

Hidden Stories, Open Doors

Tourism Resource Guide for churches,
chapels and meeting houses

October 2024



**Discover
Churches**
Herefordshire & Shropshire

The **Discover Churches Hidden Stories, Open Doors Tourism Resource Guide** aims to encourage curiosity about new ways of attracting visitors, inspiring and sharing knowledge, values and experiences.

Whether you are just starting to opening your church, chapel or meeting house* to visitors or have years of experience doing so, you are invited to dip in and out of Discover Churches Hidden Stories, Open Doors Tourism Resource Guide.

Churches need a lot more people to care a whole lot more. One way is to share your church as a place of fascination, awe, a deep sense of peace or solace for the present by welcoming visitors. It also shows how much you care about safeguarding the heritage of your church for the future.

We hope to enable and support everyone involved with welcoming visitors to respond to the needs of those visitors and also the church, it's volunteers and community. We aim to encourage curiosity about finding engaging new ways of attracting visitors, inspiring and sharing knowledge, values and experiences.

1. Tourism
2. Open and welcome
3. Interpretation
4. Publicity and social media
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Appendix A

Great case study examples of hidden stories being used to encourage visitors. Also, some brilliant examples of open doors; tourism and the wider use of churches, chapels and meeting houses from across the country.

Appendix B

Here are some templates and examples you could use in developing your own church tourism strategy, welcoming visitors, surveying, and planning and creating interpretation and publicity.

The guide has been written and collated as part of the Discover Churches project in Herefordshire and Shropshire. Led by Herefordshire Churches Tourism Group**, working with partners, the project team, and volunteers across the two counties:

- To explore sustainable and commercially viable activities that will help give historic church buildings an opportunity to secure their financial sustainability and safeguard the buildings impressive heritage.
- To show how tourism interventions can help support church buildings by helping to raise the capacity, resilience, and sustainability of churches to attract additional income through offering engaging church involvement for day, or short stay visitors in the area.

* This guide can be used by all places of worship, but we have used the word ‘church’ throughout to keep the language simple.

** Please see the [last page](#) for a list of those we wish to acknowledge in putting together this guide.

Version 1 : October 2024

We welcome additions and amendments for future version, including case studies, templates and examples to be added to the appendices. Please understand that we may not include all suggestions, they will be reviewed regularly by the editorial team. Email anything you would like to add to : sarah.crossland@nationalchurchestrust.org





For Jenny

Every successful project needs a good leader - firm but fair, a bit restless but in a measured sort of way, with good diplomacy and persuasion skills.

Jenny Beard had all these great qualities in abundance. Although producing this tourism guide has been an excellent team effort, it was Jenny who drove the whole project along, who got full value from the diverse skills and experience of the steering group and who dealt with the inevitable 'wobble' or two along the way, not least of all the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

It is of just a little comfort to know that she knew the task was effectively complete, as she emailed round the final draft of the guide just a couple of days before her death. Even now, you fancy she may be looking to improve the welcome for those who follow where she has now gone - and making a typically good job of it!

The project team



Church buildings are visited both by regular members of congregations and by those who do not identify themselves as followers of any faith. The reasons for visiting are many.

I find this guide inspiring, encouraging, and perhaps even challenging. I hope that you do too. If you already open your church building you will have the opportunity of reading how others do it; if as yet you do not open your church building other than at service times, perhaps you will gain food for thought that 'your church' is present for more people than just your congregation, it is there for everyone who wishes to enter.

But, only if your church building is open can they do so.

Revd Canon John Brown, Honorary Life President of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

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Tourism

Why embrace tourism?

One of the oldest forms of tourism is **pilgrimage**.

Places of faith offered a haven of hospitality to travellers, even if religion was not their main reason for travelling.

Visitors are not always attracted to sacred sites, churches, mosques, synagogues, and other places of devotion for their religious value, but also for their cultural significance, architectural importance, aesthetic beauty, historic, or family value. For others, seeking self-improvement or health and wellbeing may be the prime reason

Church tourism has a role to play in the wider **tourism, hospitality and leisure** sector.

All aim to provide customers, guests, tourists or visitors with an enjoyable service, experience or visit by meeting their expectations. This is why **knowing your visitors** is important.

Church tourism can be a **catalyst for change**.

The positive benefit for an areas culture and society can help to raise awareness of our common heritage; helps to encourage the interest of tourists and visitors in local values and communities, with a 'payback' in developing a sense of support and pride in the local community, its culture and history.

In addition, any income generated can be reinvested into maintaining your church building.



The significance of tourism

Tourism is a major industry, managed by professionals, and which contributes to national, regional and local economic growth, employment and quality of life.

It is a people focused industry. Meeting or exceeding traveller needs is respected and valued ... it also makes good business sense. Tourism includes accommodation, heritage, culture, retail, hospitality (food and drink), sports, transportation and tour operators.

In 2021 tourism generated £131.5 billion per year and employed over 2 million people nationally. Annually heritage and heritage attractions (historic sites and buildings, towns, zoos and botanic gardens, museums, art galleries, conservation and nature parks) contribute between 2 and 4% of the value of the tourism economy as a whole.

More information : Explore the sector, advice and insights website from [Visit Britain](#)

Understanding tourism lingo

Like any industry tourism has its own specific terminology and language.

A **tourist** is usually classified as an overnight visitor.

A **visitor** is usually a one day visitor. Both could be travelling for leisure, business or visiting friends and family.

A **destination** is the place people travel to. It could be a town, area, National Park or attraction. Destinations are often managed by a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) involved in supporting the visitor economy.

The **visitor economy** is the whole environment in which visitors, locals and tourists interact. It focuses on the elements that attract visitors and the infrastructure and services that support their visit. It could include hotels, shops, places to eat, places to visit and how people arrive or move around once there.

Opportunities for partnership

1. Seek advice from your county / local churches tourism group (if you have one).
2. Find out about support available from the National Churches Trust; discover tourism projects, training and networking opportunities as well as promotional pages and story content : [National Churches Trust](#)
3. Visit the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association website to find resources and information about membership : [Churches Visitor and Tourism Association](#)
4. Seek advice from your denomination. Some Church of England dioceses have a tourism officer, resources and publicity. Methodist Heritage promotes tourism and has resources : [Methodist Heritage](#)
5. Find your local Destination Management Organisation and tourist or visitor information centres. Your local authority will have contact details, there may be more than one. Ask if you can join any local forum groups.



What to research:

1. Ask for advice about the type of people who visit your area. How long they stay, what they are looking for and doing, what is missing? Ask how partners could help promote your church to visitors. What do they need from you to do this? What is the preferred method used by visitors to find out about you?
2. Make sure to explore all the ways you might be able 'add value' for visitors. This might include anything from food to the time of certain events, to music played, to cultural, agricultural and religious calendars.

Income and other benefits

Don't just aim to increase the number of visitors : think about how those visitors can have a positive impact on your church and community. Income generated can be used to power your other activities and counting how many people come can help you access grants and other support.

Welcoming more people into your church may bring unexpected benefits eg: someone who can help you.

