

St Mark's Cheltenham Sound Management Policy

1. Background

The sound of church bells is an important and integral part of the Christian Church. Bellringing has been practised for many centuries, forming part of our heritage and proclaiming the message of the church to the local community. The bells are rung for regular services, weddings, special events and half muffled at times of sadness. They are an important part of the evangelistic outreach of the parish Church and hearing the bells reminds people that God loves them, that the Lord Jesus died for them and calls them to be part of his Kingdom.

St Mark's is an active community church situated in a densely populated neighbourhood on the west side of Cheltenham.

St Mark's is lucky enough to possess a fine ring of bells. They have been rung regularly since 1885 and were augmented and restored in 2007. We are proud of them, and privileged to be ringing them and listening to them.

Bell ringing forms an integral part of worship at St Mark and the bells are rung regularly as an act of worship and as an expression of our evangelistic faith ("To call the faithful, warn the heedless and cheer the sick"). The sound of our bells calls the community to Worship God and come into closer fellowship with him. The bells are usually rung by members of the local community.

St Mark's seek to maintain good relationships with all their neighbours and to promote best practice when managing their facilities. We recognise that the sound of bells is not insignificant and that they must be used with sensitivity to those who live within the immediate neighbourhood. With this in mind it was decided to formalise the sound management policy so that neighbours could appreciate how we plan the duration, frequency and regularity of when the bells will be rung.

2. Sound policy considerations

When writing the sound management policy the PCC and ringers took into account the following factors. (In no particular order)

- The requirements of the church as to when the bells would ideally be rung for Worship, weddings, special events and practice. (And others listed below)
- The density and proximity of the housing in the immediate area surrounding the church (over 100 properties within ¼ radial mile)
- The views of the neighbours about when and for how long the bells should be rung
- The views of the church congregation and leadership about when the bells should be rung for worship.

- The necessary levels of ringing (practice, worship and other) necessary to maintain interest and enable a band of ringers to train effectively
- The quality of the ringing expected by the public.
- The volume of the bells outside the building

3. Sound policy

Regular ringing.

Practice. In order to reach a high standard of ringing it is important to teach, train and practice regularly. Practicing at home is not an option! This helps to maintain the interest of the band, ensure that our ringing meets the standard expected by the general public and enables us to recruit other ringers from the locality (in particular younger people)

The bells will usually be rung for practice **once per week for duration of around 1 3/4 hours**. At present this will usually be on a **Monday evening** between the hours of **7.15pm and 9.00pm**. This is the minimum frequency and duration of practice ringing needed to effectively maintain a band of ringers.

Service and Worship. The Bells may be rung for each and every Church service to call people to worship. Normally this would be for around 40 minutes. At present the bells will only be rung for the main Sunday Service, each Sunday and for Holy Communion on a Wednesday.

Possible requested ringing.

The bells may also be rung:

- For **weddings***, by request of the bride, by means of the formal booking process through the church office. Possible duration around 50 minutes, usually around 20 minutes on a Saturday, maximum 20 minutes on a Friday. Ringing for weddings could occur on any weekday, but at present is restricted to Friday and Saturday.
- For **funerals***, by means of booking through the PCC. Possible duration around 50 minutes, usually around 20 minutes on a Saturday, maximum 20 minutes on a Friday. Ringing for funeral could occur on any weekday, but at present is usually restricted to Friday and Saturday.
- For **additional or seasonal services*** such as school carol concerts of memorial services.
- By **visiting bands**. Because our bells are of such good quality, visiting teams often wish to ring at St. Mark's. Usually limited to 60 minutes between the hours of 10.00am and 8.30pm.
- For **quarter peals**. These are usually rung for service or to mark events. Usually on Saturdays or Sundays (if the latter, for a service) between the hours of 10.00am and 8.30pm

