

## Research your Church

Knowing and understanding your church is important when writing statements of significance, church guides and also some funding applications. Researching your church history can also be a really enjoyable exercise which can attract new volunteers.

### Where do you find information?

#### Word of Mouth

Local people always have stories to tell, some you have to take with more than just a pinch of salt, whilst other can help fill in gaps, point you in new directions or add colour and life to the often dry list of dates and terms that make up the best part of most church building history. So get out there and talk to people.

#### Visual Analysis

If you are into 'church crawling' and visit churches regularly, or someone mentions an architectural feature or piece of furniture similar to yours in another church – do go and have a look if you can! You might find that one of your pews in fact came from another church (or vice versa) or you had the same patron who deliberately commissioned similar designs.

#### On Paper

- For guidance relating to fittings, furnishings, fabric and particularly terminology, see *A Companion to the English Parish Church* by Stephen Friar.
- Nikolaus Pevsner's series of books on history of architecture in England remains an almost irreplaceable source. Relevant titles in the series:
  - North-West and South Norfolk
  - Bedfordshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough
  - Cambridgeshire
  - West Suffolk
- *Cambridgeshire Churches* edited by Caroline Hicks – a volume of 24 essays covering virtually every aspect of church history and architecture.
- *Exploring Cambridgeshire Churches* by Carolyn Wright – popular guidebook highlighting key features.
- Mortlock and Roberts' *Guide to Norfolk Churches* and *Guide to Suffolk Churches* - concise but thorough.
- *England's Thousand Best Churches* can be a good source to refer to if your church has been given a few stars, but otherwise is quite subjective and not comprehensive.
- Local guidebooks and village histories can be informative.

#### Online:

- Building on History – useful guidance from a project delivered in the Diocese of London between 2009 and 2011. <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/>
- Francis Blomefield, easily searchable online at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/topographical-hist-norfolk> It is potentially difficult to read but incredibly informative, as the document goes through not only history of buildings, but also

people, local areas and legal matters. Information can be brief but is almost encyclopaedic in its completeness. One thing to be aware of, however, is that it was originally published in 1736, so will not tell you anything about Victorian rebuilding!

- The National Heritage List for England is a good resource for checking facts: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>.
- The Incorporated Church Buildings Society is a good source for church plans: <http://images.lambethpalacelibrary.org.uk/luna/servlet/LPLIBLPL~34~34>.
- Maps can be found here: <http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk>.
- For genealogy and other records, have a look here: <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng>.
- Bryant on churches of Norfolk can be found here: <http://www.norfolksources.norfolk.gov.uk/DserveNS/>. Select 'Books Bryants Churches' on this page and enter your church in the search bar.
- Heritage Explorer:
  - Norfolk - <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/>
  - Suffolk - <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/>
  - Cambridgeshire - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/archaeology/cambridgeshire-historic-environment-record-cher>
- Heritage Gateway allows to search across a number of databases, including the Heritage Explorer sites: <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>.

Other interesting sites, which are good sources of information, but can be out of date depending on when the author's visit took place.

- Cambridgeshire: <http://www.robschurches.moonfruit.com/>  
<http://www.druidic.org/camchurch/>
- Simon Knott's Website:
  - Norfolk Churches <http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/norfolkindex.htm>
  - Suffolk Churches <http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/Alist.htm>
  - Cambridgeshire Churches: <http://www.simonknott.co.uk/cambschurches/mainpage.htm>

## In Archives

- **Cambridgeshire Archives Service** holds a wealth of unique historic records and other resources relating to Cambridgeshire, the former counties of Huntingdonshire and the Isle of Ely and their communities. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/archives>
- **Norfolk Record Office** - You can search by parish here: <http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk/DServe/public/searches/nroparish.htm> and make an appointment to use the search room by emailing [norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk). A similar principle applies to the records in Suffolk: <https://www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/>.
- The **Norfolk Heritage Centre** at the top floor of the Forum Library in Norwich <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/libraries-local-history-and-archives/researching-family-and-local-history/norfolk-heritage-centre>.

- **Historic Environment Record** at Gressenhall is where you will find archaeology reports and other useful pieces of information. All the details, including how to make an appointment, are here: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/libraries-local-history-and-archives/archaeology-and-historic-environment/historic-environment-record>.

Also visit your local library or museum.

Try not to limit yourself to researching just the church building and its history – gather information from the wider area! The church is very much a part of the fabric of a village or town and, often being the oldest building in the area, a guardian of the local history.

This guidance has been provided in good faith but is for general information only. Although reasonable efforts will be made to update the information on this note, no representations, warranties or guarantees are made, whether expressed or implied, that the content is accurate, complete or up to date.

*This is an edited version of a document produced by Anastasia Moskvina, Historic Church Buildings Support Officer, Diocese of Norwich.*