- Heritage is one of the biggest drivers of tourism day visits and is growing
- More people visit heritage sites than attend premier league football matches
- Churches offer an experience; there are 35,000+ and all can offer a warm welcome

Make sure your church benefits:

- Always have a clear ask for donations, and Gift Aid where possible
- Refreshments; if the church is open without stewards you could offer bottles of water or kettle / teabags
- Install contactless giving or use a QR code to link to online giving
- Think about chargeable activities; group tours or special access to behind the scenes areas
- Be creative about sales; they could include souvenir items, religious books, faith based music, event or time of year specific items, items inspired by art or architecture within your church
- Monitor your return on the investment of time and scarce resources

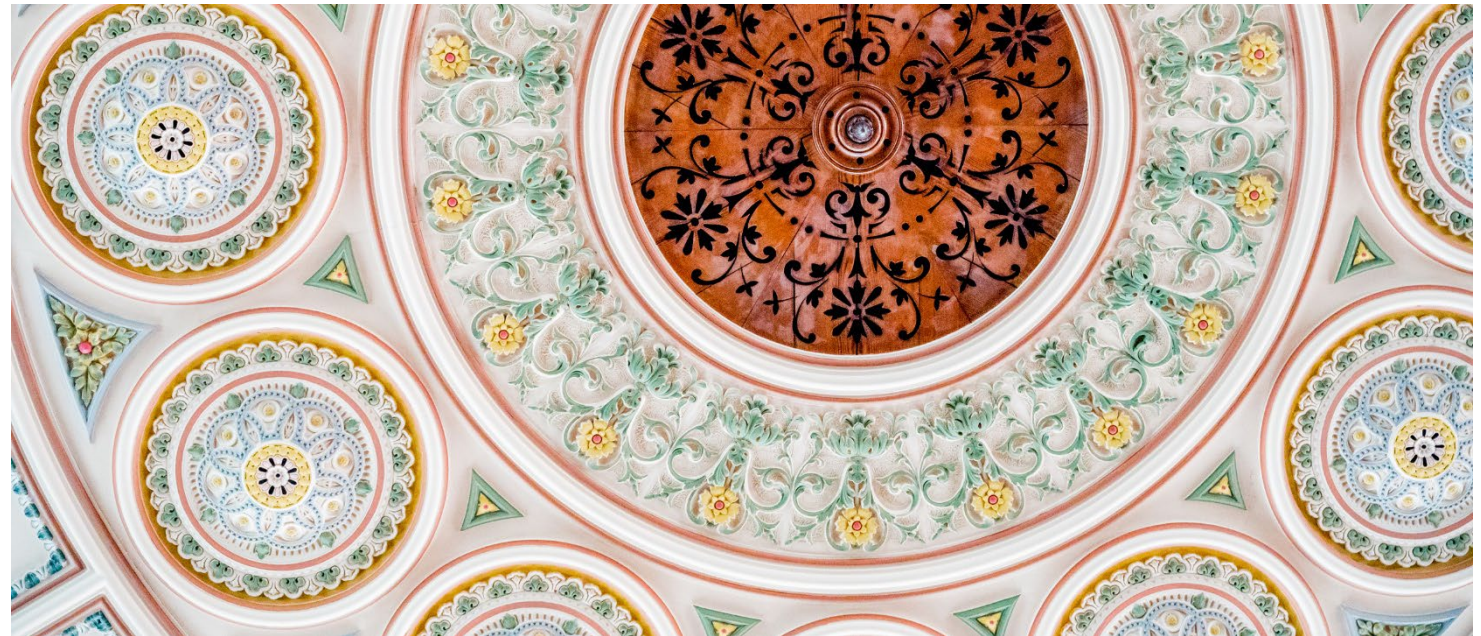
Digital donation terminal

You can do this even if you don't have wifi or electricity, terminals are now available with batteries and data storage that you can download to a computer at a later date.

Funding

Simply opening your doors to visitors doesn't have to be expensive, or even cost anything at all. Much of what is included in this guide relies more on volunteer time than cash investment. However, if you want to create a warm welcome, tell your stories or promote what you are doing you may need funding.

Conversely, if you are applying for funding for a major buildings project or similar you may be required to deliver engagement activities. This is a brilliant time to think about being more open, and even adding to the budget for technology, materials or publicity that could help you.



Funding advice

There are many organisations that will offer advice and support for improving places of worship for the use of visitors and the wider community. There are also some potential sources of funding for your projects.

The [Directory of Grant Making Trusts](#) is a good place to start your own research, cross referring geographical location with topics (like 'Places of Worship'). You could also search the [Church Grants](#) database.

Grant making trusts give out grants totalling over £5.6 billion each year. Some work nationally, like the [National Churches Trust](#), [Benefact Trust](#) (previously the AllChurches Trust), the [Congregational & General Charitable Trust](#), [Garfield Weston Foundation](#) and Henry Smith Charity.

The [Plunkett Foundation](#) is a useful source of advice and funding for establishing community owned businesses in places of worship, such as a shop, post office, bookshop or café. There are inspiring case studies on its website.

A good place to start is with your local Council for Voluntary Service or Rural Community Council in England, County Voluntary Council in Wales or Community Council in Scotland. Churches don't always engage with voluntary sector support, but are a part of that sector. These organisations will probably be able to run a funding search for you so it's worth searching online for your local or regional version of these organisations.

Most parts of the UK also benefit from having a **community foundation**, typically at city, county or regional level. Find your local one to see whether they can offer you funding and/or offer you advice on other local funding sources.

In Wales, significant government funding is available under the [Community Facilities Programme](#) to install or improve community facilities. The application is simple and they fund many churches and chapels.

In Scotland, the [Church of Scotland](#) has a page 'grants and funding'.

More information : Find a list of potential grant funders on the [National Churches Trust](#) website.

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Open and
welcome

Who visits churches and why?

... history seekers ... wedding guests ... pilgrims ... those visiting local friends and family ... walkers ... wanderers ... local tentative door triers ... dog walkers ... heritage open days explorers ... bird watchers ... geocachers ... cake lovers ... cyclists ... genealogists ... geologists ... artists ... students ... archaeologists ... reluctant companions ... peace seekers ... school groups ... tourists ... anthropologists ... worshippers ... local community ... film buffs ... church crawlers ... nature lovers ... families ... those needing support ...

To feel the past and feed a love of holy or historic places; especially 'thin places'

To shelter from the rain

To join in local community groups and activities

To be a 'church crawler' (a term coined by John Betjeman)

To pursue specialist historical and architectural interests

Prayer, pilgrimage, reflection, spiritual sustenance; alone or with others

Out of pure curiosity

Research and discover family history; links to the area or where family married or are buried

To discover art and heritage craftsmanship

To give thanks for all that is good in life

To celebrate life events; weddings, baptisms etc

For the cultural heritage of the building and its setting

For natural heritage in a flower filled churchyard

To get support; might include something organised as part of the church's outreach work (like a foodbank)

To reflect on distressing events in the world

To think about loved ones; deceased, ill or absent

Remember : some visitors come to the church or chapel for one reason and then stay for another: they might visit for the heritage, but stay for the quiet and peace, or vice versa.

None of them can visit, none of them can experience any of these wonderful things, if your church is locked; so please don't disappoint them!

More information: Discover Churches produced church visitor profiles, which you can find in **Appendix B**

rules for visiting our church

Please remember to leave your anxieties in the rack provided

Light a candle

Listen to the organ even if it is not playing

Make room for something unexpected to speak

Find a seat and sit for a while

The people who came before are here beside you

If you are very quiet, you might even hear angels playing their instruments up there on the ceiling

Let your eyes walk through a glass garden

All these colours are born of one light

Taste the silence. Many varieties are available

Take a sip of each one

Take it with you when you go

John Rudd, Poet in Residence Manchester Cathedral



Ways to be open

No one size fits all, there are different options to consider for opening your building to visitors. Whichever ways you choose to be open, communication is vital. Let people know when you are open everywhere you can, including on your website and your noticeboard.

