# Risk Assessment for Bell Ringing at St Mary's, Nantwich during the Covid-19 pandemic

Incumbent's name: Revd. Mark Hart Assessment carried out by: Nicola Basford (Ringer)

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Date of next review: At least annually Date of assessment/revision: 9 May 2021

#### **Basis for Assessment**

The UK Government's "COVID-19; guidance for the safe use of places of worship" [1] requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public in England. The Church of England's House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group) has published a "Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public" [2], which provides rationale and advice and guidance for completing such a Risk Assessment. NB: It is good practice to review any risk assessment whenever there are salient changes that may affect the risks. This Risk Assessment has therefore been revised in light of the expected relaxations in the rules from 17 May 2021.

The purpose of this risk assessment is:

- 1. To mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19 amongst any ringers whilst they are taking part in ringing activities (or other activities associated with ringing and the tower) at St Mary's Church, Nantwich during the Covid-19 pandemic (all other risks, processes, and policies etc. remain as before).
- 2. To ensure that all ringing and any tower-related activities are performed in accordance with:
  - a. the Coronavirus rules set out by the UK Government to address the Covid-19 pandemic[5], where they relate to permitted activities in England. In particular, the rules defined in "COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic"[1] shall be followed.
  - b. the "Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance" [3], published by the Church of England. NB: The sole reference to bells and bell ringing is recorded in the Version Log as having been made on 25 August 2020 however the referenced FAQ is no longer available (although see note in following bullet).
  - c. the House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group's interpretation of the Government's rules as given in their "COVID-19 Permitted Activities under national 'Step' Regulations" [4] document which covers the expected rules (in England) that are to come into force from 17 May 2021 (step 3) and how they apply to activities in the church. NB: there is no specific reference to bell ringing in this document.

NB: The House of Bishops Recovery Group's latest version of their "COVID-19: opening cathedral and church buildings to the public" [6] document contains a response to the question "Can church bells be rung?" which is answered thus: "A single bell or a single household/support bubble ringing multiple bells is possible, provided that guidance agreed between the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers and the Church of England is followed [7]. Please ensure your ringers have read the guidance and undertaken the ringing risk assessment." This advice matches that of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) up to 17 May 2021, but not thereafter. It is assumed that this version of the House of Bishops Recovery Group is now out-of-date with respect to the answer to this question (except for the requirement to produce and circulate a risk assessment). This assumption is reinforced by examining the answers to questions regarding singing which are more clearly out-of-date.

- d. the "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Standing Guidance" [7] produced by The Central Council for Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), and in particular their "Guidance 17 May to 21 June" [8].
- e. any rules laid down by the PCC. It is expected that the Standing Committee, should they approve this Risk Assessment, will ensure that this document conforms to any specific rules the PCC has laid down.

NB: The term "support bubble" is used hereafter in this Risk Assessment instead of the more cumbersome combined form of "household/support bubble" and should be read to mean both forms.

#### **Aims**

- 1. To enable Bell Ringing for Church Services (including weddings etc.), and for other authorised occasions, in a "Covid-safe" manner. NB: All ringing other than that for services will require prior authorisation by the Rector.
- 2. To pave the way for the resumption of some initially limited bell ringing practices (but not involving any face-to-face teaching, which would currently infringe the social distancing rules). Any resumption of bell ringing practices will only take place after discussion with, and with the authorisation of, the Rector.

# **Principles**

The key principles adopted are:

- a) Hands: To maintain and promote good [hand] hygiene at all times whilst ringers are on Church premises (entering, leaving and within the Tower).
- b) Face: To wear face masks at all times whilst ringers are on Church premises (in particular when they are within the Tower).
- c) **Space:** To maintain appropriate social distancing between ringers, who are not within the same support bubble, at all times. Also, to reduce the sharing of space and facilities whilst not ringing.
- d) Fresh Air: To increase the ventilation in the Ringing Chamber as much as possible.
- e) To involve no more than the number of pre-arranged ringers who can ring together at the same time whilst conforming to the Government's social distancing rules and limits on indoor "gatherings".
- f) To keep the time when ringers are together in the Ringing Chamber to just sufficient for an agreed amount of ringing and associated preparatory and concluding activities (e.g. ringing up and down).
- g) To reduce the risk of contamination between different groups of ringers participating in consecutive ringing sessions by leaving a suitable elapsed time between sessions and/or by performing specific cleaning operations.
- h) To reduce the risk of contamination between ringers by not sharing ropes between ringers in different support bubbles (unless appropriate cleaning measures are in place).
- i) To produce ringing that is as close as possible to "normal" and which is not "unmusical".

