

Inspection of Churches, Registers etc

Canon F 18 requires each Archdeacon to inspect every church in their area at least once every three years, either in person or delegated to the Area Dean or Assistant Area Dean. The following guidance is for when this duty falls to the Area Dean (as part of shared leadership, the Lay Dean or Assistant Lay Dean can be involved in this process). The Archdeacon's Triannual Inspection Form below provides all the guidance necessary to carry out the inspection.

Preparation

A few weeks before the visit a letter should be sent to the incumbent and the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens inviting them to meet you at the church at an agreed time.

With the letter you should send a list of what you expect to see and to do and you should ask them to have the documents all laid out for your inspection.

The visit

Arrange your timetable to leave plenty of time for travel between the churches (especially if you do not yet know your way around). Arrive on time, having looked up the names of the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens beforehand.

Your visit should have two parts. There is the inspection of all the documents and contents of the church, comparing one with the other, and there is the inspection of the church itself and the churchyard. You might too, like to take the opportunity of paying a visit to other church property such as a church hall.

It is also important to ensure that there is an opportunity to talk about the spiritual wellbeing and life of the parish.

The follow-up

A few days afterwards a letter should be sent to the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens, encouraging them for the efforts they have put into the visit and are giving to the running of the parish, and listing the matters you have discovered which require attention. It is important to send your letter to the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens who are responsible for the fabric and the contents, but you should also send copies to the incumbent and, if appropriate, to the inspecting architect.

You should expect the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens to reply to your letter within, say, three months, telling you what they have done. If you have not heard by then, drop a gentle reminder and, if necessary, another one after six months.

The inspection

What you need to see can be laid out under four headings:

1. Church records

Registers

You should inspect all the current registers to make sure they are being filled in correctly. You can also quickly pick up information here about the health of the parish. The registers should also be kept in the safe.

You should also inspect registers that are no longer in use to ensure that they are kept securely and cleanly. If the baptism or burial registers are over 100 years old the law requires that they shall be deposited in the local Record Office. If they are still in use, they may be kept open for 150 years but then have to be closed and deposited and a new register bought. Marriage registers, being the joint responsibility of the civil registrar, fall under different regulations.

Other ancient documents

The above rules about depositing also apply to all other ancient documents. It is therefore well worth 'nosing around' the drawers and safes of the vestries to see what has been tucked away in corners and forgotten about. You may also discover mouldy hymn and prayer books and suggest that they are burnt.

Parish Terrier and Inventory

This is a legally required document which you should check carefully against the contents of the church. It needs to be signed at the back by you, the incumbent and the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens.

Church Electoral Roll

You should ensure that there is an up to date and accurate electoral roll for each relevant parish.

Minute books of PCC and Annual Meetings

There are sometimes questions about how the minutes should be kept and it is useful to advise those who keep loose-leaf minutes to number the pages and to put the name of the church and the date of the meeting on each page.

2. Finance

Annual PCC accounts

You could ask to have a look at these and talk with the Churchwardens/Chapelwardens and, as appropriate, the Treasurer or even the examiner/auditor about any issues you or they might have. It is also worth checking that the accounts have been prepared in accordance with the 2006 Charities Act and the Statement of Recommended Practice 2005, if necessary. The church

Treasurer should perhaps have availed himself of a Treasurers' Update Workshop to keep abreast of best practice in accounting and accounts presentation; these workshops have been held at the autumn financial consultations for the last a few years.

Special Church accounts

The 2006 Charities Act requires that trusts and accounts that provide income annually for the PCC or make payments on behalf of the PCC should at a minimum be mentioned in the accounts but might have to be consolidated within the accounts if appropriate and material.

Insurance policies

It is advisable to ask to see the actual policy by which you can check the adequacy of the church's cover. The employer's liability certificate of insurance should be displayed somewhere in the church.

3. Church contents

Church plate

It is particularly important to examine this carefully and compare it with the Inventory. It is amazing how easily Elizabethan chalices go missing. It is important to ensure that all silver is kept in the safe.

Other church valuables

It is not only church plate that constitutes 'articles of value'. Stained glass, monuments and furnishing of all kinds can also fall into this category. But do not talk too frequently in terms of monetary value or some of the churchwardens will want to sell them off to repair the church roof!

Photographs

All churches should have a photographic record of their valuable silver and furniture with details on the back of each photograph. There are frequent instances of stolen goods being recovered because of this simple practice. Two copies of the photographs, kept separately, is safest.

Altar linen

Ask to see this. You will find the occasional church that uses a Kleenex for purificator. It has been known for the linen to be filthy, so ask about laundry procedures.