- If you really feel you have to keep the building locked, let visitors know where the key can be found
- Open daily during daylight hours
- Open just at the weekend, or for bank holidays and school holidays, when larger numbers of people are out and about walking or visiting
- Open whenever there is a local festival or event happening in your community
- eg: the village fete, Open Gardens Weekend or late night Christmas shopping
- Take part in national events and festivals such as Heritage Open Days (see below)
- Create your own festival, opening a range of places of worship in your area for tours and events

More information : [Love your Burial Ground / Churches Count on Nature](#) – in June

[Festival of Archaeology](#) – usually in July

[Heritage Open Days](#) – in September

[Cadw Open Doors](#) – in September

[Ride + Stride](#) – in England, in September

Opening safely and securely

Safety and security is often the number one concern of volunteers when planning to open their church. There are a few simple steps you can take, and lots of advice available.

More information: Find a wealth of advice on the [open church pages](#) of Ecclesiastical Insurance's website
Attend the National Churches Trust workshop : [Footfalls and the Effect of Visitors](#)



Carry out a risk assessment

- This need not be onerous. It simply means checking the building and its contents for opportunities for something to go wrong and taking sensible preventative measures.

More information: Discover Churches produced a template risk assessment, which you can find in **Appendix B**

Let people know

- Let people who live close to the church know that it will be open for visitors (you might also want to let local police or PCSOs know).
- Give people a number to ring if they see suspicious activity.
- Encourage local people to pop into the church or walk through the churchyard regularly while they are out and about, walking the dog, visiting neighbours, going to the pub or shop.

Take simple steps to improve security

- Being open should have no impact on insurance premiums, especially if the building is open during daylight hours and a risk assessment has been undertaken.
- Talk to your insurance company, ask for their advice on opening securely (find advice about open churches from Ecclesiastical Insurance online here or by ringing 0345 777 3322).
- Lock up your valuables (including church silver, textiles and historic furniture) off site or create a secure storage area in which all valuables can be secured.
- Use Smart Water (often available free from your insurance company or your local police force) for marking property and advertise the fact with a notice in the porch.
- Consider investing in CCTV, talk to advisors as this is an expensive option and might need permissions, but for some churches it can be worth the money in the long run as a deterrent to vandals and thieves.

More information: Attend the National Churches Trust & Ecclesiastical Insurance workshop [Open Churches](#)

Creating a warm welcome

Exceeding expectations will make visitors very happy.
Happy visitors are generous visitors.

Having invited visitors to visit your church, their first impression should be one of a warm greeting. Visitors should expect to be greeted with kind courtesy and welcome, either personally or with an appropriately worded sign. Don't forget the 'thank you' when they leave.

Your aim should be that that they feel welcome and welcomed.

There are a variety of tourism training courses on how to create a great welcome and exceed expectations.

More information : Join a National Churches Trust online workshop [Creating a Perfect Welcome](#)

If your budget allows, look at nationally accredited training from [Welcome to Excellence](#)

If you are a rural church, use [Open Welcome](#), a toolkit from the Arthur Rank Centre

See the slides from the Discover Churches training session *A Tour Guide's Ten Top Tips for Making your Visitors Feel Welcome* with Penny Platts, which you can find in **Appendix B**



Welcome signs

All you may need is good signage. Many churches place an a-board or sail banner by the gate that says: *Visitors Welcome, or Church Open; please come in.* A notice saying *please feel free to come in and walk around* will put visitors at ease and that they try the door and come into the building.

Think about other places you can signpost from: for example, if you are near a walking route could you put a sign on stiles or finger posts. And don't underestimate the power of a welcome sign.

Think about other places you could signpost from:

- Are you on a public footpath? Add signs to posts or stiles encouraging people to step off the path and visit, or even just use the church porch for shelter or to eat their packed lunch.
- Do you have a car park nearby? Add signs close to payment machines.

More information : [Search online for examples of welcome signs](#)



Take a look around

It's easy to get used to things as they are:

- Take a fresh look around your church (inside and out), with the eyes and ears of a first time visitor.
- What needs to change?
- What could be better?

The same applies to your online presence:

- Your website, social media and other places people find you online might have been created with your congregation or local community in mind, but they are also seen by visitors.
- Do they offer a warm welcome?
- Is it easy to find information visitors need?

More information : [A Place to Belong](#) is a guide to access, inclusion and welcome from the Church of England offering practical information and advice you can put into practice

[Accessible Welcome](#) is a toolkit from the Arthur Rank Centre to help rural churches ensure they are accessible to all

Being a good neighbour in the Christian tradition means keeping your buildings open for visitors and those seeking space to pray and reflect. Churches that are only open on Sunday or for the occasional service are wasting their potential and as congregations diminish, so the viability of the building itself will inevitably decline.

A locked church sends a negative message to the community and prevents local people from coming in for a quiet moment in their busy day. Opening your doors allows for a much greater range of spiritual expression. To open your church, you do not need to do much more than unlock the door and put out a sign saying 'Welcome'.

Small changes can make a big difference

Opening your church doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. If you have not opened your church before, you might like to dip a toe in the water before embarking on a more ambitious project.

What about praying?

You may not think of your church as a tourist attraction, but opening your doors also makes it available for new people to discover their way to pray. We all have different ways to pray or to engage with holy or spiritual places.

- For some, church visiting itself can be a form of prayer.
- Opportunities and resources for prayer and quiet reflection (such as candles, pebbles, prayer trees, prayer cards and prayer requests), especially for bereaved visitors or those seeking prayers for the sick.
- Using words like quiet space/quiet reflection can be more inclusive (only using phrases like 'open for prayer' can make some people feel that the church is not open for them).



Carry out simple research before doing something new

- Look at how other places of worship encourage and provide for visitors. You will find examples in this guide.
- Be aware of other well established visitor economy activities in your destination. Make sure to consider all the connections you might be able to use to encourage their visitors to come to your church or vice versa. Look for any artefacts or other historical facts that relate to your location and focus on those.
- Having looked look at what is already available nearby - can you add something? Think about any artefacts or stories that relate to your location and focus on those.
- Make sure to explore all the ways you might be able 'add value' for visitors. This might include anything from food to the time of certain events, to music played, to cultural, agricultural and religious calendars.
- Your open days and events may not be a success without the support and full integration of your local community. Remember to acknowledge and respect the views of your local communities – religious, business and parish. Welcoming visitors successfully may depend on their support and involvement.
- Let everyone know about your plans and invite participation to make sure that everyone has the freedom to express their views, both positive and negative (perhaps about activities in a church or additional parked cars on their street). Encourage them to understand that this is an opportunity to help care for the building.
- Notice boards (physical and virtual) and displays can be great ways of letting the wider community know about your work. Use community boards as well as the ones at your church.



Welcome help from your community

You probably have creative and visionary ideas for opening to visitors or enhancing the current approach.

Do you or your team have the knowledge, skills, time and financial resources to implement your vision? It's impossible to do everything alone, and activities to attract visitors can often be great ways to involve your wider community in volunteering.

Why not consider setting up a Friends Group for support. You could encourage volunteers from outside the church to get involved and the group could plan, manage and promote interpretation, events and more.

