

## Opening Doors; Exploring Local Churches

These notes are intended as guidelines and suggestions to help with preparing information for visitors. We hope they give some interesting ideas but they are just a starting point. They can be developed over future years as time and resources allow.

- Begin by asking yourself questions about what interests you about your own church, and what you like to show people, is a good means of getting underway. It is helpful to arrange any notes about what to see from a starting point at the entrance or where the information is to be available.
- Explore what needs some explanation to make clear the basic facts; How old is it? What was added when? What are the functions of the features and spaces?
- Thinking laterally from the available evidence, and what it says about the building and life in a particular period will make for the most interesting stories. Every church will have more substantial pieces of evidence from particular periods, such as Norman or Georgian, in which case it also becomes important to draw out information on the not so obvious, eg; the earlier Saxon churches on the site, or the pre-Reformation interior, or what is medieval masonry and what is Victorian.
- The human story is always easy to relate to; What do we know of characters connected to the church from the different periods such as patrons, clergy, or interesting people buried in the church or graveyard? Is there any historical evidence of the role of local people on an everyday basis, such as a schoolroom, choir, bell-ringing, details from parish registers etc?

### Some ideas for a checklist of what to include

Some examples to look at are in italics and brackets

#### Introduction

- Pointers to the different parts of the building and their functions; nave and chancel as basic, but also tower, porch, vestry etc. Clues as to how the building has evolved, starting at earliest or most obvious part. The listing description (if the church is listed) may help; most of these can be seen on the English Heritage website *Images of England* at [www.imagesofengland.org.uk](http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk)
- Dedication. Since what date? Do we know the reason behind the choice? (*St Anne, Bewdley; St Cassian, Chaddesley Corbett*)
- Context of church; in village (*Himbleton, Eckington*), isolated but with humps and bumps from deserted village (*Grafton Flyford, Throckmorton*), on a country estate (*Croome, Hagley*), in a Victorian suburb (*All Saints, Bromsgrove; St Stephen, Worcester*) etc.

### **Early church origins and the history of the site**

- Location significance; eg. near river crossing, crossroads, hilltop etc (*Upton-upon-Severn, St Thomas Dudley*)
- Evidence of pre- and early Christian use; well or spring, yew trees, circular churchyard, Roman remains, prehistoric finds or remains (*Romsley, Dodderhill, Knighton-on-Teme*)
- Saxon church; physical or documentary evidence (*Cropton, Pershore, St Helen Worcester*)

### **Norman Church**

- Architecture; windows, doorways, arches, buttresses, masonry (*Astley, Earls Croome, Overbury*)
- Sculpture; font, carved panels, etc; compare to other examples, may link to Herefordshire School of Sculpture (*Eastham, Pedmore, Holt*)
- Place in village; link to manor house, castle, Norman Marcher Lords, historical evidence (*Rock, Castlemorton*)

### **Medieval church**

- Architecture; windows, doorways, arches, tower, porch, roofs; material stone or timber (*Besford, Stoke Prior, Leigh*)
- Furnishings and evidence of medieval worship; screen, pews, pulpit, lectern, chest, chantry chapel, churchyard cross, font, stoup, stained glass, wall paintings, floor tiles, plate, bells, anything in archives eg; psalter (*Shelsley Walsh, Strensham, Malvern Priory, Bredon*)
- Memorials; link to wealthy influential people. Stone or brass? (*Fladbury, Stanford-on-Teme*)

### **Reformation, Civil War and after**

- Adapting the medieval building for different worship style; furnishings, pulpit, lectern, pews, communion rail, communion table, plain walls and painted inscriptions, plain glass, galleries, musical instruments (*Hanbury, Wickhamford*)
- Evidence of worship and life; bells, plate, bible, registers and other documentary evidence of people including recusancy and non conformity, poor relief, clock (*Spetchley, All Saints Worcester*)
- Civil War damage, new building or repairs, use of brick (*Hanley Castle, Old St Martin Worcester*)
- Memorials; inscriptions, links to people and places (*Norton-with-Lenchwick, Rous Lench*)

### **Victorian**

- Restoration or rebuilding; Gothic Revival or Arts and Crafts style, materials used, architect and builder (*All Saints Sedgley, St George Worcester*)
- Furnishings and evidence of worship; layout, font, pulpit, lectern, screen, altar, organ (*Upton Snodsbury, Oldswinford*)
- Decoration; stained glass, tiles; known designers (*Newland, Dodford*)