4. Church building and churchyard

Quinquennial inspection report

It is helpful if you make time to glance over your copy, if you have one, before you go.

Church logbook

This is a legal requirement, but many parishes are very bad at keeping it up to date.

Faculties

Ask them to show you the faculties they have been granted over the last five years. You can check them against work actually carried out. Look out for signs of work which you suspect has not been authorised by faculty.

The churchyard

One of the most important things here is to check that they have an adequate grave-space plan which includes a list of the names and locations of those interred (not a plan of memorial stones, which is different). This will tell you whether the church or the undertaker has actual control of their churchyard. You may need to check whether the churchyard is closed by Order in Council and therefore legally in the charge of the local civil council for maintenance purposes.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) encourages the maintenance of churchyards as places of wildlife conservation. It is difficult to get the issue taken seriously either by parishioners, who become irritated when they find long grass barring their way to the grave they are tending, or by the church members who, if they are interested at all, will just see the churchyard as another public garden to be kept spick and span. A good balance will need to be found

Gutters and down pipes

The traditional *bête noire* of the Archdeacon, but experience suggests about half our churches at any one time will have some inadequacy in their rain-water disposal. It can cause grave damage to stone and brickwork faster than practically anything else.

Security

Do they lock the church? Is the safe bolted or concreted in? Where do they keep loose cash on the premises? Where do they keep the keys? How do they maintain a balance between the church being open for prayer and secure? These aspects require constant vigilance.

Order in the church

It can be helpful to use an outsider's fresh eye to make comments about the interior of the church – the dusty children's corner unused for decades, the possibilities for the space under the tower, the dirty cupboard full of unused rubbish, a vision for re-ordering. Approached in a positive spirit, you can find yourself used over time in further informal, imaginative discussions.

Trusts

It is important to see that these are properly managed.

Triennial Inspection Report

Parish:

Date:

Churchwardens:

	Seen	Notes and any actions required
Quinquennial Inspection Report please have a copy ready		
Date of report		
Name of Church Architect		
The Quinquennial Inspection Report often has a summary list of thing to do towards the back Have all works listed as 'Urgent' and those 'Essential within the first 18 months' been completed?		
Note other works necessary within the quinquennium which are still to be completed.		
Note any other related matters about which advice from the Archdeacon, the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), etc may be helpful.		
Terrier * (book containing details of all land and buildings belonging to church complete with boundary details)		
Inventory * (detailed list of all articles belonging to the church)		
How many copies are there?		
Where are they kept?		
How often is it reviewed?		
Log Book * (contains a full note of all alterations, additions and repairs and anything else which affects the church, land and articles and the location of any other documents relating to these alterations, repairs and events which are not kept with the log book. (Your treasurer should have receipts for work done.))		
Is this up to date?		
Where is it kept?		
Do you have an annual maintenance plan?		
*The Council for the Care of Churches publishes The Inventory and Terrier both bound together in a file called Church Property Register. They also publish a file called the Church Log Book with all the necessary forms (Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ. Also available at https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715110522/church-property-register-insert)		

Photographic Records		
There should be a photographic record of items of silver, brass, furnishings, furniture, memorials etc which are of value: these can be essential in case anything is stolen. Photograph items against a ruler or another object to indicate size. You should also have good colour photographs of your stained glass, in case of damage		
Where is the record kept?		
Is there a second copy kept in a separate place?		
Current Registers		
Are they up to date, clean, tidy and completed in proper indelible/registrars ink?		
Services		
Banns Book		
Weddings		
Baptism		
Confirmation		
Burials/Funerals		
Past Registers, Records, Receipts **		
Completed registers, records and receipts should normally be transferred to the Heritage Centre in Taunton for safe keeping		
Please show receipts for records and registers which have been transferred to the Archivist.		
** The Heritage Centre website lists all the registers that each parish has deposited. If you need to check, go to https://someset-cat.swheritage.org.uk/ and type the name of your parish in the search facility		
Communion Plate and Silver		
Check against inventory, unless deposited in a bank, in which case the receipt must be produced		
Is everything listed present? Are there any missing or damaged items? Are any items left out when the church is open and unattended?		
Altar Linens		
Are the fair linen cloth, purificators, corporals etc clean and in good condition? Where are they kept?		
Vestments		
What condition are these? Where are they kept?		
Choir Robes		
What condition are these? Where are they kept?		
PCC Minute Book		
Is it up to date?		
APCM Minute Book		
Is it up to date?		
Faculties		
All faculties held by the parish should be kept in the safe. Those over 5 years old can be transferred to the archives		