More information : [Guidance on how to set up a Friends Group](#) on the National Churches Trust website



Measuring success

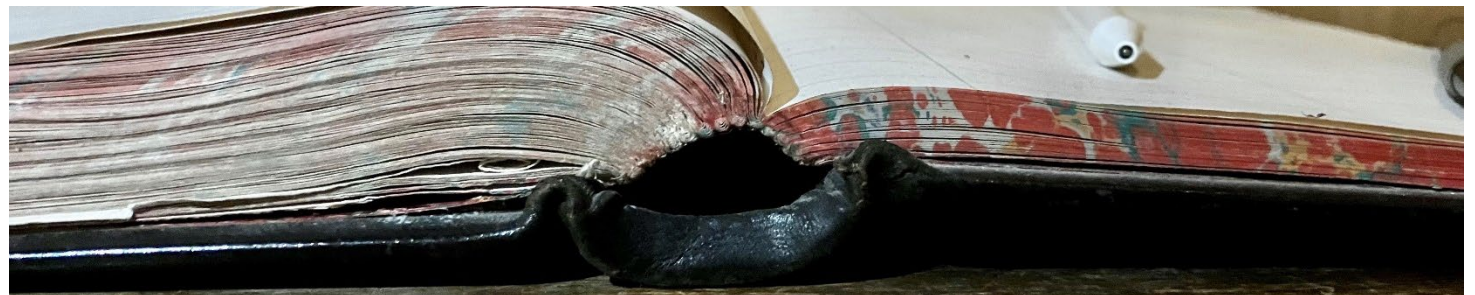
It's important to know that the time, energy and financial commitment you put in is working to increase your visitor numbers and their impact on your church and community. The number of leaflets printed and picked up, or clicks on your website don't always translate to visitors through the door.

Visitors book

The simplest way to count visitors is encouraging them to sign a visitors book. A landscape format often works best, one with columns for name, number in party, address (or county), reason for visit and comments can give you valuable information for.

However, research shows that only a low proportion of visitors sign a visitors book, so:

- Make sure that is in a prominent position, somewhere where it will be seen on the way out of the church
- Check it regularly for any special comments you could use on social media or elsewhere, or for comments from visitors you should follow up with
- Apply a multiplier to the number of people who sign the book, usually anywhere between 5 and 10 times as many people visit as sign a visitors book



Digital visitor counter

You could install a digital visitor counter, which will automatically count the number of people who come into the building. They range from a simple bi-directional counter to something much more sophisticated or linked to your wifi so that you can access statistics remotely.

More information: The National Churches Trust has simple bi-directional digital visitor counters for sale; they are battery powered and are small and light enough to be affixed using Velco

Visitor surveys

If you want to know more about your visitors, a survey can be very insightful. You could also gauge whether a particular campaign or event has been successful, or discover more about how visitors came to visit you.

When asking for personal information be very aware of GDPR regulations.

You could work with a local tourism business to offer a discount or prize for those who take part, to encourage people to complete the survey. You will need to approach the businesses and negotiate.

More information: Discover Churches produced a visitor survey, which you can find in **Appendix B**

The great church visitor count

Take part in a research project from the National Churches Trust, gathering numbers from visitor books and digital counters at churches across the UK.

Find out about the [#GreatChurchVisitorCount](#) more on the National Churches Trust website.

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- [Opportunities for partnership](#)
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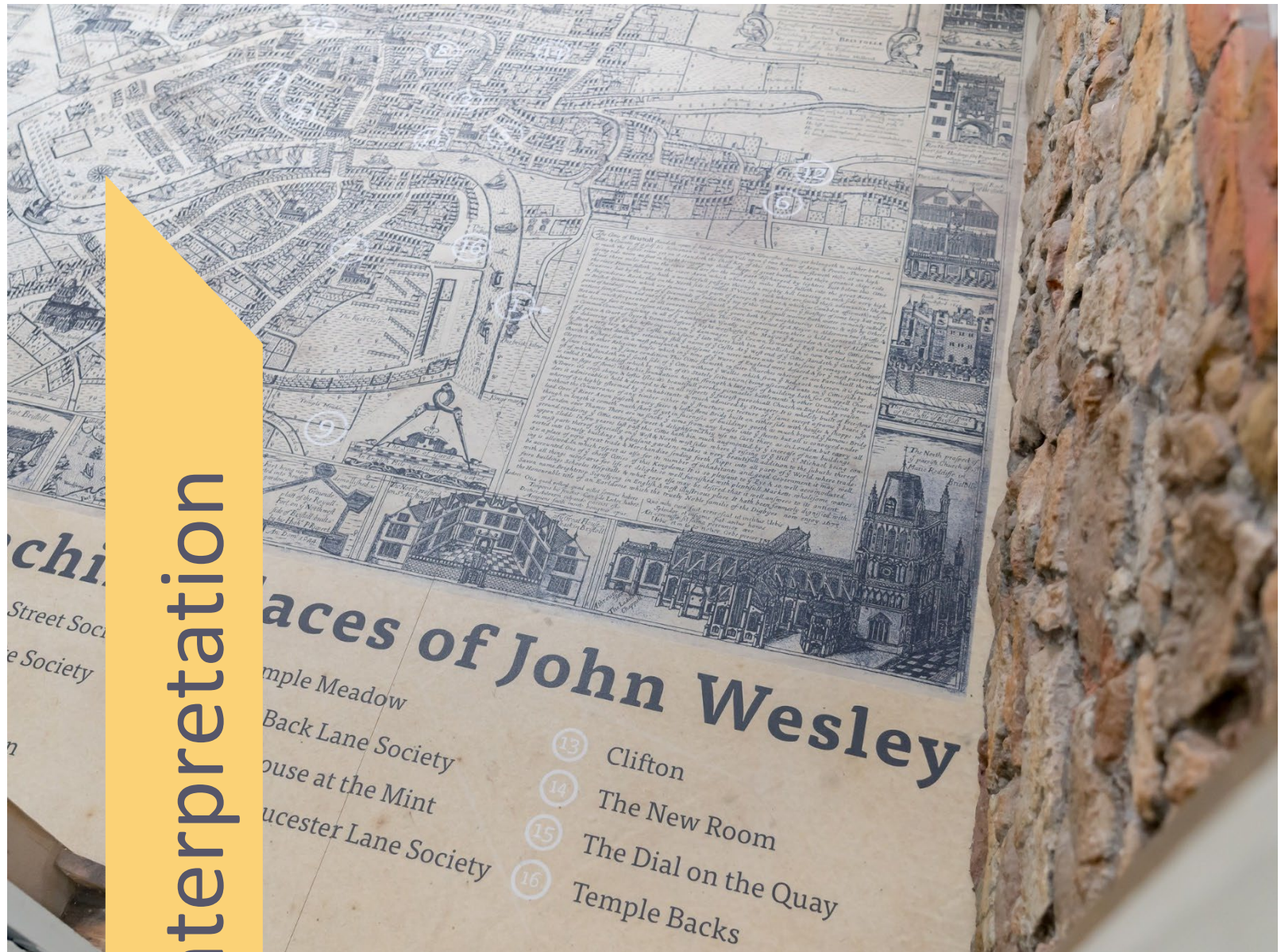
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The warmth of your welcome together with some interpretation of the building, heritage and community may be many people's first contact with your church.

It's your opportunity to say **we have thought of you**. This is essential if you want to encourage them to support your church by buying a memento, making a donation or recommending others to visit.

- Most interpretation is best when it is well written, conversational in tone, clear, concise, with correct and valid content about the highlights of the building.
- Different visitors are drawn to different things and ways of absorbing information, it can depend on their motivations or simply how they like to explore or learn.



Some people will have made a special journey to your church because they have read about it in a book (such as celebrated Pevsner guides).

Others simply call in if they are passing a familiar building, or as a shelter in adverse weather.

Many will be local, while some will have come from much farther away. Some may even have come from abroad to visit a memorial or the church or chapel at which their forebears worshipped.

More information: See [Telling Your Story](#) on the National Churches Trust website

Finding your stories

It is likely that you are not starting with a blank page.

Most churches and chapels have an existing history document, booklet or more – often written and embellished over the decades. Ask your congregation, local community and local history societies to share any guides or other information they have with you.

You can also draw upon the relevant entry in the Pevsner guides to use as a basic framework of dates and significant facts. If there is one for your parish, the [Victoria County History](#) (search for VCH) will be a mine of information, as will any local history books published by historians and antiquaries in the past.

