

Church Maintenance: Your Guide to Care

Maintenance Tips

Preparing for colder weather

As a glorious Summer comes towards its end, we look ahead to Autumn with its cooler conditions which means it's crucial that churches prepare for adverse weather.

To ensure that your church is well equipped for the colder conditions, you should aim to have the church's boiler and heating system tested to make sure that it is working properly. These checks are best done in September, before the colder months strike, so that you can plan for repairs. If your heating system uses oil or Calor Gas, September is also a good time to make sure that you have enough fuel for winter.

You will also need to inspect all exposed water tanks, water and heating pipes, and oil feed pipes to ensure they are protected from frost. When temperatures fluctuate, or get too cold, there is a risk of pipes freezing which can result in them bursting. It is therefore crucial that there is some form of protection in place to help mitigate problems that arise from burst pipes. This can be done by making sure pipes are well-lagged (insulated), regularly getting your church's boiler and heating system serviced, and checking that your frost thermostat is working. Any leaks that are identified during your inspection should also be repaired as soon as possible.

As part of your winter preparation, you should also examine your church's snowboards to make sure they are still in place and are not damaged. If you identify any that need repair, it would be beneficial to rectify this before winter arrives to ensure the necessary protection is in place.

Another area you should regularly examine in preparation for the colder months is your rainwater goods: gutters, downpipes, valleys, gullies, and drains. As part of your weekly walk round the church, you should aim to see if there are any leaks or blockages in your rainwater disposal system. If you find an obstruction, it is important that you clear it as soon as possible as there is a risk that any trapped water could freeze and crack the affected gutter or downpipe.

More information about frost protection can be found on the following websites:

- ChurchCare:
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/frost-protection-note_v1.pdf
- Ecclesiastical:
<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-cold-weather-advice/>

Other maintenance tasks

Beyond preparing for the cooler conditions, you should continue with regular inspections, tasks, and checks around your church.

With Autumn leaves falling from trees, you should be vigilant and make sure any debris or obstructions blocking airbricks are removed. This will ensure the space under your floorboards remains properly ventilated. If obstructed, there is a risk that your floorboards could suffer from problems with damp and rot.

In preparation for the end of daylight saving, you may wish to check if there are any broken bulbs inside and outside the church and replace them if necessary. If you have any security lights, it is a good idea to check and replace any that are broken at the same time.

In the next couple of months, you should also aim to inspect your church's masonry for damage. Signs of damage include deeply eroded mortar joints, cracks in the stone or bricks, laminated stonework, or evidence of movement. It is worthwhile making a note and photographing any areas of concern so that you can monitor their condition and act accordingly.

At this time of year, it is also good to check for any signs of water damage or ingress across your church. As with masonry issues, it is best practice to note and photograph any problems. Ideally, you should also attempt to understand whether the water damage is an ongoing issue. If you find any areas of damp, we suggest walking around the outside of your church (ideally in rainy conditions) to see if any rainwater goods are blocked or leaking. If you have rising damp, it is worthwhile checking your gullies and drains are clear. You should also aim to clear any vegetation from the base of walls and drainage channels. If there is safe access, it is worthwhile examining any boarded roof spaces to see if there is evidence of leaks or damage that may have been concealed.

When daylight saving ends, you may also want to take the opportunity to check your turret clock.

Permission

Although many maintenance tasks can be completed without List B permission or a Faculty, general repairs and minor changes normally require permission.

If you identify a repair need, please contact a member of the Church Buildings Team for advice on whether permission is needed.

Maintaining Churchyards

Churchyard maintenance is an important part of caring for your church and ensuring that it is safe for your congregation, passersby and those who visit your churchyard.

Who is responsible for the care of your churchyard?

Responsibility for looking after a churchyard can differ between churches and will ultimately depend on whether a churchyard is closed or open.

If your churchyard is open for burials, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is responsible for maintaining and repairing the churchyard. This includes mowing the grass, trimming any plants or shrubs, caring for and maintaining trees, maintaining paths, walls and fences and ensuring any churchyard monuments, memorials, or headstones are stable.

If your churchyard is closed by Order in Council, this may mean the responsibility of caring and repairing has been transferred to the local authority. However, the Order of the Council does not automatically transfer this right. The responsibility only changes if the PCC decides to give notice under Section 215 of the Local Government Act 1972 to their appropriate local authority.

Whether your PCC has responsibility for the churchyard or not, it should still care for and inspect it to ensure it is safe. As frequent users of the church, you will be best placed to identify any areas of the churchyard that are unsafe and contact the necessary people to rectify the problem. If maintaining the church lies with the local authority, you should aim to contact them at the earliest opportunity.

Advice on maintaining memorials, monuments, and headstones

The maintenance of memorials can be a particular concern for PCCs who have open or closed churchyards.

Although the responsibility for the maintenance of a churchyard lies with either the PCC or the local authority, the maintenance and safety of a memorial, monument, or headstone remains the responsibility of the owner of the monument or their heirs.

Despite this, it is still important for the PCC to remain vigilant and complete regular checks to see if churchyard monuments are safe as the heirs may no longer live in the area or, if a monument is particularly old, the current heirs may not realise the monument exists.

An easy way to identify if a church monument is safe is to conduct a 'wobble test'. This would involve inspecting a monument for any obvious signs of instability and applying pressure back and forth to see if it moves.

If a problem is identified, the PCC should contact those who interred the person memorialised, or their heirs, to make them aware of this responsibility. If they cannot be reached, or decide not

to fulfil their responsibility, any work will need to be carried out by those who are legally responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard i.e. the local authority or the PCC.

If a headstone or monument is found to be dangerously unstable, the structure should be cordoned off at a distance of at least 1.5 metres and immediate contact made with the Church Buildings Team for advice. We will then be able to provide guidance on making the headstone/monument safe until it can be reset or repaired.

Does work to churchyards need permission?

Churchyards remain subject to Faculty Jurisdiction regardless of whether they are open or closed. You should seek advice from the Church Buildings Team if you are planning to make alterations to your churchyard. This includes repairs to built structures, alongside changes to the natural environment (for instance if you are looking to plant or fell a tree).

Need support?

If you would like any advice on church maintenance, or have any repairs you need help with planning, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the team for assistance. You can contact us via the Church Buildings Team email, churches@cofe-worcester.org.uk.