

# ANNUAL RETURNS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Getting started & time scales

### How does the online return relate to the former schedules?

The Annual Returns site was launched in 2013 as a replacement to Schedules A, C and D and their respective supplements (checklists). Doing so means that the collected data can be more easily viewed by the circuit and district and will also mean less repetition of information for the managing trustees. Once all the data has been collected, the circuit and district will be able to generate reports on certain aspects of the return, making it easier to spot any potential issues. There is no Connexional-level scrutiny of the annual returns as they are intended for circuits and districts only.

See also: [www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/property/schedules-and-forms](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/property/schedules-and-forms)

### When is the return due?

The deadline for returns is set individually by the district. Your District Property Secretary should be able to provide you with the relevant date. The return can be submitted online for **365 days** e.g. information for the year ending 31 August 2020 can be entered from 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021.

### When are the annual forms available?

**The full annual return form** is made available at the start of the new Connexional year in September. This means that the information entered for the previous year is archived and the online form is open for information entry again.

While the return does need to be submitted online, you can download the questions via the purple **PDF VERSION button** in the **Welcome tab** (see screenshot).

The screenshot shows the 'ONLINE PORTAL' interface. On the left, there is a sidebar with 'RETURNS HOMEPAGE' and 'Return Details' (Status: In Progress, Church: Keir Hardie, Circuit: Newham (20), District: London District (35)). Below this is 'Print Reports' (Church Return, Property Information) and a 'Status key' (Please complete, Information is incorrect, Information is complete, Tips or further information). The main content area has a navigation bar with tabs: Welcome (active), Property, Documents, Safeguarding, Finance, General Administration, Sign Off. The main heading is 'WELCOME TO KEIR HARDIE'. Below it, there is a section for 'Annual Return' with a purple button 'ANNUAL RETURN PDF'. A text block explains that the return needs to be filled via the online portal but a blank form can be downloaded. Below this is a section for 'Guidance Manuals' with a purple button 'ANNUAL RETURNS HELP GUIDANCE PDF'. At the bottom, there is a purple button 'ANNUAL RETURNS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS PDF' with a green arrow pointing to it from the right.

Please be aware that this is a dynamic form which means it is linked to the information currently displayed on the webpage. So when you download that form, you will see the information displayed on the various tabs at that moment in time. Previous years' information can then be accessed via the sidebar under the **Print Reports** function via **Church Return**.

**Blank church and circuit property checklists** are available all year round to download and print off, or to complete electronically. They are available via the purple **CHECKLIST PDF** and **CHECKLIST WORD** buttons under the Church Council or Circuit Meeting headings within individual Church or Circuit **Property tabs** (see screenshot).

## Going online & completing forms

### Where do I find the return?

The return needs to be submitted via the web-based ANNUAL RETURNS site, which is part of the Methodist Online Suite of Applications: <https://online.methodist.org.uk>

### How do I access previous years' returns?

Previous years' returns can be found in the **Print Reports** section located in the left-hand side bar. The **Property Information report** contains general, non-annual property-related information; past reports are available from 2018 onwards. The **Church Return report** contains annually submitted information on property, documents, safeguarding, finance and general administration; past reports are available from 2013 onwards (see screenshot).

Please note that these reports are slightly more standardised than the online version in that they also include all conditional questions, some of which you may not see in the live version