If the building is listed, the list description will be another source. For England see [Historic England](#), in Wales see [Lle](#), in Scotland it's [Historic Environment Scotland](#) and in Northern Ireland see [Department for Communities](#).

There might be a Wikipedia entry for the parish from which you can get some further clues about local history and some cross references to further sources. Whilst you are there, make sure the Wikipedia entry for your church / parish / community is up to date, comprehensive, accurate and well-illustrated, as it is the likely to be the first page that anyone will encounter doing an online search for information about the building.

Other options are your parish or other websites, or your county records and archives office.



John Betjeman, in his 1974 TV series *A Passion for Churches* said:

‘I know no greater pleasure than church-crawling: you never know what you are going to find’
‘there is no such thing as a dull church for those who have eyes and ears and imagination’.

Watch the programme on [BBC iPlayer](#)

What are the special things that make your church stand out

There are lots of ways to write a church guidebook or other interpretation.

Try not to focus on just the architectural styles and dates. They can give many people very little idea of what the building is really like. Visitors love the **details that make your building different and special**.

Good interpretation doesn't just focus on the oldest parts of the building but unravels the **accumulated layers of history** that can tell us much about past and present beliefs and values and the rich story written in the graffiti, the memorials, the stone and wood carving, the stained glass and the churchyard biodiversity.

Places of worship are like miniature museums in every community. Each one is unique and has its own story to tell of local, natural and social history, of remarkable sculpture, of furniture, textiles, glass, woodwork and ironwork.

But, they are also **living buildings**, still used for their original, ancient purpose.

Don't be afraid to introduce a **human** element too: you are allowed to comment on those qualities that make the building special: the beauty of the light filtered through the windows, the patina on the woodwork of pulpit and reader's desk, the expert work of builders, joiners and memorial carvers, the decorative hinges and lock of the church door forged by the local blacksmith, the war memorials of solemn beauty, fragments of medieval wall painting appearing through later layers of plaster, a flamboyant royal coat of arms painted by a local sign writer who has never seen a real lion but has done his best.

More information: See [Telling Your Story](#) on the National Churches Trust website

It is easy to take the 'celebrity' with a connection to your church for granted, because you have known about them for a long time. Whether someone from recent or ancient history, make the most of your connections. Try to tell their whole story, if there are difficult aspects but tell them openly and frankly.

Sharing your treasures

Ways to interpret your building and story - TRADITIONAL

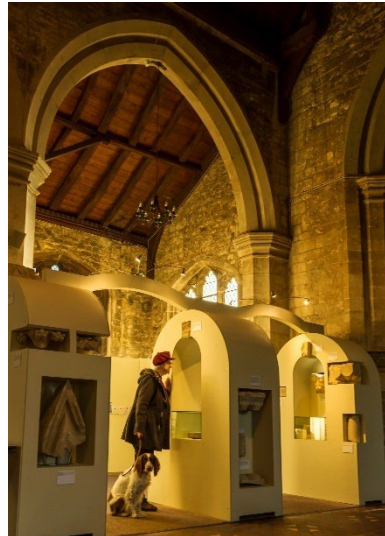
Interpretation can take many forms, from the traditional wooden paddle or a simple photocopied sheet to a fully illustrated and professionally printed booklet.

Providing a short guide to the church together with positive signage is a simple way to encourage your visitors to linger, explore the building and its setting and perhaps make a donation, but there are many additional ways to **interest and engage** with visitors.

Ideas include:

- A sheet that lists the top ten things everyone should see, with a short description, is a brilliant introduction.
- Think about placing display boards around the building at key points. You could use portable exhibition banners, digitally printed with pictures and text, which can be placed close to the part of the building that you wish to draw to the attention of your visitors. They can be folded up easily and stored when the building is in use.
- If you have enthusiastic volunteers think about offering guided tours. A successful and engaging tour is as much about the guide, as much as about the information imparted.
- Try to customise your tour or information according to your visitors needs by making it diverse or by having multiple versions, perhaps in different languages if you have visitors from particular countries.
- Guides for families are very popular, especially if they challenge children to look closely at stained glass, carvings and monuments to spot animals, flowers or items of clothing (visible at a child's height).
- Quizzes are fun for children eg: how many sheep are in the windows, where are the carved bunch of grapes.

More information: Attend the National Churches Trust workshop [Finding and Sharing your Stories](#)



CHILDREN'S TRAIL

ALL SAINTS AND ST JAMES THE GREATER

Your name: _____

Make sure you have a pencil so that you can fill in the answers.

Start the trail at the grey arrow on the plan (back page) and follow the numbers around.

Each time you see this picture it suggests something to do. It's a tick. Give for each one.

Font (1)
Can you find the font, which is used for baptism?
What is the font made of? _____
What is put in the font for Baptism? _____

Roof Bosses & Gallery Window (2)
Look above your head. Can you find carvings like this? It is called a roof boss. There are many bosses to see as you look round the church.
Look at the window. It shows part of the Christian story of Easter.
How many soldiers can you see? _____

Mining Cabinet (3)
At the bottom of the stairs is a display case full of mining objects and things from the past from local people.
How many miners lamps can you see? _____
Can you draw one? _____
space for a drawing

The discovery of the lost crypt

In 1728, a builder working on the Abbey got the back of his leg digging around, he suddenly fell into a deep hole, he had entered one of the passageways of Wulfert's secret burial crypt. But underground thousands of years before. How or why it was forgotten nobody knows. The part of the church above it had long been ruined and was an overgrown prairie.
Until 1824, the well-known crypt was used as a place burial place for wealthy family. However, when the new Nave was built in 1908 the crypt once more became a place of interest as tunnel at the wonder of Wulfert's church.



Ways to interpret your building and story - DIGITAL

To engage in new ways, or to help you be more environmentally sustainable, you could use digital technology to share your stories. From a simple QR code to a full virtual reality experience, churches around the country are trying out new technologies.

Ideas include:

- Use QR codes to link to pages on your or other websites.
- Create a GPS trail around the church.
- Take 360° photographs using a special camera or app and add them to your website and Google Maps.
- If your church has a poor mobile signal, or you want to provide a lot of digital interpretation you might consider installing technology to help, or have downloads on your website so visitors can come prepared.

If you are applying for funding for a major project, consider including a digital storytelling element. There are many individuals and companies across the UK who can create exciting and engaging and fun content with you.



Bringing history to life

Volunteer guides and stewards

Harnessing interest in heritage can be a great opportunity to get local people involved in welcoming, maintaining fabric and social activities.

Welcome people from your community willing to act as stewards to greet visitors and keep an eye on the church in busy periods. If you have wifi, people could work there.

New volunteers can bring a renewed creativity, motivation and critical thinking, which may take your church out of its 'comfort zone' with new approaches for attracting visitors.

In most cases, it won't be necessary to have anyone in the church to be open. A risk assessment will help you decide, but it may be that you just need people to open and close the church.

Of course, when recruiting volunteers you need to be mindful of their health and safety. Places of worship should be safe spaces, and you will need to ensure safeguarding and lone working policies are observed.

Remember that **all** volunteers that come in face to face contact with visitors are part of your welcome.



Wonderful welcomers:

- Smile and say hello
- Share your enthusiasm
- Maintain eye contact
- Tailor your approach
- Tell a simple story
- Make people feel relaxed

Guided tours

Guided tours are often a next step for volunteers.

They are brilliant at highlighting parts of the building, or heritage stories visitors might otherwise miss. You could have a regular programme of tours, especially on open days, or your volunteer stewards might be happy to do short tours on an ad hoc basis.