Insurance Policies		
<i>(The policy issued by your insurance company which relates to the church building and its contents)</i>		
With who are you insured? How much are you insured for? When was the policy last reviewed?		
Employer's Liability Certificates		
<i>Certificate of liability issued annually by the insurance company to show that legal liability for accidents to or illness to employees sustained in the course of their employment is covered by insurance policy</i>		
Is it displayed? (This is a requirement)		
No Smoking Signs		
Are they displayed (as is required)?		
Church/Safe Security		
Is there a substantial church safe? Is it bolted to the building? Is it free from damp?		
Is an alarm system installed? Is Alphasafe used (e.g. security marking from EIG)? Is there security lighting? Have you considered a monitored roof alarm system?		
Where are inflammable materials kept? Are there adequate locks and bolts to all outer doors? Are vestries and other side rooms kept locked? Is the tower locked? Are all the church keys properly secured?		
If the church is kept locked, is there a clear notice concerning availability of the key?		
Have you used Smartwater to mark lead/metal? Have you registered this?		
Fire Safety		
<i>A risk assessment should be carried out by a 'responsible person' appointed by the parish</i>		
Name of person appointed Is there an understood evacuation procedure? What fire extinguishers are available? Is there a CO2 extinguisher within 6ft of the organ? When were they last serviced? Do people know how to use them?		

Health and Safety		
<p>A health and safety audit should be completed by the parish and as a result of this audit, there should be a policy and a Health and Safety Officer</p>		
<p>Who is your officer? When will the audit be reviewed? Is there a trained first aider present when the church is in use (or on call?) Where is your accident book kept? Are there any entries? Where is your first aid kit?</p>		
Safeguarding		
<p>Has your PCC adopted a policy such as the one highlighted on the diocesan website? When will it be reviewed (this should be reviewed annually in the benefice)? Is there an appropriate poster displayed about who should be contacted in case of any concerns and is a contact person indicated on the homepage of your website? Who is your named Safeguarding Officer? Does everyone in your parish who needs DBS clearance have it in place and up to date? Has everyone who needs to completed either C0, C1 or C2 training?</p>		
Data Protection		
<p>Are you compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)?</p>		
Disability Provision		
<p>Current legislation which governs disability inclusion is principally the Equality Act 2010. More information can be found on the website: Disability-Inclusion-policy-rev-2016</p>		
<p>Have you completed a disability access audit as required in the diocesan disability inclusion policy? When will it be reviewed? Is wheelchair access as good as possible? Is there any provision for the hard of hearing? Are any of your services signed? Are there large print service and/or hymn books? Is there a hearing loop? Is there a disabled toilet? If you have a church hall has an audit been done for this too? With what result?</p>		

Asbestos		
Have you investigated whether there is any risk of asbestos being present in the building? Is there a record of the location of any asbestos in the building and the policy to notify anyone who might be at risk? Have places of risk been marked?		
'PAT' Testing		
Have all portable electrical appliances had the annual PAT test and the tests recorded? When are they next due to be tested? (this should be done annually)		
Electrical Wiring		
Is there a record of the 5 yearly testing of electric wiring? When is it next due to be tested?		
Lightning Conductor Test (this should be carried out at least every four years – Ecclesiastical Insurance suggest at every QI and half way between i.e. every 2½ years)		
What is the date of the last certificate? What was the resistance?		
Interior Inspection		
Note any visible dampness and general cleanliness. Are notice boards well maintained and up to date?		
Exterior Visual Inspection		
Is there any ivy or other vegetation growing on walls or in any drainage area? Are the gutters, downpipes and drains clean and in good condition?		
If the central heating is oil fired, is the oil tank up to regulation standard i.e. with a 'bund' (a well to contain any spillage)? Is the tank kept locked?		
For guidance go to www.ecclesiastical.com and type 'oil storage' into the site search box.		
Plans		
Do you maintain an up-to-date plan of the church and churchyard for use with faculty applications and for dealing with contractors? Is there a plan of graves, where applicable? Is it up to date? Are there any listed tombs?		

Churchyard		
Is the churchyard closed or open? As applicable, in what condition are any: a) fences b) gates c) paths d) walls e) grounds f) tombstones		
Churchyard Trees		
Are there any Archdeacon's authorisations, permissions from the Local Authority and arboriculturalist's reports relating to the trees in the churchyard (e.g. preservation orders)?		
Is there anything you wish to draw to the attention to the Area/Lay Dean?		

Thank you for all your time and help.

Following the triennial the Area/Lay Dean and Churchwardens will agree the notes made and then the form will be forwarded to the Archdeacon's office

Signed by the Area Dean/Lay Dean:

Signed by the Churchwardens:

Date: