



Filming in churches

Hosting a film shoot by a movie or TV company can be very beneficial to a church. It can bring the church into the public eye and encourage the public to come and visit. It can also be a useful source of additional income.

However there are potential pitfalls to avoid, including the risk of inappropriate content, unfavourable publicity, damage to the fabric and furnishings, and other risks such as copyright violation.

Permission to film in a church

The Chancellor of the Diocese, the Revd Justin Gau, granted a general faculty for filming in churches in June 2019.

The general faculty had the following provisions:

- If there is to be any temporary alteration to the fabric of the Church a Faculty must be obtained;
- Written consent of the incumbent and PCC (or PCC and Churchwardens during an interregnum) must be obtained prior to any filming;
- The prior written consent of the archdeacon providing the archdeacon has been supplied with the proposed filming agreement, the script and the storyline of the proposed recording and evidence of appropriate insurance. The archdeacon must be satisfied that the agreement makes appropriate provision for the following matters:
 - That no alterations to the fabric, furnishings or memorials are permitted. A digital record of the Church must be made by the company in partnership with a representative of the PCC before the filming to ensure that no alteration or damage is caused.
 - That full commercial payment is to be made.
 - That nothing is done on the Church property or use made of any film made on the property which would be in breach of Canon F16 .

The use shall not interfere with the use of the church by the minister for the time being having pastoral charge of the parish or by the PCC (or anyone authorised by it) and in particular shall not interfere with any service of divine worship taking place in the church or churchyard.

In light of the general faculty, these guidelines are to assist incumbents, PCCs and churchwardens in the Diocese of Bristol to decide whether to agree to filming, and then in planning and managing the shoot.

Points to consider before agreeing to filming proposals:

1. Format

Is this for a feature film or for a television programme? Will the church be used for just a small clip in a larger production, or is the church itself the main feature?

2. Audience

Which television channel is this intended for and who is the target audience? For example, Channel 4 with its brief to be innovative and experimental is, broadly speaking, more likely to transmit more challenging material than, say, BBC1.

3. Category

If filming is for TV, will the programme be a drama, a news programme, documentary, a soap opera or sitcom. Or will it be used for advertising, either on the TV or in the cinema?

The scale of fees you charge will be determined to some extent by the category.

The potential for damaging or insensitive material will also vary across different genres.

4. Content

Any television company has to abide by programme codes which are laid down concerning content.

Even so, this leaves possibilities for material to be transmitted which might show the parish, and therefore the Diocese and the Church of England, in a poor light.

Knowing who is involved will give a clue to the type of treatment that is going to be used. However, you should not be shy of asking directly for clear information on content. A written synopsis would be appropriate.

Programme makers should be happy to share their intentions, since this enables them too to get the best out of what is a collaborative exercise.

In discussion, try to elicit the central message the Director wants to put across, which will drive all editing decisions. What is included, or left out, and how it is arranged, can have a surprising effect on the impression conveyed to the audience.

5. Story

Ask for a synopsis of the story-line in any drama or sitcom for example. This will give you an overview of the finished programme, and allow you to judge whether it is beneficial or harmful to the Church.

6. Script

If filming is likely to be lengthy, with a lot of action in or around the church, you may also want to see the actual scripts.

It is important for you to see what is going to be said and in what context. For example, double entendres may flag up the kind of programme for which the material is being used.

If there are last-minute changes to the script to which you object, then you should have the right to withdraw from the deal and negotiate a sum for your trouble and inconvenience. Make sure the contract states this clearly.

The Archdeacon or the Chancellor may wish to approve the script before giving their permission for the filming to take place.

7. Advertising

The name and nature of the product or item to be advertised should be obtained, with a copy of the script or advertising copy.

8. Location

Will filming be inside or outside the church? If on church premises (in the church or churchyard or other curtilage), the church's permission is needed for anything to be done.

Filming of a church or any other building from outside the site boundaries requires no permission. Pictures of buildings are not subject to copyright either.

9. Animals

If any animals are to be used, think through the implications very thoroughly. Very considerable precautions would be needed before letting any non-house-trained animal inside the church itself.

10. Time

Ask how long the church is required for. Broadly speaking, a news item where the subject is a Church of England matter and the editor simply wants to use the church as background would not take more than half an hour.

However, a feature film or drama will need to light and possibly rig the church before filming could start, and it could need de-rigging.

11. Church services

It often happens that news crews or documentary-makers wish to film a service, for example a baptism or marriage, for a package they are putting together. They will probably only use it for background.

In the case of a baptism or marriage you clearly need the permission of those involved. A film crew will often offer copies of the film in lieu of fees for the couple. The PCC is still entitled to a fee.

For any service – Songs of Praise, for example – you need to agree what is to be filmed and the camera positions, so that the congregation is not distracted from worship. The service will have to start early, allowing time for rehearsal of congregational singing.

In addition, should you require the use of the church building for services or regular activities, please ensure that time is built into filming schedules that allows for the church to be returned to its original state.

Make sure the above points are covered in the contract.

12. Facilities

Bear in mind the difference between a small documentary which may only require 2 or 3 people and limited hand-held equipment, compared to a major film job which could involve scores of actors and technicians even to make a clip of a few seconds!

Does the production company need to use other facilities such as the Hall or car park? Do they wish to film in the churchyard?

If filming is likely to be lengthy or for drama, make sure to discuss toilets, dressing room areas etc. Use of your hall or car park for such things can be used as bargaining tools when you negotiate the fee.

Do ask the production company what they have organised for parking. If it is on a street with restrictions they will need to have gained local authority traffic department approval.

13. Layout

What changes are proposed to the way the church is laid out? Does the film company, for example, wish to move some historical piece, such as the altar?

14. Fabric and furnishings

If fixed items need to be moved you are likely to need a faculty from the Diocesan Chancellor. Minor temporary changes may be able to be authorised by your Archdeacon. See permission, below.

15. Contract

Always insist on a contract. This will spare a lot of trouble later.

Make sure the contracting parties are clearly named and even spelt correctly, as a simple error could void the agreement. The filming company is likely to be an ad hoc project subsidiary, not any broadcaster or film studio.

The contracting party for the church should be the PCC.

Make sure copyrights are clearly defined. Avoid handing over the right to images of church property (but see Location above)!

If you are looking at a substantial amount of filming, it would be prudent to ask the Diocesan Registrar to look over the contract.

16. Risk

Make sure the Regulatory Reform (Fire Precautions) Order is followed. Both the church and the film company will have a 'Responsible Person' and must carry out their own fire risk assessment.

It is desirable anyway to have a written risk assessment taking account of all equipment, sets, facilities, special effects etc.

The last thing you want is the parish to be sued, the second last thing is to have to sue someone else.

17. Insurance

You must insist that the PCC is indemnified and insured against damage or accident. The church insurance policy may not cover such matters.

Ascertain whether the permanent film or TV company will underwrite any risk. If not, either make sure you are covered by the church's own insurance, or else write into the contract that the film company take on its own special insurance for the job.

Inform the church's insurers anyway.

18. Fees

Time and type of programme are the two main factors determining a location fee.

The word 'day' is often used. You should be clear what constitutes one day, so you can charge if time is overrun. An extra half an hour might be reasonable, but more should be charged. Filming at night may also confuse matters. Therefore it may be simpler to charge per hour, and this is done more and more.

Feature films, TV drama and commercials may well command a fee of £400-500 per hour; photo-shoots and magazine or topical features about a third of that, with documentaries and education programmes lying somewhere in-between. Daily news items are unlikely to be subject to any fee, but they have the benefit of drawing attention to the church on prime-time television. You are also likely not to want to charge to broadcast a service. But for commercial contracts you should always think commercially and be prepared to charge the going rate. Bear in mind that the fee may be higher to work inside the church than to film from the outside. Consider an up-front deposit, in addition to pre-payment of up to 50% of the fee. The deposit need not be returnable.

19. Rules

Film makers actually welcome working to clear site rules. They appreciate knowing where they stand. If they like the location they will do what they have to get it, and will not be put off. They will not resent it if a church enforces its rules.

Bear in mind it is always the first time this crew has worked together. They are all freelancers and are hired on a single project basis. Copy the rules to every crew member.

Since 1 July 2007, smoking has been banned in all internal public places, including churches. Crews are already quite used to a smoking ban, and will observe it.

Drink is the main issue. It is essential to have a liquids policy, as crews get very hot and need to re-hydrate constantly. A vast supply of bottled water with filter caps is best to avoid casual spillage over valuable artefacts.

20. Planning the film shoot

The main pressure on crews is the time to get in and out. Therefore pre-planning is essential. They will happily attend recce meetings with key personnel including Director, Location Manager, Set Designer, Production Supervisor, Photo Director etc. Then the shoot can proceed quickly and smoothly.

The conclusions of the planning process should be written up as a method statement by the film company, and submitted to you for your approval.

21. Access

- Think where to park vehicles. Here's a useful tip – place a drip tray under lorry oil tanks.
- Comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

22. Equipment

Lighting is usually the main item of equipment. Fittings are improving and getting smaller; wiring routes and the size and spread of tripods etc are the key thing.

Lighting may be mounted outside, pointing in through windows, in order to simulate daylight, but any effect on the glazing and metal bars must be appraised in advance.

Be prepared to insist on spreaders etc, tennis balls on equipment feet over valuable or fragile floors. Insist on protection to fittings and furnishings in the church which are not actually being filmed. Avoid taping of polythene, cables etc. In particular, be prepared to ban gaffer tape and avoid blak-tak (Blak-tak is used by film crews, it resembles blu-tak but leaves a much more stubborn residue).

23. Special effects

Trial any special effects on a small scale first, especially if fog machines etc are involved. Naked flames should be banned. Some alternative is always possible to achieve a desired cinematographic effect, so long as you identify what is the underlying requirement.

On and after the shoot

1. Supervision

It is advisable to ensure someone is present during the filming. If it is a day-long shoot, or longer, two people may be needed. They need to know what agreements – the contract and the rules – you have made with those filming.

2. Inspections

Before starting, carry out a walk-round inspection of condition with, say, the Assistant Director. Take lots of digital photos.

Inspect for any damage again immediately on conclusion, and report any issues within hours not days. The company actually filming may disband very quickly after delivering to whomever commissioned it.

Check carefully for any pilfering and take action quickly if need be, but make sure it's really gone and not misplaced (or innocently packed up with props) – before telling the police.

3. Records

Make detailed notes afterwards for future reference. Film companies are likely to return to a good site, and past experience will be invaluable.

These guidelines are not comprehensive, and not a blueprint to fit all occasions. If in doubt consult:

- *the Archdeacon, Emma Bakewell (Parish Buildings & Planning Officer), Ben Evans (Diocesan Communications Officer) at the Diocesan Office (0117 906 0100), and/or*
- *the Diocesan Registrar (01749674747).*

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