

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 12

Researching a Norfolk Parish Church

Check the searchroom lists, as given below, for details and availability of documents.

1. Bishop's Registers

Bishop's registers survive from 1299 and record the institutions to benefices made by the bishop of Norwich stating the date of institution, and name of the clergyman, patron and benefice: see list DN/REG. Entered in the earlier registers are copies of documents relating to other matters such as appropriations, presentations, advowsons, unions, disunions and consolidations of benefices and (very few) church consecrations. An entry in the register can indicate the earliest presence of a parish church and its dedication. The registers for 1299-1608 (except 1425-45) are indexed in DN/REG 17. Incumbents and patrons are also indexed in DN/REG 30, 31, 35, 36.

2. Visitation Records

The condition of the church building was reported at the Bishop's and Archdeacons' visitations and entries relating to the fabric can be found in the **visitation process** or **comperta books** and **churchwardens' presentments**. For the visitations of the Bishop of Norwich 1555 onwards see lists DN/VIS, DN/VSM 9/3, DN/EST 58/4 and DN/MSA 1/24; the Archdeacon of Norfolk 1560 onwards see lists ANF 1 and 5; and the Archdeacon of Norwich 1533 onwards see lists ANW 1-6, 11 and 16. These records are not usually indexed but visitations were held by deanery.

The Dean and Chapter and Castle Rising peculiars were exempt from the archdeacons' jurisdiction though parishes of these peculiars often made a token appearance at the visitation of the Archdeacon of Norwich. The Peculiar of Great Cressingham was exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishop and archdeacons. For the visitations of the Peculiar of the Dean and Chapter 1664 onwards see lists DCN 76 and PDC 1 and 3; the Peculiar of Castle Rising 1714 onwards see list ANW 29; and the Peculiar of Great Cressingham 1684 onwards see lists PGC 2 and 3.

For **Quinquennial inspections** undertaken under The Church Inspections Measure, 1955, by the diocesan appointed architects, and details of subsequent work undertaken, see BR 179 and BR 323.

3. Consistory Court Records

The Bishop's Consistory Court dealt with cases arising from the episcopal and archidiaconal visitations and other matters such as dilapidations of church property and the misappropriation of church goods. The **act books**, in Latin until 1733, cover 1508-1871: see list DN/ACT. They are not indexed and the sentence is not always recorded. The **deposition books** are generally in

English but survive for 1499-1788 only and are not indexed : see list DN/DEP. For an example see Revd E.D. Stone, 'Norwich Consistory Court depositions 1499-1512 and 1518-1530', *Norfolk Record Society*, x (1938). The **case papers** 1528-1989 are partly indexed by parish: see lists DN/CON and DN/FCP.

4. **Faculties**

Faculties were granted by the bishop for the alteration or destruction of church buildings. They are recorded in the **faculty court books** which survive from 1633 and are indexed by parish: see lists DN/FCB and DCN 77. Earlier faculties relate mainly to bells, pews or the removal of lead from the church roof. However, not all alterations or repairs were undertaken with the prior consent of the bishop until the mid nineteenth-century. **Faculty petitions and papers** survive, with gaps, from c.1638 and plans are included from the mid nineteenth century onwards: see lists DN/FCP and DN/CON. Contested faculties, usually involving pews, memorials, vaults or burial grounds, were brought before the Consistory Court. **Bonds** to carry out the work permitted in the faculty and **accounts** for work completed survive for 1717-95 and 1836, with gaps: see list DN/FBA. From 1940 an **Archdeacon's certificate** is required acknowledging the completion of work according to the faculty: see list DN/FBA. Under the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure, 1964, Archdeacons can authorise certain undertakings affecting the church fabric and these authorisations are filed with the faculty papers.

5. **Consecration Records and Title Deeds**

Consecration registers, which survive from 1793, record the consecrations by the bishop of churches, chapels, mission halls and burial grounds: see list DN/CSR. The **consecration papers** 1784-1967 often include the title deeds and a plan of the site: see list DN/CSP. Some of the earlier consecration papers relate to consecrations recorded in the consistory court act books. Other title papers to church sites are amongst the **diocesan deeds** series c.1675-1969: for indexes see DN/ADR 26 and the **augmentation deeds** 1621-1918: see list DN/AUG.