Trails – walking, cycling or something else

Join up with other churches and chapels in the vicinity to create a circular walking route linking a number of places of interest or a group of churches and chapels; create a tourist trail or pilgrimage route that takes in other places of spiritual resonance, such as wells, springs and prehistoric monuments. Put leaflets promoting trails in visitor centres and local businesses.

Events

Events can also bring history alive and be a form of interpretation. Exhibitions, re-enactments, plays and more can help to tell your story. Craft markets and concerts, can bring new people into your church.

Find a list of major heritage festivals, which you could take part in on Page 14.

More information: Discover Churches produced group tours and trails, see examples in **Appendix B**
Find out about [creating group bookable experiences](#) from the National Churches Trust
Get inspiration from [bookable experiences](#) listed on the National Churches Trust website

Group bookings and experiences

Many visitors are looking for an experience as well as just coming to see something.

The search for authenticity is also a growing trend. Some may immerse themselves in the spiritual and cultural traditions associated with your church or pilgrimage site; others may include connection with the local community.

Working hand in hand with tourism professionals, businesses, retail, transport, arts, culture and heritage helps to create a vibrant and improved or vital income for your church and the tourism economy in your community. This also provides opportunities for making an 'offer' to visitors that can be combined with others. Creating a tour of several churches, for example, can connect multiple activities and accommodation.

If your church is particularly special, it is likely to be visited by organised tour groups.

- Talk with tour operators, destination managers and visitors to learn which amenities and facilities are appreciated and which are not. Offering the unusual is often a balancing act that can work but it can also backfire. Offer sufficient information in advance, so your visitor knows what to expect.
- Focus on specialist tour and coach operators instead of targeting free independent travellers directly.
- When you receive a booking ask about the group, or look them up online. Find out if they have any specific interests or knowledge, so that you can pitch your tour or other activities at the right level.
- Set up tours that create added value to visiting your church, such as including stories, music, food and other aspects associated with your community.
- Ask for a donation, or charge a fee. To add value you could offer homemade refreshments or lunch.

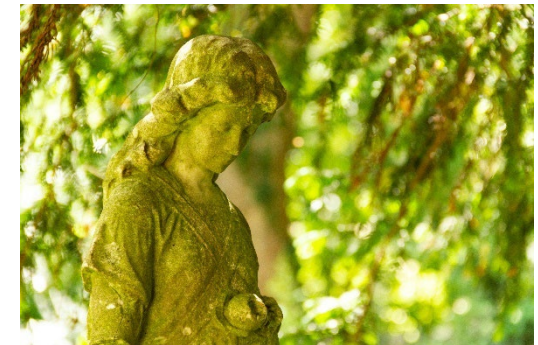
THINK CAREFULLY : Is your church **accessible** to coaches of all sizes and visitors of all abilities? Does your church have the basic **facilities** required to cope with a large group of people arriving? What **resources** will be needed to manage, promote, co-ordinate and sustain this activity.

Features to include

Here is a checklist, intended to spark ideas that you might like to think about when preparing your interpretation. Find a printable copy of these lists in **Appendix B**

Outside the building:

- The shape of the churchyard; it's position in the settlement; any monuments (burial mound, castle, motte).
- Local geology and imported building stone as reflected in the walls, paths, churchyard memorials, roof slates, and the stone of the church or chapel.
- Interesting walls, the carpentry of the lychgate and inscriptions, coffin stand, gates and stiles, steps, paths.
- Curtilage buildings; bier house, ossuary, alms houses, school rooms, guildhalls.
- The character of the churchyard, local styles of headstone, chest tombs, ledger stones, wall memorials, interesting epitaphs or carvings, unusual local surnames long lived inhabitants, the graves of famous people or people with an interesting story, the churchyard cross and war memorials, views.
- Noteworthy trees and plants, and the best time of year to see them, perhaps snowdrops and daffodils, wildflowers in June; butterflies, moths, birds and bats; the age of the yew trees, wells and springs.

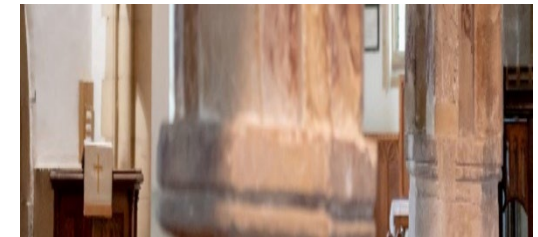


- External features of note, the style of the façade, towers and spires, buttresses, inscriptions, date stones and foundation stones, windows that are diagnostic of date, blocked doorways and windows, separate priest's doors, carved stones, corbels and gargoyles, scratch dials, masons marks.
- The style of the porch, the roof carpentry or atone vaulting, historic graffiti, crosses and mass dials scratched into the stonework, carvings and statuary around and above the door, holy water stoups, the age and ironwork of the door, upper rooms and their use.
- The meaning of the church or chapels name, lives and histories of the patronal saint(s), especially in the case of unique or unusual dedications.
- Calendar festivals and seasonal traditions associated with the area and church.



Inside the building

- The plan and the architectural styles and dates of different parts.
- A plan and explanatory notes showing what is where and why.
- Details of restoration (when and by whom), patrons.
- Bells and bell ringing.
- Font and font cover.



- Nave; arcades, columns and capitals, clerestory, royal coats of arms, lecterns, pulpits, readers' desks, box pews, pews, carved bench ends and poppy heads, graffiti, galleries.
- Chapels; arcades, columns, window openings or tracery.
- Crossing and transepts: chancel arch, rood screens and lofts.
- Roof trusses, bosses, painted ceilings, angels and carvings.
- Chancel; choir stalls, communion rails and tables, reredos, east window form, misericords, piscinas, sepulchres, sedilia.
- Flooring, tiles, aumbries / cupboards, chests, carved stones, chests, parish registers, books, documents, museum exhibits, lighting, candelabra, squints and anchoritic cells.
- Memorials; ledger stones, brasses, effigies, hatchments, armour, flags, war memorials, crypts and burial vaults.
- Textiles; kneelers, banners, tapestries, vestments, altar clothes.
- Organs and organ cases.
- Stained glass.
- Wall paintings.



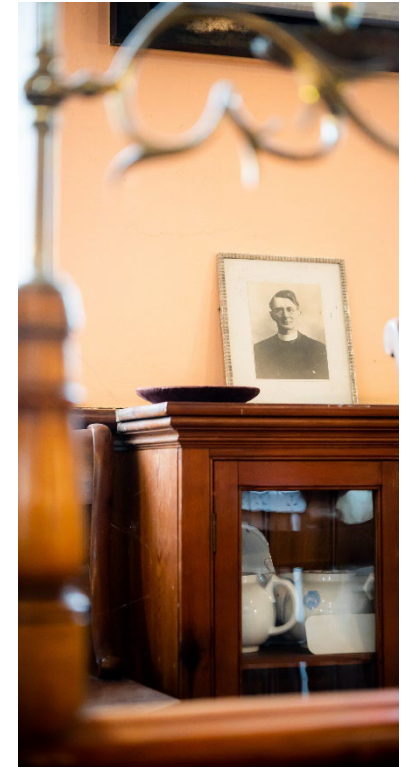
Hidden people stories

It is so easy for the visitor to miss the hidden human stories of your church and its place in the community and they will be grateful to you for pointing them out in the guide. Thinking wider than just the church, it might be that the local community played a role or was part of a local, regional or national historic event. Or it could be the people who actually built the church, or paid for it.