- Memorials; personalities, evidence clergy, trades and professions from inscriptions, longevity or infant mortality, churchyard (*St John Bromsgrove, Hartlebury*)
- Benefactors; local landowners or industrialists (*Bushley, Wilden*)
- Village life and church setting; church school, vicarage, almshouses etc (*Wollaston, Alvechurch*)

### **Present Day**

- Current use; worship, community use, adapting for modern needs; disabled access, WCs, heating (*Salwarpe, Ipsley*)
- Evidence of worship; Modern furnishings, layout, new artworks, eg Millenium (*St Mary Kidderminster, Martley*)
- Modern buildings; ecumenical use (*Stourport, Lapal*)
- Memorials; more recent personalities (*Madresfield, St Francis Dudley*)
- Preservation, conservation and restoration (*Cotheridge, Warndon, Ripple*)

### **Where to find further information....**

#### **Archaeology**

**Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service** can provide some tools and pointers.

1. Apply by 1st August for a 100m search of the Historic Environment Record around your church. the information will be provided as a print out of the known archaeological finds and a series of maps, including the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map. These can be incorporated into an exhibition (subject to copyright).
2. Staff at the Service will be pleased to discuss the findings with you, perhaps with a site visit.
3. Suggest that parishioners collect together any local finds of artefacts that they think might be of historic interest and staff will try to identify them - a small piece of broken pottery may open up a whole new chapter in the history of the parish. Contact the Historic Environment Record, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Woodbury, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ. tel. 01905 855494, email [matkin@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:matkin@worcestershire.gov.uk)

**Dudley Historic Environment Record** for archaeology in Dudley. Contact the Historic Environment Team, Development and Environmental Protection, Directorate of the Urban Environment, 3 St James Road, Dudley, DY1 1HZ. Tel; 01384 814190, [www.dudley.gov.uk](http://www.dudley.gov.uk)

#### **History**

**Worcestershire Library and History Centre** has a wealth of reference books on Worcestershire, as well as photographs, local maps, directories and newspapers to look up further information on your church and parish. There is also access to historic material such as parish registers and church documents for more detailed research. Contact the Worcestershire Library and History Centre, Trinity Street, Worcester, WR1 2PW; tel; 01905 765922 email;

[WLHC@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:WLHC@worcestershire.gov.uk)

**Dudley Archive and Local History Service**, at Mount Pleasant Street, Coseley, WV14 9JR. Tel 01384 812770, [www.dudley.gov.uk](http://www.dudley.gov.uk) for historical material relating to places within Dudley borough.

For an initial idea of what may be available, a look at the website designed to give a national index to archives, **Access to Archives** at [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk) might give some interesting documents, but is worth revisiting regularly as more material is entered onto the database.

### **Books and References**

- Old guidebooks and local history or photographic books on the church and parish, village or town, but beware of inaccuracies which can be perpetuated. There may be lots of new interesting facts not recorded in these sources, but which can be uncovered using the resources above.
- The Inspecting Architect's Quinquennial Report should contain detailed information about the structure of the building. You may wish to draw visitors' attention to work in progress or forthcoming restoration projects, which may encourage donations.
- Local history groups are worth talking to as they may have done much of the groundwork already, and be able to offer useful pointers on what else to look at saving time and resources. Many local groups have interesting websites.
- If the church and its contents have been recorded by NADFAS Church Recorders, the record produced will contain detailed information on stonework, metalwork, glass, woodwork and textiles some of which may not normally be on view or even held in the church. The Heritage Day may be a good opportunity to display some of these items, such as vestments, altar frontals, plate and registers. If NADFAS have not already covered your church it might be worth considering having a record produced, (further details and advice can be obtained from [www.nadfas.org.uk](http://www.nadfas.org.uk) or John Bailey on 01905 26391.
- Victoria County History volumes on Worcestershire and Staffordshire, now also available online at [www.british-history.ac.uk](http://www.british-history.ac.uk)
- Books on churches such as Tim Bridges *Churches of Worcestershire* (general introductory chapters, gazetteer, subject index), Mike Salter *Parish Churches of Worcestershire* (gazetteer, several plans).
- Books on County History and buildings; Pevsner's *Buildings of England* volumes on Worcestershire and Staffordshire, Arthur Mee's *King's England* series volumes on Worcestershire and Staffordshire.
- General church books e.g. Richard Taylor *How to read a Church* or Stephen Friar *A Companion to the English Parish Church*

### **Heritage Open Days**

Further information can be found at [www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk)