

Planned Preventative Maintenance of Historic Places of Worship

Concentrating on regular planned preventative maintenance is the best way to care for church buildings in the long term. 'To stave off decay by daily care' as per the SPAB Manifesto. Historic Places of Worship tend to be constructed from natural materials which will eventually decay. Our responsibility therefore is to slow down this rate of decay by keeping the building in a good condition. Often by spending time and money on cyclical maintenance it is possible to avoid the more difficult challenge of remedying major defects which can be caused by leaking gutters and slipped slates.

In 2019, Historic England commissioned research into the economic value of maintenance and repair. They assessed the Quinquennial Inspections of thirty listed churches across England. The main findings from this relatively small sample were that:

- The estimated cost for repairing all defects across the sample at the time when they were first identified is approximately £6.95m.
- Consequential damage accounted for around £1.8m of this total repair cost. Consequential damage is when a problem leads to another issue in a different part of the building fabric. For example, leaking rainwater goods causing saturation and damage to walls.
- In addition, delayed repair results in a significantly increased cost liability. An example would be delayed repair to slipped roof tiles leading to the need for more extensive roof repairs. Across the sample, delayed repairs resulted in an increase of between 15% and 20% over and above the costs incurred if defects had been fixed when first identified.
- It is clear that regular maintenance mitigates the potential additional costs associated with both delayed repair and consequential repair.
- Roofs and rainwater goods are the main causes of defects and consequential damage.
- Buildings of different ages generally have the same type of defects, suggesting that research findings are relevant for historic places of worship, regardless of when they were built.

You will find a copy of this report here: [The Value of Maintenance?](#)

What are the Common Problems?

Water is the biggest threat to our building fabric. Our places of worship rely on rainwater disposal systems to allow water to drain away quickly from our steep and often complication roof arrangements. Blocked and damaged gutters and downpipes prevent this from happening as intended and water then seeps into the structure and the damage can affect stonework, timber, internal fittings and decorations. Cyclical inspections and regular clearance regimes can prevent this from happening.

So we advise trustees to adopt a maintenance plan; we intend to make a template available soon. In the meantime, your maintenance checklist should:

- Check for defective rainwater goods
 - Are gutters securely fixed and positioned so that they direct water towards the outlet?
 - Are there signs of soil being washed away at ground level or splashes of soil on the base of the walls? If the answer is yes, is the water being caught by the gutter above?

- Are the fixings of downpipes and gutters loose or corroded? Staining and algae around joints will indicate a faulty connection. If corroded, then repainting maybe required.
 - Is the water discharging into the gulley correctly? Or is it spilling into the ground? Any blockage should be removed and gulley gratings inspected. Debris from rainwater hoppers and sumps should also be removed.
 - Are the valley or parapet gutters clogged? Has seeds established themselves here? Plant roots can cause extensive damage and prevent water from flowing freeing from the gutter. Valley and parapet gutters should be regularly cleared to prevent overflowing and the accumulation of debris.
 - Have drainage channels and drains been cleared? Has the condition of the manholes and inspection chambers been checked?
 - Identify and note any defects in building fabric. Perhaps take photographs to show what has been done and to identify any defects or urgent problems.
 - If gutters are fixed to timber fascia boards, check the condition of fascia boards and at the same time soffit and barge boards? Is there any sign of timber decay? Is there a need to repaint exposed timber?
- Check for slipped slates and defective roofs
 - Any evidence of broken slates found on the ground should be investigated further. Any missing or dislodged slates should be reinstated.
 - As moss can harbour moisture, large areas of it should be removed.
 - Where ridge and hip tiles have become dislodged because of stormy conditions and high winds they should be replaced without delay. Failure to do this can reduce the protection to the areas where different roofs meet. Also any missing mortar around the ridge and hip tiles should be replaced to prevent water penetrating any gaps.
 - Are there any splits in lead or other roofing materials? Or damaged flashings?
- Flat roof coverings
 - Inspections should be carried out twice a year
 - Are there any splits, tears, cracks or holes in the roof covering?
 - Any evidence of dampness on ceilings? These can be a possible indication of roof leaks.
- Any unwanted vegetation should be removed
 - Shrubs, trees and ivy can damage walls or block gutters, and should be removed.
 - Plants and shrubs growing against the base of the walls prevents the masonry from drying out, and should be removed.
 - Plant roots and grasses can damage drainage channels and should be removed.
- Are Air Bricks and Ventilators clear?
 - These are helpful in circulating air through floor voids and if blocked will impede air flow which can lead to timber floor joists and floorboards rotting.
 - If these are beyond repair and are broken, then 'like for like' replacements should be sought.
- Windows and Doors
 - If made of timber or metal, is the paintwork in good condition and is there any decay?
 - Check for bare timber, especially on thresholds, sills and lower and underside areas of window sashes.