More information: Find examples of hidden stories and open doors from around the UK in **Appendix A**

Chapels and meeting houses

- Explain the story of your particular denomination and what that means in terms of history, practices, beliefs and differences from other denominations.
- The key differences between a chapel and a church.
- Style and decorative elements of the façade; foundation inscriptions, date stones; name of the chapel; male / female entrances; schoolrooms, manses.
- The chapel was funded and built from local contributions of money, labour and skill; local builders, architects, the role of the minister.
- The primacy of the pulpit and reading desks.
- Pews and galleries, seats for elders, fonts and baptistries.
- Stained glass, Biblical texts, wall tablets and memorials, plasterwork, ironwork, tiling, door furniture, screens, clocks, gasoliers, lighting.
- Organ, choirs and the musical life of the chapel.
- Chapel china, photographs and archives illustrating history and activities.
- The burial ground and its memorials, tombstones, biodiversity
- Activities; social, educational and political; temperance movements.



Tourism:

[Why embrace tourism](#)

[Opportunities for partnership](#)

[Income and other benefits](#)

Open and welcome:

[Who visits churches and why](#)

[Ways to be open](#)

[Opening safely and securely](#)

[Creating a warm welcome](#)

[Measuring success](#)

Interpretation:

[Finding your stories](#)

[Sharing your treasures](#)

[Bringing history to life](#)

[Features to include](#)

Publicity and social media:

[Getting the message right](#)

[Ways to share](#)

[Working together](#)



Publicity and
social media

Getting the message right

You may want to dive further into an interesting range of ways for visitors to discover more about your building, its location and the local community.

Communication is the **two way process** of informing or sharing knowledge by speaking, writing or using some other method. It's a vital means of connecting with your visitor or 'customer' as the recipient of a good, service, product or an idea. Usually in exchange for money or some other valuable consideration.

This may sound very commercial, and not appropriate for a church setting. But, we are passionate about tourism having a tangible benefit for your church. Encouraging income through donations, sales or attending events is one way in which encouraging more visitors to your church can have a tangible benefit.



Know your potential visitors

To achieve effective communication:

- First and foremost you must know who your visitors are and why they are visiting.
- Think about how potential visitors might receive your message , this might be different for different types of visitor or audience.
- Consider the message, the method used, the setting and circumstances.
- Think about whether there are any hinderances to people receiving and responding to your message and try and mitigate them.

Take time, with an honest, open mind and involving 'non worshippers' and your community, to look at the strengths, weak points, opportunities and threats when opening your building to visitors.

Take every opportunity to gather and use information from:

- Your congregation.
- Your volunteers.
- Your local community.
- Your visitor book (where people have come from, why they came and what they experienced during their visit).
- Visitors to events.
- Your Local Neighbourhood Plan may reference tourism.
- Local or regional tourism, culture and economic strategies.



Look at what others are doing, see examples from:

[Discover Churches](#)

[National Churches Trust](#)

[Churches Visitor & Tourism Association](#)

More information: Discover Churches produced a visitor survey, which you can find in **Appendix B**



Your church is unique

- Be absolutely clear at what makes your church, what is your unique selling point.
- This could be a special atmosphere, unique piece of history, a heritage story, a link to a famous person, that you are on a national trail or something else altogether.
- Think about how to bring faith into your welcome, branding, events.



Have a plan

Invest time in writing a simple Communications Plan. Take notice of what others do when promoting churches, learn from their success and listen to their messages.

More information: Discover Churches produced a communications plan, find the discussion document used to create the plan in **Appendix B**

Branding

Clear and consistently applied branding helps you to be recognised in a crowded market:

- Branding can help enhance connection with the place, create desired perceptions and attract people.
- Think about using faith based word and symbols in your name and branding, making it easily recognisable.

More information: Discover Churches produced a branding plan, which you can find in **Appendix B**

Ways to share

Strengthening your local communication networks

1. Make sure your **website stays up to date**

Include information about the building and when it is open, where to park, who to contact for guided tours and times of services, and all the events that are happening – exercise classes, nurseries, after school activities, youth groups, flower shows, concerts, teas and suppers, quizzes, choral activities and choir practices, bell ringing and mission work including food banks and night shelters, fair-trade shops and Eco Church.

2. Make sure your **noticeboards up to date**

As well as your usual noticeboards, think about small panels to help visitors better understand the life and work of the church community today as well as the heritage of the past. You might like to include information about planned giving, churchwardens and ministers.

3. Be a **good neighbour**

Use your porch noticeboard to promote local accommodation, village or farm shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants, local walks and trails and nearby visitor attractions, to encourage people to spend more time and money in your community. Put these on your website too. In return, ask that they recommend a visit to the church to their customers.



Press or news releases

A press release is a short compelling news story sent to targeted members of the media.

The purpose is to pique the interest of a journalist or publication that announces a newsworthy story about your church that the media might want to cover. The press release should contain all the essential information **who? what? where? when? how? why?** for the journalist to easily produce their own story.

A press release should read like a news story, written in third person, citing quotes and sources and containing standard press release information:

- Name of church or group.
- "For Immediate Release" if you want your news to go public ASAP, or "Embargoed until (date)" if you are sending a pre-emptive release for a date in the future.
- A compelling, concise headline or subject line is the most important four or five words in the whole press release (this is what the journalist reads first so make it intriguing, newsworthy).
- Facts and figures.
- Call to action.
- Accessible contact(s) for more information.
- Boiler plate, usually at the bottom and containing background information for editors such as a very brief history of your church or other essentials not part of the story itself.



More information: Discover Churches produced a number of press releases, see an example in **Appendix B**

Social media

Social media is all about person to person interaction in virtual communities and networks. It is a powerful tool in communicating with people that could previously not be reached and has evolved more over the past two years than in over a decade, to suit new 'consumer' habits, opinions and tendencies

What is the first think that pops into your mind when you think 'social media'? Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tik Tok? You may have heard of Snapchat and YouTube. These only represent some of the many platforms.

How can social media help you communicate with visitors?

- Reaches potential and keeps in touch with return visitors 360 days a year.
- Connect with like-minded people using hashtags #
- Reaches a new 'audience' you were unaware might be interested, or you have already attracted.
- A way to carry out audience and market research.

When writing content for socials:

- Keep language simple and clear.
- Consider tone and inflection.
- Write less, say more.
- Write in a way that is easy for all users to understand.
- UK 2022 literacy statistics show the average reading age is nine.

More information: [Attend the National Churches Trust workshop Publicity & social media for your church](#)



Networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn enable you to engage directly with your audience and with the tourism and heritage sector organisations and professionals. You can seek out people with a particular interest using a hashtag # or take part in regular discussions or promotions.

On Facebook in particular there are many special interest groups, which you can join and share an invitation to visit, images or events. There is usually a historic churches group for each county, but many many more where like-minded people share their specific interest.

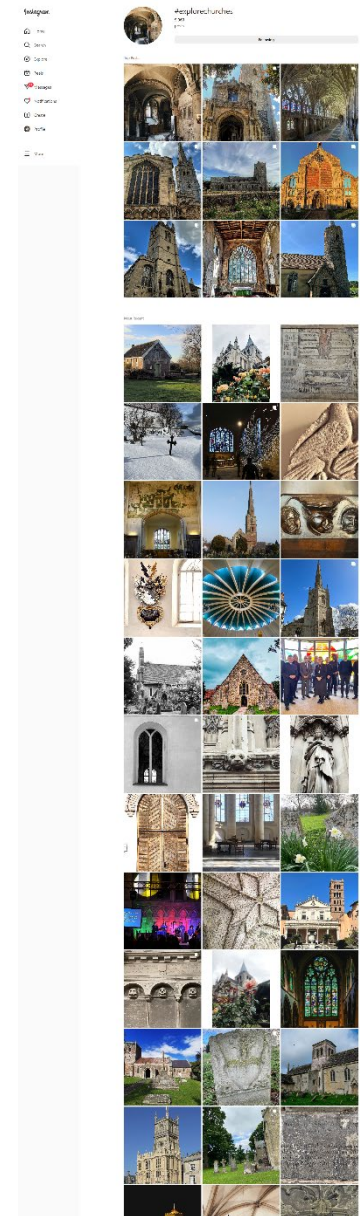
Review sites like Trip Advisor or Yelp are used by tourists and visitors to review locations and experiences when planning a trip. Reviews can also be added to Google Maps and other location based sites. They tell you (and other visitors) about the experience of visiting from the visitors point of view.