#### **Values Associated with these Principles**

The following table includes specific values that qualify the above principles and also describes when they apply. The column headed "Up to 17 May 2021" are the effective rules in place at Nantwich as described in Version 2 of this Risk Assessment; the column headed "From 17 May 2021..." describes the values and, where appropriate, the rationale for these values for the current period (NB: these are likely to change again from 21 June 2021).

Ref	Property	Up to 17 May 2021	From 17 May 2021
b	Minimum Distancing between Ringers	At least 2m shall be maintained at all times between ringers, who are not	In accordance with the Government's Social Distancing rules, and noting that Face Coverings shall be worn at all times on church premises, the following rules shall be observed:
		within the same support bubble.	At least 2m between ringers, who are not within the same support bubble, shall be maintained whilst not ringing.
			At least 1m between ringers, shall be maintained whilst ringing.
			For clarity, at the moment, we have no ringers who have stated they have an exemption from wearing face coverings.
е	Maximum number of Ringers Present in	Only ringers in the same support bubble may be present, up to 8 (we	The "Rule of Six" will apply with an additional constraint on maximum number (we have only 8 bells). So, the ringers who may be present will be limited to either:
	a Ringing Session	have no more bells).	6 ringers if these include ringers from more than two households/support bubbles.
			8 ringers if they are all from no more than two support bubbles.
f	Duration of Ringing Sessions		The CCCBR has recommended that ringing time per session should now be allowed up to 45 minutes (was 15 minutes). We shall adopt the following more specific constraints, which includes limits on the total time the ringers are "gathered" together:
			Each ringing session shall be no more than 40 minutes long, which includes no more than 30 minutes with the ringers ringing as a band.
			In the case of the <i>same</i> ringers ringing before and after a particular service, one of the sessions shall be limited to no more than 30 minutes long, and the total time spent ringing as a band shall be no more than 45 minutes over the two sessions. Ringers shall not remain in the ringing chamber during the service.
g	Elapsed Time between Ringing	No two ringing sessions shall occur within 24 hours of each other.	There is no longer any specific rule or guidance which limits the frequency of ringing sessions.  However the House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group's Risk Assessment Template[1], states
	Sessions	At least 24 hours shall elapse between two ringing sessions that involve the same band (or subset thereof) ringing the same bells on the subsequent occasion.	in the section on "Cleaning the church before and after general use [where there is no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)]": "If the church building has been closed for 48 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces." The implication being that if there are two "uses" within less than 48 hours, cleaning is required, otherwise 48 hours is sufficient for any residual virus to become harmless.
		At least 48 hours shall elapse between two ringing sessions that involve	Given that we can control the ringers who are present in any ringing sessions, the following constraints will be followed:

Ref	Property	Up to 17 May 2021	From 17 May 2021
		different ringers or the same ringers ringing different bells.	At least 48 hours shall be allowed to elapse between two ringing sessions that involve different ringers, unless extra cleaning is performed between the sessions.
			Two ringing sessions may be held within any 48 hour period without additional cleaning activities if, and only if, the ringers involved in the subsequent session are the same as (or a subset of) the ringers involved in the earlier session.
			NB: If a ringer involved in a ringing session subsequently tests positive for Covid-19 within three days, no further ringing session shall take place until at least a further 48 hours elapses and appropriate cleaning has been performed.