6. **Glebe Terriers**

Compiled every few years, these often contain a description of the churchyard and a list of the church furnishings such as books, vestments and bells: they survive for various dates from about 1556: see lists DN/TER and ANW 15. Their descriptions of the glebe land can be compared with the maps surveyed under the 1836 Tithe Commutation Act : see DN/TA and DE/TA lists. The minute book of the **Norwich Diocesan Association for Building and Enlarging Churches** 1844-99 contains lists of grants made from 1836 : see list DN/DAB.

7. **Parish Records**

The rector was responsible for the upkeep of the chancel, the churchwardens for the nave and tower. Rectorial accounts may survive together with receipts, vouchers, bills or restoration fund accounts amongst the **benefice**

papers. Churchwardens' accounts record their expenditure on church maintenance. **Vestry minutes** record the decisions of the vestry meeting concerning alteration or repair work to be supervised by the churchwardens. Parish collections may also include **faculties, terriers** and **plans and papers relating to church restoration**.

Parish registers may contain incidental references to the church building, its mishaps and repairs. **Registers of briefs** record collections for charitable purposes authorised by the Crown, including church re-building, but rarely survive. The survival of all these records will vary between each parish and none will pre-date the sixteenth century, except, in very few cases, the churchwardens' accounts. During the vacancy of a living the sequestrator became responsible for the chancel and its upkeep: for **sequestration accounts** see list DN/SEQ.

For further details see the parish records lists and subject card index.

8. Wills

Wills can be an invaluable documentary source, especially for the medieval period. A church may have been altered, completely rebuilt or had a side chapel added by a legacy in a benefactor's will. For the medieval period see P. Cattermole and S. Cotton 'Medieval Parish Church Building in Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xxxviii (1983), 235-279. The Norfolk Record Office holds wills proved in Norfolk 1370-1941, available on microfilm 1370-1925. There are printed name indexes on the searchroom shelves, covering 1370-1858. Some of these index volumes also include indexes to places. NCC wills can be searched on NROCAT.

9. Churchyard Surveys

About a third of Norfolk churchyards have been surveyed, many of them in the early 1980s by the Women's Institute. The surveys record the inscriptions on gravestones and other memorials and usually include a plan. Most are available on microfilm: see list of Churchyard Surveys on Microfilm.

10. Other Sources

Patrons' private papers may include accounts and other financial papers concerning the church fabric. Antiquarian notes may describe the church building, its furnishings and inscriptions prior to a major restoration: for example, Thomas Martin's *Norfolk Churches* ref. Rye MS 17; and A.B. Whittingham's papers, see lists MC 186 and DCN 131. For slides and photographs of many Norfolk churches see lists MC 365, MC 530 and MC 640.

The papers of architects such as Edward Boardman, Cecil Upcher, Michael and Sheila Gooch, and Andrew Anderson include church plans: see BR lists. The records of G. King and Son Ltd, lead glaziers, of Norwich, include details of the design of new stained glass and repairs to existing windows: ask for ACC 2004/53 interim list.

For these and other incidental references see the searchroom card indexes or on-line catalogue.

The Incorporated Church Building Society was founded in 1818 to provide funds to build and enlarge Anglican churches across England and Wales. Amongst the Society's records are over 15,000 files relating to individual churches, which may include grant applications, correspondence, plans, building specifications and photographs. The files are held at Lambeth Palace Library, London, SE1 7JU, telephone 020 7898 1400, website <www.lambethpalacelibrary.org>. You can search a database of the files and view images of all the plans in the files online at <www.churchplansonline.org>.

11. Further Reading

Norfolk Churches

Many parishes have produced guides to and histories of their churches. These may be in the searchroom library or at the Norfolk Heritage Centre.

N. Batcock, *The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1991)

F. Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (11 vols, London, 1805-10)

T.H. Bryant, *The Churches of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1900-15)

E. Farrar, *The Church Heraldry of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1887-93)

R. Fawcett, *The Architecture and Furnishings of Norfolk Churches* (Norwich, 1974)

H.O. Mansfield, *Norfolk Churches: Their Foundations, Architecture and Furnishings* (Lavenham, 1974)

K. Mourin, *Heraldry in Norfolk Churches* (Norwich, 1999-)

H. Munro Cautley, *Norfolk Churches* (Ipswich, 1949)

For further information and advice on sources held elsewhere see:

J.H. Bettey, *The English Parish Church and the Local Community* (Historical Association Helps for Students no. 92, 1985)

D.M. Owen, *The Records of the Established Church in England* (British Records Association, Archives and the User no. 1, 1970)



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