You can use them to identify or discover what works well or where there is room for improvement.

Make sure you check if you are listed on any of the main review sites, claim your entry and start to respond to visitors comments with thankyou's or encouragement to return.

Video Hosting sites like You Tube share a wide variety of content.

From how to videos to virtual tours, you could share your unusual or remarkable content. For example a unique artefact, unusual story or special event.



Photographs are worth a thousand words. Images, infographics and illustrations capture your visitor's attention, imagination and hearts.

Image sharing sites like Instagram or Snapchat are widely used for this purpose. You could also generate inspiring content sharing by running a 'snap and share' picture campaign with a hashtag #.

Community blogs (often hosted on a networking site or local website) can be used to share your thoughts. Blogs should be short, including images or video. Be clear about what you want to say and always include an invitation to come and visit your church..

Four tips for finding which social media platform and posting style is right for you:

- Find out who in your community is good at social media and ask them to help you make the most of online opportunities to tell the world about your church or chapel and its community.
- Before you post, be clear about what you want to achieve.
- Think creatively don't be afraid to step out of the box.
- Always keep your post human.



Working together

With many churches in survival mode, working in isolation to encourage and welcome visitors may only help a little. Collaboration skills are one of the attributes that everyone has in one way or other, and working together with other churches and organisations locally or nationally strengthens the approach for everyone.

Local

Work with other local churches to promote each other, if visitors have enjoyed your church it's likely they would like to visit others (and vice versa). You could work together on a churches trail around your town or area.

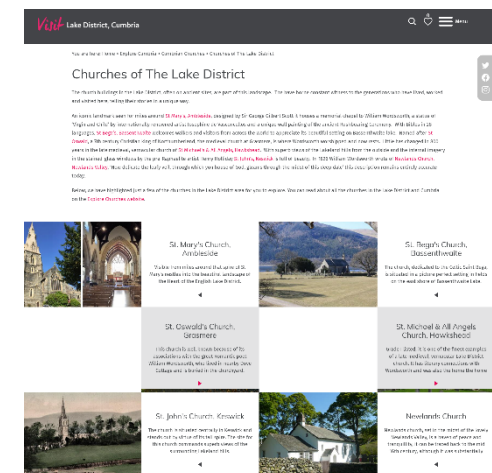
Find out about and join any local tourism groups or networks.

Regional

To reach a much wider audience it's important to engage with your **regional tourism organisation**, usually called a Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). Some may charge for membership, but might offer a discounted or free rate for charities.

You could access training and support, as well as be part of events and promotions. All promote heritage, as it is such a huge tourism driver, and your church could help tell the story of your area. They may even have a page of churches to visit on their website.

Search online to find your local DMO and get in touch!



You might also think about organising a **church tourism festival** or open weekend. There are examples in a few areas, but one of the longest standing is [West Lindsey Churches Festival](#). It can be a lot of work, and need a group of volunteers to pull off, but they are incredibly well attended.

In a county, diocese or even cross borders you may consider starting a **churches tourism group** as in [Herefordshire](#) and [Shropshire](#).

Both are long standing constituted voluntary membership church tourism groups. Each has a website and publishes a detailed visitor guide, and would be happy to share their experience if you would like advice.



Top 6 tips for forming a church tourism group:

- Decide on common aims and goals.
- Form an inaugurating committee from interested parties.
- Research and gather information
 - potential number of members
 - geographic spread
 - costs involved and how it will be funded
 - governance and financial status
- Map capabilities required for a committee (working directly with others such as active listening, communication, decision making, financial, digital and social media, creative writing, management).
- Prepare and plan a campaign to build unity and support.
- Promote your campaign.

More information: Discover Churches produced a guide to creating a church tourism group, which you can find in **Appendix B**

National

The **National Churches Trust** [explore pages](#) promote churches that are open to visitors. There are sections for each country and region, as well as themed stories and groupings of churches or trails on maps.

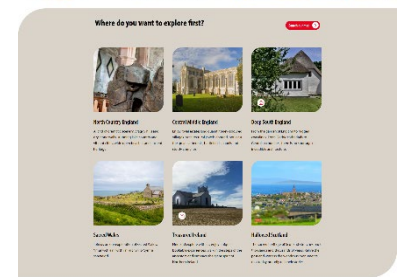
The National Churches Trust also works with national and regional tourism organisations and Destination Management Organisations to share church heritage with tour operators who work regionally, nationally and internationally.

You can get involved by listing your church on their website and taking part in campaigns. Use the #ExploreChurches on social media.

The **Churches Visitor & Tourism Association** is a membership body which offers advice to churches wishing to welcome visitors as well as organising an annual symposium to get together and discuss best practice and share ideas.

They also have a website with [advice and resources](#).

Methodist Heritage is the name for the heritage work of the Methodist Church in Britain aimed at preserving its heritage and using it as a tool for contemporary mission. Their website (and there is also a published visitors' handbook) promotes all [Methodist Heritage](#) sites of historic importance.



Britain Express promotes [heritage sites](#) across England, Wales and Scotland.

The **Churches Conservation Trust** care for 350+ redundant churches in England. They are open for visitors, activities and events.

Learn from how they [promote their churches](#), and perhaps take part in their Champing (camping in churches) scheme.

Friends of Friendless Churches rescues and repair redundant places of worship in England and Wales. They care for and [celebrate their rich architectural legacy](#) and history.

Visit Wales has a special section on [visiting churches and chapels](#). They also produced a [faith tourism action plan](#).

As well as offering support to churches, the **Scotland's Churches Trust** offers a [directory of churches](#).

Scottish Church Heritage Research is a voluntary organisation comprising individuals from various professions and backgrounds, with the aim of promoting understanding of this [rich heritage](#) of the people of Scotland.



We hope you find this guide useful.

Acknowledgments

This resource guide has been put together by a group of volunteers and professionals , who all have decades of experience working with churches, tourism and indeed church tourism. The Discover Churches Project Partners thank everyone involved (in alphabetical order):

- + Jenny Beard : Vice-chair Herefordshire Churches Tourism Group, Member of the Tourism Society.
- + Anni Calver : Secretary of Shropshire Churches Tourism Group, Trustee of Caring for God’s Acre and journalist.
- + Christopher Catling : Chief Executive, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, author, journalist, consultant on the historic environment and Trustee of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association.
- + Sarah Crossland : Engagement Manager and tourism lead at the National Churches Trust, heritage advisor to the Diocese of Sheffield DAC, tourism consultant and Trustee of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association
- + Liz & Tony Hill : Discover Churches Hidden Stories, Open Doors Tourism Project Officers.
- + Becky Payne : Co-author of Crossing the Threshold Toolkit, Development Director the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance and Trustee of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association.
- + Richard Tulloch; Trustee of the Churches Visitor and Tourism Association, and former member of staff at Diocese of Bath & Wells, supporting parishes in their projects and with responsibility within the diocese for tourism.
- + Members of the Herefordshire Churches Tourism Group committee
- + Members of the Shropshire Churches Tourism Group committee

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