- To mark **National events and tragedies**. These may be on any day of the year. (e.g. St. George's Day, or Remembrance Day Nov. 11th.) In exceptional circumstances the bells may be rung with minimal notice to mark significant national events, for example the death of a monarch. This will be between the hours of 10.00am and 8.30pm
- For **Peal attempts**. (3 hours) These are by special request only to the PCC. These are always rung to celebrate major Christian festivals, significant local events or national events. (For example Christmas, Easter, The Cheltenham Music festival or anniversary of a national event) and have a minimum of 2 months' notice. They will usually be rung on Saturdays, Sundays or in the place of a practice evening. They will always be rung between the hours of 10am and 8.30pm. No more than four per year will be rung.
- From time to time it may be necessary raise the bells ready for ringing (for example prior to a wedding). The bells will be raised individually, at a reasonable time of day, the time taken usually being around 10 minutes. This is the only time notice will not be given.

****Please note, when ringing after a service, wedding or funeral, exact start and finish times are dependent upon the finishing time of the service. We will always try to be as accurate and punctual as is possible***

Exempting regular ringing and services (including weddings and funerals), the bells will not normally be additionally rung more than twice per month.

Additional information

Details of all ringing will be published in advance (usually 4 weeks ahead) on the website www.stmarkschelt.co.uk

No more than one unit of ringing will usually be allowed on any one day with the exception of multiple weddings. With the exception of the practice night, the bells will not normally be rung on weekday evenings. Usually a maximum two additional units per month will be allowed with the exception of weddings or funerals.

Ringling can be cancelled with no notice period.

It should be noted that this frequency and duration of ringing is very significantly less than almost every other church with bells within Cheltenham District and is considered to be the minimum necessary to maintain a band of ringers. Many towers in the area permit considerably more than this frequency and duration.

The ringers and Rector will work together to ensure that due consideration is given to neighbours when planning ringing.

4. Quality

We understand that those living in close proximity to the church do not wish to endure poor quality ringing. There are times when the quality of ringing may be poorer, for example when training new recruits.

5. Reservations

The PCC reserve the right to alter this policy without formal consultation, but with due consideration given to neighbours of the church.

6. Sound control system.

St Mark possesses a significant sound control system installed in 2011 that enables the ringers to promote the best ringing while significantly reducing the volume of the bells outside the building during practice.

This system consists of a series of opening hatches in the louvres of the tower, which are bricked up with high-density sound blocks. This means that when the shutters are open a limited level of well-blended and mellow sound is allowed out. When they are closed the sound must leave through the openings in the top of the spire, significantly reducing the volume of the bells around the church. When the shutters are closed, the bells are inaudible inside nearby properties with the windows closed.

Shutters will be **fully open** when the bells are rung for worship on Sunday, for services or Christian festivals.

Shutters will be **partially opened** (front of building only) when the bells are rung for weddings, national events and some peals for Christian festivals

The sound management system shutters will always be **fully closed** during practice ringing, ringing by visiting bands, some peals and during maintenance.

It is the responsibility of whoever is running the ringing to ensure that shutter hatches are set correctly. A procedure is located next to the controls on the ringing room wall.

7. Communications.

We will gladly arrange times for local people to come and visit the bells, meet the ringers, and to see for themselves the enjoyment of ringing and discuss this role of the Church's ministry.

St Mark PCC regard communication with neighbours as to when the bells will be rung as imperative to successful relations. With this in mind notices of all ringing are published:

1. On the ringers own website www.stmarkschelt.co.uk usually 4 weeks in advance, often with more notice.

2. On the church website. Regular ringing 4 weeks in advance (subject to confirmation) and special ringing usually 6 weeks in advance.

Special ringing such as peal attempts and festival ringing is also published in the church newsletter.

8.

If you wish to contact the church or bellringers, please visit www.stmarkschelt.co.uk or e-mail stmarksbells@btinternet.com
A log of any communications held by the PCC.

Policy reviewed and approved by the PCC July 2021.
The bells have come back into use after a Covid crisis where they were silent for 18 months.