# **Social Distancing in the Ringing Chamber**

The Ringing Chamber is quite large (it's almost a regular octagon with 8m between opposite sides) and it is possible for ringers to place their belongings in separate areas and to sit/stand at distances greater than 2m apart when waiting for ringing as a band to commence. Ringers within the same support bubble can share an area. Ringers will be requested to place all their belongings in their chosen area and not to use shared facilities such as the rack of coat pegs.

Ringers will also be advised to keep conversations to a minimum and not to arrive earlier than arranged to minimise contact with other ringers before ringing.

# **Vaccination and Testing**

It is understood that vaccination reduces both the risk of becoming infected with the virus and that of becoming seriously ill, however it neither gives anyone full immunity nor makes them incapable of carrying the virus. The UK Government and the NHS state that "getting regularly tested is the only way to know if you have the virus" [10]. Ringers should consider testing themselves in accordance with this guidance, and getting vaccinated when offered, to reduce the risks to themselves and to other ringers with whom they come into contact, especially where it is possible that these ringers maybe more vulnerable or have not had a full course of vaccine.

### **Ventilation**

The Ringing Chamber has four doors to the outside roof spaces, all of which will be kept open during any ringing session – wind from any direction will and does cause draughts! The Ringing Chamber ceiling is 7m high and the ringing circle is in the middle of the chamber so there is plenty of air space around and above the ringers to support good ventilation. We are considering the installation of ceiling fans to help with ventilation and energy saving through destratification of heated layers of air.

NB: The CCCBR have published notes on investigating "Carbon Dioxide monitoring whilst ringing" [8] as a way of assessing the adequacy of ventilation in a ringing chamber. We shall consider this but shall await any results of experiments as to whether this could help with collecting and using any quantitative data.

### **Record Keeping**

A record of the participants in each ringing session shall be maintained to support the tracking and tracing of people with whom anyone subsequently testing positive has been in contact. This will take comprise the attendance book which will remain in the Ringing Chamber so that it is accessible to all.

### **Changes to the Rope Circle**

The drops of some of the ropes in the "rope circle" were modified during July 2020 to increase the distances of some adjacent ropes from others to 2m or more (the bells involved were the second, third and sixth). This was achieved by reversible non-intrusive means (see photo below). Prior to doing this, it would only have been possible to ring no more than 3 rather spaced out bells with 2m distancing between ringers which would not have been particularly attractive. These modifications made it possible to ring up to 5 bells with 2m distancing if we include two ringers from the same support bubble ringing two adjacent bells closer than 2m, or no more than 4 bells with any set of four ringers. This enabled ringing of a more acceptable musical quality than possible on the prior choices of three bells. On 1 September 2020, the seventh's rope was moved to be more than 1m from the rope of the eighth (previously 0.8m) in preparation for the possibility of moving to a 1m+ distancing rule whilst ringing. Up to 8 bells may now be rung with 1m+ distancing between ringers without needing to use any ringers from the same support bubble.

The current distance between ropes is shown in this table (the letter (a) after a bell's number indicated that its rope has been moved as above<sup>1</sup>):

Bell	1	2(a)	3(a)	4	5	6(a)	7(a)	8	Key	
1	+	1.10	2.50	2.50	2.90	3.20	2.25	1.20	+	This bell
2(a)	1.10	+	2.00	2.60	3.30	4.00	3.25	2.20	0.01	to 0.99m
3(a)	2.50	2.00	+	1.50	2.50	3.85	3.65	3.05	1.00	to 1.49m
4	2.50	2.60	1.50	+	1.00	2.40	2.55	2.40	1.50	to 1.79m
5	2.90	3.30	2.50	1.00	+	1.55	2.05	2.35	1.80	to 1.99m
6(a)	3.20	4.00	3.85	2.40	1.55	+	1.25	2.20	2.00	or greater
7(a)	2.25	3.25	3.65	2.55	2.05	1.25	+	1.10		
8	1.20	2.20	3.05	2.40	2.35	2.20	1.10	+		

Here you can see that all non-adjacent pairs of ropes are now 2m or more apart, and that all the adjacent pairs of ropes are at least 1m apart. To help interpret the table, the adjacent bell distancing in the rope circle as: **1-2** (1.1m), **2-3** (2m), **3-4** (1.5m), **4-5** (1m), **5-6** (1.55m), **6-7** (1.25m), **7-8** (1.1m), and **8-1** (1.2m).



