

THE GUILD OF SAINT AGATHA HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION FROM THE GUILD PRESIDENT

The Guild handbook has been out of print for several years, awaiting one of the members of the Guild Committee having the time available to reprint and update our main publication.

This I have now been able to achieve. In this new edition all the previous contents have been included. The rules have been updated to reflect changes agreed upon at the 1996 and 1997 AGM's.

However this new edition includes 2 new features:-

1. The "Aims and Objectives of the Guild". This would be titled, in jargonesque, the Guild Mission Statement. Distinct from the "tablets of stone" of the Guild rules, this is a recital of our aims, their purposes, and how we try to achieve them. This document was drafted by the Guild Committee in 1996, and will be updated as need arises. Under the Charity Commission regulations the Guild now has to prepare an annual report and financial statement, which will directly reiterate these Aims & Objectives

2. The other new feature, replacing and augmenting a list published back in 1983, is a *Directory of Catholic Bells*. It will be obvious that our information is currently very patchy and incomplete. This is a database which we wish to continually develop, and I would encourage all readers to notify us of any errors or additions to this list, which they are aware of you can contact the Guild via any of its current officers, or write to us c/o: 1 Albert Road, Bournemouth, BH1 1BZ

Patrick Matthews Holy Week 1998.

PREFACE

Church Bells serve several purposes besides reminding the Faithful of the times of church services.

To those who do not go to church, bells are an outward indication that a church is open and alive.

To the unchurched or the housebound, bells are a reminder that the church is at prayer for the needs of the local community and the world.

To all people bells proclaim the freedom of the Church to worship God; and to Catholics in England and Wales they celebrate Catholic Emancipation. In times of religious persecution bells are silenced. To the faithful bells present a joyful introduction to the Sacred Liturgy.

To the people of our nation bells provide a unique way of marking days of public rejoicing, and give witness to the Church's participation in the Nation's celebrations.

GUILD PRAYER

Dear Saint Agatha, Patron of Bellringers, through your example in Loyalty and with the help of your prayers may I in my life and service as a bellringer proclaim my Faith and call others to praise God's name, Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SAINT AGATHA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

Saint Agatha was born of a noble family in Sicily in the third century, and has been venerated from early times. She was consecrated to God from her earliest years, but was pursued by a consul called Quintian. When she rejected him resolutely, he took advantage of the fact that it was then illegal to be a Christian, and had her arrested and brought before him at Catania in the year AD251. Her biographer tells us that when she found herself in the hands of her persecutors, she prayed in these words:- "Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, you see my heart, you know my desire - possess alone all that I am. I am your sheep, make me worthy to overcome the Devil".

She wept and prayed for courage and strength all the way she went. The consul handed her over to a wicked woman who tried for a whole month to corrupt her, but through her faith in God she triumphed over their attempts on her virtue. Eventually she was brought again before Quintian, who ordered her to be tortured. St. Peter is said to have appeared to her and comforted her, but she was tortured again and eventually died of her sufferings. Before her death she prayed:- "Lord my creator, you have ever protected me from the cradle: you have taken me from the love of the world, and given me patience to suffer: receive now my soul".

When persecution ceased and the Faith flourished, churches were built and bells became popular. The bell founders of Sicily were admired for their ability and skill in casting bells, and they believed that this was due to their local saint, whose faith was known to be true and without fault. Soon other bell founders adopted Saint Agatha as their patron, and so she became the patron saint of bell ringers and bell founders throughout Europe.

Her name is in the first Eucharistic prayer of the Mass, and many churches have been dedicated to her. Her feast day is 5th. February, when it is the custom in some places to bless bread in Church.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GUILD

"The object of the Guild is to advance the Christian religion within England and Wales by promoting the art of bellringing and by recruiting and training bellringers in the practice of their art."(Guild Rule 2)

1. TO PROVIDE AN ASSOCIATION FOR CATHOLIC BELLRINGERS

(a) To provide both a social forum, and a spiritual support, for all those engaged in the ringing of bells in the Catholic Churches of England and Wales.

(b) To provide likewise for the many Catholic bellringers who serve as Church Bellringers, wholly or partially, in the belfries of other Christian traditions.

(c) To provide a source of representation and contact between Catholic bellringers, and the Church itself at national and local level.

(d) To provide a source of representation and contact between Catholic bellringers, and bellringing organisations at national and local levels.

THUS THE GUILD:-

(1) Meets in April, June and November in differing parts of England and Wales for fellowship, worship and ringing together.

(2) Encourages local groups to assemble, wherever numbers permit.

(3) Appoints a Chaplain to assist the spiritual needs of the Guild and its members, including an annual Mass for deceased members during November.

