

E5 VISITATIONS, INSPECTIONS AND RECORDS

Visitations

An archdeacon is required to hold yearly visitations within their archdeaconry except when the bishop himself conducts an episcopal visitation. This annual visitation is usually held soon after the end of April, at which time the churchwardens are formally admitted to office.

Early in the New Year the Diocesan Office, on behalf of the archdeacons, will mail to the parishes the papers relating to the visitation. These will include:

- The Articles of Enquiry (a questionnaire about the life of church and parish during the previous year), which will need to be completed by the retiring churchwardens and incumbent, for return to the archdeacon at the Visitation or by post beforehand.
- Citations, requiring the new churchwardens to attend the visitation in May, together with a declaration form for completion at that visitation.

A separate mailing will send citations to all beneficed and licensed clergy (but not those holding Permission to Officiate) requiring them also to attend the visitation.

Visitations are normally held on a deanery basis, with deaneries sometimes doubling up. During the visitation service itself the archdeacon will deliver his visitation charge and the churchwardens will make their declarations and be admitted to office. Episcopal visitations are an exceptional occurrence.

Inspections

There are three principal sorts of inspections of churches.

Quinquennial (Building inspection by a qualified person)

This is the five yearly inspection of a church. Arrangements for the quinquennial inspection of a church are made by the archdeacon, and the cost is included in the diocesan budget. Consideration of the report is primarily the duty of the PCC. The inspection and report is made by a qualified professional person approved by the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). That person must be a qualified architect or a chartered building surveyor, who is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)

Survey of churches, chancels and churchyards by the Archdeacon or Rural Dean

“Every archdeacon shall survey the churches, chancels, and churchyards within his jurisdiction at least once in three years, either in person or by the rural dean, and shall give direction for the amendment of all defects in the fabric, ornaments, and furniture of the same.” (Canon F18)

Fabric and possessions of the church by the churchwardens and minister

The Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 requires churchwardens, acting in consultation with the minister to inspect the fabric of the church and all the articles belonging to it at least once every year. Each inspection should be recorded in the Inventory and Log Book (see below).

Records

Terrier, Inventory and Log Book

Churchwardens, acting in consultation with the minister are required to:

- compile and maintain a full terrier of all lands belonging to the church and a full inventory of all articles belonging to the church; and
- maintain a log book containing a full note of all alterations, additions and repairs to the church and the land and other articles belonging to it, other events affecting any of them, and the location of any relevant documents which are not kept with the log book itself.

There is a prescribed form for these documents, and they may be obtained from Revelations Bookshop in the St Nicholas Church Centre. These forms contain detailed instructions as to completion. Diocesan policy is to exclude from the terrier the following: glebe, parsonage house and its grounds, other clergy houses (unless owned by PCC).

As well as a written record of the articles belonging to the church, it is essential to keep an adequate photographic record (with measurements), which would be particularly important if an article were stolen. It is vital that these records are kept up to date on a regular and systematic basis. They should also be kept in a secure place – generally in the church safe.

Parochial Registers and Records

These matters are regulated by the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, as amended. This legislation, the first for fifty years, reflected the sharper appreciation of the historical importance of registers and records and their increasing physical vulnerability. The legislation requires an inspection of registers and records every five years, by the archdeacon or someone acting on their behalf. This is to check both for any necessary action (closure, transfer to Record Office, first aid) and for the conditions in which the records are held. The scope is quite wide. By “registers” is meant the six types, baptisms, confirmations, banns of marriage, marriage, burials and services. “Records” are any other materials in written or other form setting out facts or events or otherwise recording information. It will therefore include, for example, maps, architects’ drawings, photographs, etc. The registers and records in question are those “in parochial custody” – belonging to the incumbent or PCC or any other ecclesiastical office holder at parish level.

Many of a parish’s older registers and records will already have been deposited at the County Record Office, either in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds or Lowestoft which have been designated as the Diocesan Record Offices. In such cases there should be with the PCC’s papers a receipt listing deposited items. In addition to anything voluntarily deposited, there are two categories which must be deposited in the CRO (unless a special exemption from the bishop is obtained):

- Registers and records all of whose contents are at least 100 years old.
- Registers whose earliest entries are at least 150 years old (post-1837 marriage registers are excepted from this requirement).

Staff at the County Record Office are always willing to advise parishes on these matters.

2005