This photo shows a temporary rope guide installed above the second rope (in front of the clock) enabling the rope to be pulled away from the third rope (the rightmost rope shown). The third rope can also just be seen to have been pulled away from the fourth by movement of its guide on the arch.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> NB: We may move the second's rope back to its original position to make it easier to ring; this will reduce the gap between it and the third but not to less than 1m.

# **Risk Assessment Table**

What is the hazard?	Who might be harmed and how?	What is already done to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks?
Ringers being infected with Covid-19 whilst making their way to the Ringing Chamber at the start of the ringing session.	Ringers being infected with Covid-19 through touching infected material or via airborne means whilst on the tower staircase or walkway.	Only ringers arranged for a specific ringing event shall be authorised to ascend the lower spiral staircase.  A notice has been affixed to the lower tower door informing people of the rules to be followed by people authorised to ascend the stairs.  Anyone with Covid-19 symptoms, who has tested positive or been in contact with anyone with symptoms, shall not participate until they have self-isolated for the recommended time. A notice at the bottom of the spiral staircase informs people who have any concerns they may be infected or possibly carrying the virus, not to ascend the staircase.  Ringers shall be advised to use the hand sanitiser provided at the bottom of the spiral staircase, before starting their ascent. NB: They should assume that the stonework and handrails are unclean and avoid touching their face before entering the ringing chamber.  The 10 minutes before the arranged ringing session shall be reserved for ascent only.  During this time, no ringer should attempt to descend unless in emergency. This will avoid the risk of ringers meeting in confined spaces and trying to pass each other.  Ringers should aim to arrive during this 10 minute period before the ringing session to ascend to the ringing chamber.  Ringers should wear face coverings whilst on the stairs and walkway.  Ringers should wear face coverings whilst on the stairs and walkway.  Should a ringer catch up with someone already on the staircase, they shall stop and only proceed whilst they cannot see the person in front.  On emerging from the top of the spiral staircase, ringers shall immediately move along the walkway before stopping to take their breath prior to entering the ringing chamber. This will avoid congestion at the top of the staircase.	

What is the hazard?	Who might be harmed and how?	What is already done to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks?
Ringers being infected with Covid-19 whilst making their way from the Ringing Chamber at the end of the ringing session.	Ringers being infected with Covid-19 through touching infected material or via airborne means whilst on the tower staircase or walkway.	The period at the end of the ringing session is reserved for descent only; no re-ascent should be attempted until the key holder has descended.  Ringers shall maintain a minimum 2m distance on the stairs and walkway.  Ringers should wear face coverings whilst on the stairs and walkway.  Should a ringer catch up with someone already on the staircase, they shall stop and only proceed whilst they cannot see the person in front.  Ringers should sanitise their hands on leaving the lower spiral staircase.  Ringers shall not cluster around the door at the bottom of the spiral staircase.  Should a ringer realise they have left something in the ringing chamber whilst they are still on the walkway (i.e. before starting their descent of the spiral staircase) they may turn around and return to the ringing chamber for it.  Should a ringer realise they have left something in the ringing chamber after they have started their descent of the spiral staircase, they shall proceed to the bottom and wait for the key holder to descend or call them on their mobile phone. The key holder shall then retrieve the item for the ringer.  The key holder shall be the last to descend and shall set the alarm and turn out the light before sanitising their hands and locking the door. The alarm and light switch should be treated as "unclean".	
Ringers being infected with Covid-19 whilst in the Ringing Chamber through touch.	Ringers being infected with Covid-19 through touching infected material whilst in the Ringing Chamber.	Ringers shall use hand sanitiser on entering the ringing chamber.  Social distancing of at least 2m shall be maintained whilst in the ringing chamber, except whilst ringing.  Ringers shall place their belongings in a free area.  Ringers should not use the shared coat pegs.  Only the key holder shall touch the four external doors (which should remain open).	