- Exterior Walls
 - Is there deep erosion or missing pointing in the joints?
 - Are there any cracks?
 - Look for defects in stonework, brickwork and rendering

What other regular checks should trustees do?

Maintenance of all buildings, not just historic ones should involve regular checks necessary to ensure your place of worship is a safe environment for its users. Your maintenance regime should therefore include a check of:

- Lighting Protection – link to document
- Fire Extinguishers
- Electrical Circuits.

There is further guidance on these on the general property pages, and your insurers will have further details on their websites.

When should be carry out preventative planned maintenance inspections?

Trustees should consider completing a visual inspection annually, although you may wish to check vulnerable areas after heavy rain fall. Use your Quinquennial inspection to locate these vulnerable areas and consider the annual maintenance check as a part of the inspection regime. You do not have to carry out your maintenance inspection in a single day, and it may be advisable to concentrate on one elevation at a time. Perhaps start at the roof and work down each face. High level areas can be viewed with binoculars and it is very important that you do not attempt to examine inaccessible areas. If you are concerned about an area that is inaccessible then seek professional advice for them to consider further localised investigation, such as drone surveyors. Alternatively, highlight your concerns to your Property Steward, your Circuit Property Officer and/or Quinquennial inspector.

Binoculars are a useful aide as they enable the examination of high-level areas inside and out even where physical access is limited. However, if parts of the building are inaccessible it is worth considering whether professional help should be sought. And, if the inspection throws up matters of concern, it would be sensible to seek advice from the parish's architect or building surveyor.

The SPAB has produced a toolkit for Maintenance Co-operatives, as well as a handy calendar which explains the various maintenance tasks you should undertake each month of the year.

Is help available?

There are a number of heritage organisations that give practical advice on maintenance, including:

- SPAB
- Historic Environment Scotland <https://www.engineshed.scot/building-advice/building-components/>
- Building Conservation.com

Help can include training and useful guidance notes. In addition, you may wish to consider setting up a maintenance co-operative with other churches in your Circuit or even

neighbouring churches of other denominations. This could involve volunteers from the local community or local students who are studying practical building skills.

The SPAB also provides a helpful technical advice helpline, details of which are here: <https://www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-advice-line>

Other organisations provide help with covering the cost of maintenance, such as the National Churches Trust, or can help find suitable contractors; see the MaintenanceBooker Initiative or GutterClear for places of worship in Gloucestershire. Remember, if a charge for VAT is incurred through maintenance work done by contractors it may be eligible for a refund through the Listed Places of Worship Scheme.

How does this differ from repairs?

Carrying out planned preventative maintenance and reactive maintenance, such as fixing slipped slates, replacing broken glass differs from repairs. Repair is work carried out to put right defects caused by decay, damage and use. In contrast to reactive maintenance, repair implies work to return a property to a good condition on a long-term basis. It is important to make this definition because some repairs can be considered to be alterations requiring permission, such as re-pointing in an inappropriate mortar or repainting in a different colour.

The basic principle is that repairs should be done on a like for like basis in terms of both materials and techniques. The Methodist Church has a policy of asking for details (i.e. a specification) of repairs works intended for our listed churches. These details should be submitted to the Conservation Officer before the works commence, they will then confirm the appropriateness of the repairs and the need for any permissions. This is to ensure that the significance of the fabric is not damaged or lost.

The need for a good contractor

When carrying out repairs to a listed place of worship we always advise you to find the right professional, contractor or conservator. We appreciate that getting the right advice is not always easy but the Connexional Conservation Officer can assist with this, as can your District Property Secretary. Circuit officers and your Quinquennial Inspecting architect may also know of appropriate people. We would always encourage you to visit previously completed projects and to take up any references. You should also ensure you have a full understanding of the services being offered and matters such as timetabling and payment. The following may be useful in the decision-making process:

- Does your chosen professional or craftsman have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience?
- Does your chosen professional or craftsman belong to the appropriate professional bodies?
- Is your chosen professional or craftsman accredited if this is necessary for the proposed work?
- Have you taken advice from your denominational body, spoken to colleagues and followed up references?
- Have you visited recently completed projects to see their work for yourself?

Sources:

<https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/churchwarden/churchwarden.htm>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/maintenance/>