(4) Publishes a newsletter to all members 3 times per year, and corresponds regularly with the 'Ringing World', the Central weekly newspaper for bellringers.

2. TO ENCOURAGE THE RINGING OF BELLS IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES.

The Guild is committed to encouraging the proper installation, restoration, maintenance and use of Catholic Bells, and to their manual sounding by whatever means most appropriate, as a means both of proclaiming the gospel beyond the Church walls, and of enriching the life and activities of the worshipping community.

THUS THE GUILD:-

(1) Provides its programme of activities detailed above.

(2) Encourages membership of this Guild, and where appropriate, local ringing Guilds by bellringers of Catholic Towers.

(3) Aims and Objectives numbers 3 and 4 detailed below.

(4) Positively discouraging the installation of any machinery in Churches which inhibits, and/or reproduces, the actions of manually sounding church bells (except, obviously, clocks and angelus strikers.)

3. TO PROVIDE AN ADVICE FACILITY.

Available to clergy, laity and ringers.

THUS THE GUILD:-

(1) Has its central Guild Office, and Diocesan Representatives in each Diocese, where there is Guild membership.

(2) Establishing a reference entry in the National Catholic Directory and wherever possible, Diocesan Year Books.

(3) Where the necessary expertise is not available from within the Guild's resources, ensuring that advice is made available from external sources.

4. TO PROVIDE A BELL RESTORATION AND RESCUE FUND.

Fundamental to the Guild's other functions is the ability to provide financial assistance towards the restoration or enhancement of belfries. The Guild has distinct funds for this purpose, and welcomes any contributions.

THUS THE GUILD:-

Responds to grant applications to the best of its financial ability, which is currently limited.

RULES OF THE GUILD

1. The Association shall be named after the Patron Saint of Bellringers, and shall be called the **GUILD OF SAINT AGATHA.**

2. The object of the Guild is to advance the Christian religion within England and Wales by promoting the art of bellringing, and by recruiting and training bellringers in the practice of their art.

3. The Guild shall have three types of membership:-

(a) *Fellowship*, open to all Catholics who are Church Bell Ringers, irrespective of where they ring, and to other bellringers who wish to support and assist the aims and objectives of the Guild, and wish to be in mutual fellowship with other members of the Guild.

In accordance with the intention that the Guild of Saint Agatha should be representative of all traditions of Church Bell Ringing, Fellowship members are listed in three divisions:-

Change-Ringing those who are trained in the art of full-circle ringing.

Chiming those who sound bells hung in chimes or carillons

Tolling those who ring individual, or small numbers of bells, other than as above.

(b) *Associate*, open to those who do not ring, yet value the contribution made to the liturgy and life of the church by ringers and the sounding of church bells.

(c) *Honorary Life*, conferred by the Guild as a mark of gratitude and in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the work of the Guild or the advancement of bellringing. Honorary Life Membership shall be conferred as a result of a nomination, supported by a citation, which shall be presented at an Annual General Meeting, and shall receive a two thirds majority vote of those present at the meeting.

4. All members are expected to observe the Code of Conduct of the Guild to the best of their ability. A serious breach of the Code of Conduct, if it is likely to bring the reputation of the

Guild into disrepute, may result in the suspension or withdrawal of membership by the Committee, subject to the right of appeal at the next Annual General Meeting by prior notice of not less than one month in writing.

5. The Annual fees for Fellowship and Associate Membership shall be determined annually at the Annual General Meeting. Membership fees fall due on the 1st. January each year, and should be received by the Treasurer no later than the 1st. May. Membership shall be deemed to have lapsed if the subscription has not been received by 1st. May.

6. The Guild shall appoint a Patron, the Committee having agreed on the nomination, which should be a Bishop of the Catholic Church.

7. The Guild shall elect annually the following Committee, which shall meet on the last Saturday of April or as near thereto as is practicable to prepare for the Annual General Meeting, and assemble at other times according to the needs of the Guild:-

(a) *A President*, who shall call and preside at the Annual General Meeting and all other functions of the Guild.

(b) *A Master*, who will deputise for the President, when necessary, and otherwise be responsible for promoting the activities of the Guild, organising and regulating ringing under the auspices of the Guild, proficiency tests and registering peals.

(c) *A Treasurer*, who will be responsible for subscriptions, expenses investments and administering bequests, in accordance with the rules and decisions of the Guild and its Committees, and presenting at the Annual General Meeting a financial report for the past year.

(d) *A General Secretary*, who will be responsible for the day to day running of the Guild, receive subscriptions, maintain minutes of all meetings, deal with correspondence and ensure publication of the newsletter, and deliver a full report to the Annual General Meeting each year. The General Secretary shall have complete discretion to delegate duties to other committee members.