What is the hazard?	Who might be harmed and how?	What is already done to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks?
		Only the key holder shall touch the spider winding handle or the clock hammer levers. The spider to be locked off if any bells have been left up.  Books, Comics etc. shall be removed from ready access to avoid sharing of tower resources. Ringers shall not bring any items to share with other ringers.  Shared refreshments (e.g. sweets, biscuits, water) shall no longer be available. The fridge shall also be out of bounds.  Ringers may bring their own drink in a bottle but shall not bring things to eat in the ringing chamber.  Whilst it is preferred that ringers should ring a particular bell for the duration of a ringing session, they may swap if and only if they each sanitise their hands before doing so. Ringers in the same support bubble need not follow this rule.	
		If a ringer needs a box, they should select one and leave it by their rope at the end of the ringing session (or disinfect it prior to returning it to the pile of boxes).	
Ringers being infected with Covid-19 whilst in the Ringing Chamber through airborne means.	Ringers being infected with Covid-19 through infected airborne material whilst in the Ringing Chamber.	Social distancing of at least 2m shall be maintained whilst in the ringing chamber.  All external doors shall be opened by the key holder on entry to the ringing chamber and left wedged open to provide good ventilation and airflow during the ringing session.  Face coverings shall be worn at all times unless there is a medical reason for not doing so.  A ringing session shall comprise no more than 40 minutes spent in the ringing chamber with no more than 30 minutes ringing as a band. Should there be ringing before and after a service, the total time spent in the ringing chamber over both sessions should be no more than 60 minutes with a total of 45 minutes ringing as a band.  Ringers shall not raise their voices except in an emergency or to advise others of a	
		potentially dangerous situation.  Ringers shall not lean towards other ringer during ringing.	

What is the hazard?	Who might be harmed and how?	What is already done to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks?
Ringers being infected through residual viable traces of Covid-19 remaining from a previous visit to the Ringing Chamber.	Ringers being infected with Covid-19 through traces of residual virus from earlier visits to the tower.	At least 48 hours shall be allowed to elapse between two ringing sessions that involve different ringers, unless extra cleaning is performed between the sessions.  Two ringing sessions may be held within any 48 hour period without additional cleaning activities if, and only if, the ringers involved in the subsequent session are the same as (or a subset of) the ringers involved in the earlier session.  If it is known there will be another ringing session within the next 48 hours which may involve a different set of ringers, the key holder shall ensure that the hard surfaces that may have been touched are wiped down with disinfectant (including any boxes that have been used which should then be returned to the box pile) before leaving the ringing chamber at the end of the session. The key holder shall also wipe down the door handles, the rope spider handle and the clock chime levers, before leaving the ringing chamber.  The Rector shall ensure the Tower Captain and the Tower Secretary are notified when any other person(s) visit the ringing chamber between ringing sessions so that appropriate precautions (e.g. additional cleaning) can be taken prior to the next ringing session.  It is expected that anyone who has been in the tower within the previous 3 days and then tests positive for Covid-19 shall notify the Tower Captain and the Tower Secretary (via the Church for external people) so that appropriate actions can be taken.	

#### References

- 1. Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public, Version 9, 25 March 2021, The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group.
- 2. <u>COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic</u>, as published 12 April 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.
- 3. Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance, as published 4 May 2021, The Church of England.
- 4. <u>COVID-19 Permitted Activities under national 'Step' Regulations</u>, Version 1, 25 March 2021, The House of Bishops Recovery Group.
- 5. Coronavirus rules set out by the UK Government to address the Covid-19 pandemic, under constant revision, GOV.UK.
- 6. COVID-19: opening cathedral and church buildings to the public, Version 6, 12 January 2021, The House of Bishops Covid-19 Recovery Group.
- 7. <u>Coronavirus (COVID-19) Standing Guidance</u>, as published 7 May 2021, The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.
- 8. Guidance 17 May to 21 June, as published 7 May 2021, The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.
- 9. <u>Carbon Dioxide monitoring whilst ringing</u>, 9 May 2021, The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.
- 10. Regular rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) tests if you do not have symptoms, last reviewed 29 April 2021, NHS.

