

Church Records and Archives in the Canterbury Diocese Guidance for Area Deans

1 *Introduction*

The requirement for surveying registers and records held within churches and church premises is stated in the Parochial Registers and Records Measure (1978, amended 1993): 'Every archdeacon shall cause the register books and records in parochial custody in his archdeaconry, including register books in use for the purpose of making entries therein, to be inspected and reported on periodically by such person or persons as he may appoint.' The inspections should happen at least every five years.

Until recent years, surveys of registers and records kept locally in church premises were carried out for the diocese by Kent County Council's Archives Service. These surveys were carried out once every five years for each church, and were chargeable to the diocese.

These surveys are now being incorporated into the triennial Area Deans' visits.

2 *Record-keeping requirements*

There are various legal requirements for record-keeping by church officials. The Parochial Registers and Records Measure specifies that older registers and records must be transferred to a Diocesan Record Office, and not kept within the church, unless the church applies for an exemption from the Measure. (A handful of churches in the Canterbury Diocese maintain an exemption.) For registers, this means that baptism and burial registers starting 150 years ago and marriage registers starting in 1837, and all registers closed 100 years or more ago, must be transferred to the relevant Diocesan Record Office. Other records over 100 years old must also be transferred. The Measure also provides guidelines for the keeping of any registers and records within the church.

The Data Protection Act and financial regulations apply to more modern records. Requirements cover records in electronic format, as well as paper records.

3 *'Registers and records' questions*

The questions around registers and records ask what records are kept locally in the church or church premises, and how these are kept. It is important that registers and records are kept securely, as they are irreplaceable. It is not advisable that church officials keeping registers and historic records in their own houses. It is important that full master sets of key records (eg PCC accounts and minutes) are kept, ideally in paper form, for adding to the parish 'archive'. Efficient record-keeping needs to be applied to current, as well as historic, records, and to electronic, as well as paper, records.

Staff at the Diocesan Record Offices can be approached for advice in specific cases, and if required by an individual church.

4 Diocesan Record Offices

There are two appointed Diocesan Record Offices for the Canterbury Diocese.

If the church is in western Kent (ie before 2011, was in the then Archdeaconry of Maidstone) the Record Office is the **Kent History and Library Centre**, James Whatman Way, Maidstone ME14 1LQ, tel 08458-247200; email historyandlibrarycentre@kent.gov.uk

If the church is in eastern Kent (ie before 2011, was in the then Archdeaconry of Canterbury) the Record Office is **Canterbury Cathedral Archives**, The Precincts, Canterbury CT1 2EH tel 01227-865330, email archives@canterbury-cathedral.org

Both Record Offices can be approached for advice on issues relating to parish record-keeping and archives. They may already hold collections of historic records relating to an individual church, and can provide listings of these on request.

5 What to keep within the church

For detailed guidance on which records should be retained by the church, which records should be transferred to the Record Office, and which records can be destroyed, see *Keep or Bin* (below). It is advisable to transfer any records for which there is no administrative need in the church to the Record Office. They will be cared for to appropriate standards there, and will be made available to others for research as appropriate. The church remains the owner of the records, and they can be borrowed back for particular occasions.

6 Further information

- 'Keep or Bin': <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/librariesandarchives/keeporbin/>
- *Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 (amended 1993)*: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1978/2>
- *A Guide to the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 (as amended at 1st January 1993)*, available from Church House Publishing.
- www.kentarchives.org.uk and <http://archives.canterbury-cathedral.org>: online catalogues for the History and Library Centre and the Cathedral Archives, with listings of parish documents held in the Record Offices
- James Behrens, *Practical Church Management* (1998), chapter 24