(e) *Three other Guild Members*.

8. The Committee shall invite a Priest of the Catholic Church to be Chaplain to the Guild for such term as the Committee and the Chaplain jointly agree. The Chaplain will advise the Guild on all matters spiritual and liturgical, and will officiate at the offering of the Mass and the Divine Office on behalf of the Guild when practicable.

9. The Committee shall appoint a Diocesan Representative for each diocese with Guild Members to liaise between the Guild and the Bishop and Priests in each diocese; informing the Guild of any change in ringing facilities, possible requirements of grants from the Bell Fund, bells available in redundant churches or religious houses, and any houses and any churches where the installation of bells may be encouraged. Where possible and appropriate the Diocesan Representative will also act as liaison member with churches of other denominations,

and local ringing associations. The Diocesan Representative so appointed shall hold office until notice by either the Committee, or the Representative terminating the appointment, subject in the former case to a right of appeal to the Annual General Meeting of the Guild.

10. Independent Examiners, who are not Committee Members, shall be enlisted by the Committee annually.

11. Withdrawal of monies from accounts maintained in the Guild's name shall be signed by any two of the General Officers of the Guild for the time being, i.e. the President, Master, General Secretary and Treasurer.

12. An advisory Board of Bells and Belfries may be appointed by the Committee. Any expenses in providing a report shall be met by the Guild. A donation to cover expenses may be accepted.

13. The Guild shall, when membership conditions are achieved, apply for affiliation to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. and all members of the Guild shall loyally abide by the Rules and Regulations of the Central Council. The Guild's representative shall thereafter be elected triennially at the Annual General Meeting of the Guild.

14. The Annual General Meeting shall be held annually on the Third Saturday in June, the venue to be agreed at the previous Annual General Meeting, or in the case of difficulty at a venue and at a time and date published at least one calendar month beforehand by the Committee.

15. All members of the Guild, Fellowship, Associate, and Honorary Life members, providing they are in good standing, shall be entitled to vote on resolutions at the Annual General Meeting.

16. The Patronal Feast, 5th. February, should whenever possible be observed in a spiritual way with Mass, in a ringing way with the sounding of bells before Mass (or Guild meeting if it is not possible to have Mass) and in a social way by a fraternal gathering. Members should try to contact their nearest Guild neighbours to celebrate with where possible. The Diocesan Representative may be able to help in this matter.

17. The conditions for registering peals shall be determined by the Master of the Guild, and such conditions shall be published in this handbook.

18. Certificates of Proficiency shall be granted to ringers in accordance with the conditions for proficiency published by the Master of the Guild, and upon the Master having been satisfied that the standard set has been achieved.

19 (a) Alterations to the Guild Rules must be proposed and seconded in writing, published in the Guild newsletter immediately preceding the Annual General Meeting, and voted on at the

Annual General Meeting, receiving at least a two thirds majority before the amendment or new rule is accepted.

(b) No amendment of, addition to, or deletion from these rules shall be made in any event which would cause the Guild at any time to cease to be a charity in law. No amendment may be made to clause 2 , clause 19b, and clause 20 of these rules without the prior approval of the Charity Commissioners.

20. The dissolution of the Guild may be effected only by the resolution passed by a two thirds majority of the members present in person or by proxy at a special general meeting convened for that purpose and of which notice has been served on every then member of the Guild at his last known address in the United Kingdom. If a motion to dissolve the Guild is carried by the said majority the Guild's surplus funds, property and assets (if any) shall not be distributed among the members but shall be given or transferred to some other charitable organisation or organisations having similar objects.

1. GUILD OF SAINT AGATHA BELL FUND

1. The Fund shall be known as the **GUILD OF SAINT AGATHA BELL FUND**.

2. The objects of the Fund shall be to advance the Christian religion by the rescue of redundant bells for the purpose of their being rehoused elsewhere for ringing in Catholic churches, and in assisting financially with the restoration of existing bells, and in the installation of new bells, and the maintenance of the fabric of towers and belfries of Catholic churches in England and Wales.

3. The Fund may take any reasonable action for the furtherance of its objects, including the acquisition, removal and storage of bells, fittings and frames. Except where urgency or confidentiality are deemed by the Trustees to direct otherwise, the Fund shall not act without prior approval of the members. The Trustees recommendations shall be voted upon without amendment by the members at the Annual General Meeting.