# **Change History**

Date	Version	Description			
29/07/2020	1.0 (Draft)	Initial version distributed for review/approval following Risk Assessment performed on 24 July 2020			
31/07/2020	1.1 (Draft)	Revised following initial comments from PCC review:			
		<ol> <li>Added clauses regarding prohibiting people from entering the Church property who have tested positive for Covid-19 or have been experiencing symptoms of Covid-19, or been in contact with someone infected or showing symptoms of Covid-19, until they have self-isolated for the appropriate period following that event.</li> <li>Added that a notice be placed on the external entrance door advising of the rules of entry.</li> <li>Added that ringers prone to coughing and sneezing should not be included in any bands.</li> </ol>			
04/08/2020	1.1	Approved by the PCC – not reissued.			
30/10/2020	2.0 Draft A	Revised in light of experiences during first three months of ringing during the pandemic and to consider changes to the associated guidance from the Government, Church, and Central Council of Church Bell Ringers:			
		<ol> <li>Minor corrections to terminology and use of roles rather than first names.</li> <li>Updated preamble regarding activities in the tower to further space out the ropes which took place on 1 September 2020 - these made no change to the rules or guidance in effect but pave the way for possible future changes in distancing between ringing when ringing.</li> <li>Remove notes about ringers being designated specific areas to sit or place their belongings in the ringing chamber. This was not found to be necessary or practical.</li> </ol>			

		<ol> <li>Revised words about separation of ringing events (reduced from 72 hours to 48 hours) and added rationale in preamble.</li> <li>Clarified where the record of ringers involved in ringing events is located.</li> <li>Removed the stated "Further Actions" which have all now been completed: Notices have been placed on the lower entrance door to the tower; notices have also been posted in appropriate places in the Ringing Chamber. Hand Sanitisers have been acquired and installed just inside the lower entrance door and in the Ringing Chamber (replacing the removable bottles that were used previously).</li> <li>Simplified rules about separation on the stairs and walkway to just maintaining 2m+ distancing – this is in line with all good advice and the previous 20s time gaps was too much and not something that was easily observable.</li> <li>Stressed that ringers should not arrive earlier than arranged to minimise time spent in the ringing chamber prior to the actual ringing performance (and thus minimise time for social pleasantries).</li> <li>Added a note that it is hoped that anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19 within 3 days of being in the tower will/should notify the Ringers so that appropriate actions may be taken.</li> <li>Modified the form to specify how/when reviews should be carried out (reviews that do not change the risk assessment need no longer cause it to be changed just to review the next review date!). Separate logs of reviews should now be maintained. Added this Change History.</li> </ol>
06/12/2020	2.0	Issued with minor revision to spellings, following review and approval of issue 2.0 Draft A by PCC/Standing Committee, as notified by email on 5 November 2020. This issue of the approved form has been held back during lockdown.
		NB: A clarification has been added in the first paragraph on Page 3 to indicate that the number of ringers that are permitted to participate in a given ringing session may be further constrained by extant and emergent national, regional or other associated rules.
09/05/2021	3.0 Draft A	Major revision to initial sections in the Risk Assessment to improve the information regarding which "Covid" rules and guidance have been considered in the risk assessment. Inclusion of a set of associated References.
		Revision to section on principles to adopt current Government terminology (Face, Space, etc.) and the inclusion of a separate table of values associated with these principles which show how these are expected to change from 17 May 2021 and how they will apply in the tower. This will make it easier to document such changes in the future e.g. as may occur from 21 June 2021.
		Added specific section on Ventilation.
		Associated changes to the Risk Table itself.
		A plethora of minor amendments which [hopefully!] reduce verbiage and improve readability.
10/05/2021	3.0 Draft B	Added note about vaccination and testing after peer review by Nicola. Issued for Standing Committee review.
13/05/2021	3.0	Approved by PCC/Standing Committee, as notified by email 13 May 2021.