4. Members for the time being of the Guild of Saint Agatha shall be members of the Fund.

5. The members of the Committee for the time being of the Guild of Saint Agatha shall be Trustees of the Fund, and shall be responsible for the administration of the Fund. The Trustees shall prepare an annual report of the activities of the Fund for presentation to the Committee, and subsequent ratification at the Annual General Meeting.

6. (a) Such bank accounts as may be required shall be opened in the name of the Fund. All cheques drawn on the Fund must be signed by two of the Trustees.

(b) Any monies not required for the immediate purposes of the Fund shall be invested in any manner the Trustees think fit in the best interests of the Fund. Any investments must be made in the name of the Fund.

(c) The Trustees shall have the power to raise funds by any means they think fit, so long as permanent trading is not engaged in, and shall be authorised to accept funds subject to any condition as to investments or use imposed by the donor(s) , provided that such conditions are consistent with the effective management of the Fund in accordance with its objectives.

(d) Subject to the consent of the Committee, the Trustees shall have the power to dispose of bells, fittings or frames acquired by the Fund if attempts at rehousing have proved unsuccessful.

(e) The Trustees shall effect such insurances as they from time to time shall deem appropriate.

7. Applications for grants from the Fund shall be sent to the General Secretary by 31st. March in each year so that they can be included in the agenda for the Committee meeting on the last Saturday in April each year. The application should include all relevant details, i.e.. an estimate of the cost, a specification of the proposed work, date of commencement and estimated date of completion.

Grants may be made from the capital or income of the Fund within the overall capacity of the Fund. In addition to an outright grant, or instead thereof, the Fund may advance loans, on such terms as to repayment, and payment of interest, as the Trustees shall advise. Grants will not be paid until the work has commenced, and if work has not commenced within two years a fresh application will be required.

8. The Treasurer shall prepare a balance sheet as at 31st. December each year, and income and expenditure accounts for the year ending on that date. The accounts shall be independently examined by the Independent Examiners of the Guild of Saint Agatha, and presented with the Trustees' annual report.

9. In the event of the dissolution of the Fund, its assets shall be distributed by the Trustees or otherwise for the purposes of church bell restoration in Catholic Churches in England and Wales.

10. No amendment of, addition to, or deletion from these rules shall be made except at the Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Saint Agatha, following notice to be given to the General Secretary in compliance with the Rules of the Guild.

No amendment of, addition to, or deletion from these rules shall be made in any event which would cause the Fund at any time to cease to be a charity in law. No amendment shall be made to clauses 2 and 10 without the prior approval of the Charity Commissioners.

1.CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Guild members should be available whenever possible for the task of ringing Church Bells for Mass and other services whenever bells are required;ensuring that they are present, arriving in good time, on the days and at the times they have offered their services.

2. Guild Members should give the maximum possible notice of absence if they are unable to be present for ringing.
3. Guild members should be considerate of others and careful not to disturb those for whom the church is a House of Prayer.
4. Guild Members should ensure that the ringing begins promptly and ends on time. Details of the ringing should be agreed with the Parish Priest.
5. Guild members should be conscious that they represent the Catholic Church in the world of Church Bell Ringing; therefore their conduct should be such as to bring respect and honour to the Faith they represent.
6. Guild members should offer the Guild Prayer before they ring, thereby dedicating their ringing to the Glory of God.

1. CONDITIONS FOR REGISTRATION OF PEALS

1. To be recognised and registered by the Guild, a peal must conform absolutely, and unambiguously, with the decisions in respect of peals determined by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.
2. All peals rung for the Guild must be by ringers who are members of the Guild; at least 50% numerically of the band shall be registered as members before commencement of the performance, and any new member shall deposit his application form and subscription in the usual manner with the peal report.
3. For a peal to be recognised and registered by the Guild, each member taking part shall pay the sum of 20p., such sum being divided on receipt between the Guild's ordinary Funds and the Guild of Saint Agatha Bell Fund (Such sum may be altered by notice in the newsletter) .
4. The conductor of the performance shall be responsible for the collection of the above mentioned fees, and any membership applications and subscriptions, and forward the same, together with an accurate report of the performance, to the Master within a maximum of two calendar months from the date of the performance, failing which the Guild may decline to register the performance.
5. The Guild will be willing to record under its title quarter- peals and any other meritorious ringing performance upon receipt of 10p. per ringer, provided notification is given within the time stated above.

DIRECTORY OF CATHOLIC BELLS

This list is of necessity incomplete, and our information depends upon entries in 'Dove's Guide', and local knowledge. Any updates to the list will be most welcome. Churches are listed

in the order in which they appear in the "Catholic Directory".

This list is updated periodically and is kept on the Guild website – [http://
www.GuildofStAgatha.org.uk](http://www.GuildofStAgatha.org.uk)