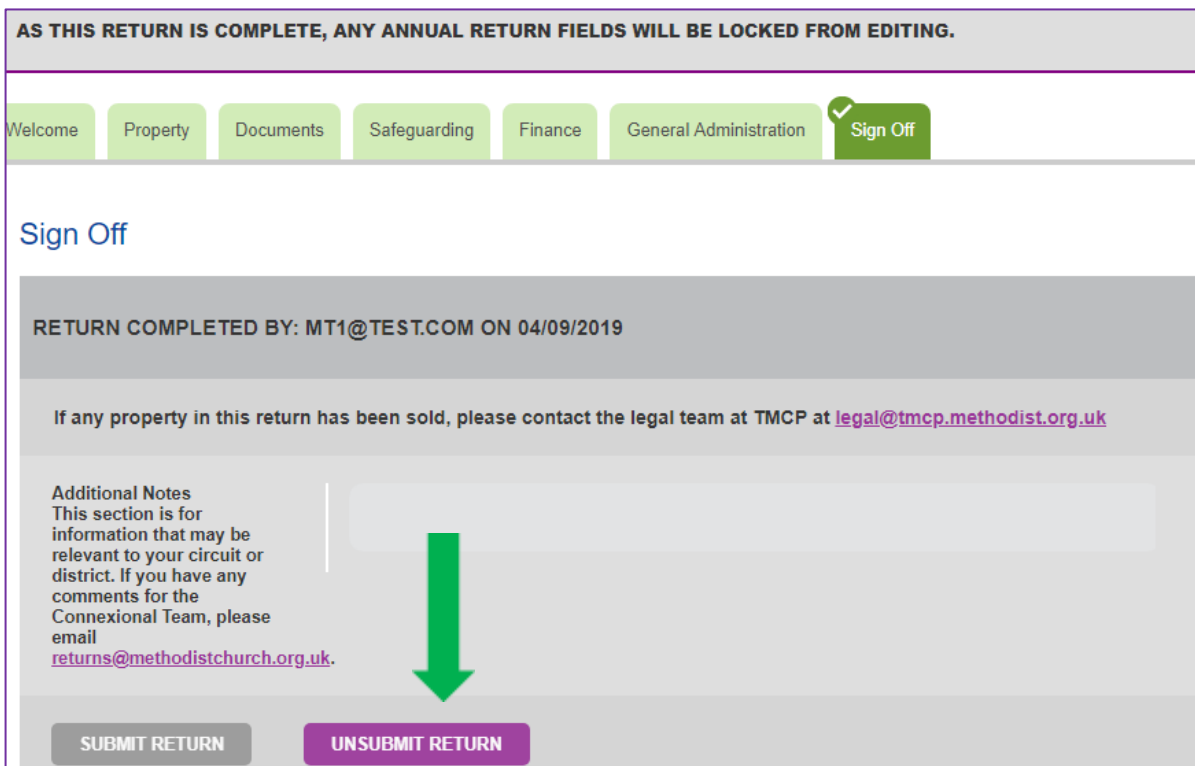
and for which the answer fields are therefore blank. If fields for mandatory questions are blank, then it means that this question had not been answered that particular year.

**When I go to SUBMIT RETURN in the Sign Off tab a pop-up prompt says that I am confirming that all the contents have been submitted to and approved by the church council. Our next church council is not until the spring. How should I proceed?**

It might be best to wait with the final submission until all the information has been collected and approved as stated. Alternatively, you may want to contact the council members with a copy of the return and make a decision via email ahead of the council meeting. Remember that you have a full year to submit your annual return.

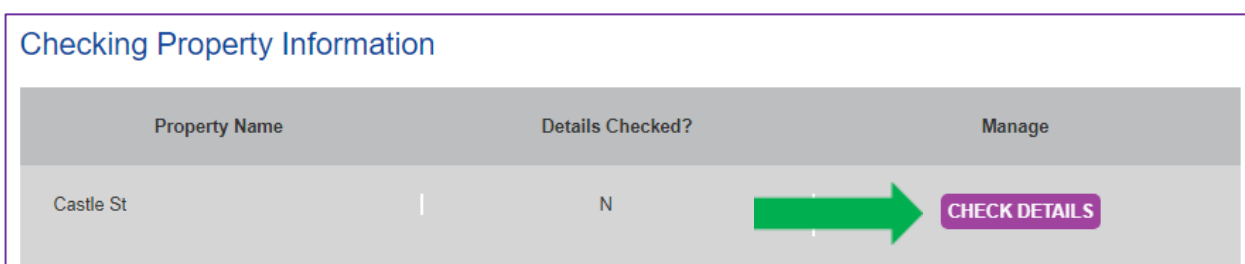
**I cannot amend my church's return form – what do I need to do?**

If the return has already been submitted, then all fields are locked. However, by activating the purple **UNSUBMIT RETURN button** (see screenshot), you can unlock it to enter additional or edit previously entered information. Alternatively, you may have insufficient access permissions. Your circuit or district office should be able to assist in this case.



**Can I amend property details after the return has been submitted?**

Information entered onto the returns site is saved against the property on a rolling basis. This means that you can amend property details at any point, even after the return has been signed off, by going in to the specific property record via the purple **CHECK DETAILS button**.



## Who do I submit the property checklist to?

This is required by circuits and districts for Synod reporting and should therefore be submitted locally.

## The website says that I have insufficient permissions to access certain churches or follow through with particular actions. How can I change that?

If you have more than one role, you will be asked to select which one you wish to use for completing the return upon entering the site. You can change roles at any time by clicking on the "Role:" display in the top right hand corner. If that does not resolve the issue, contact your Superintendent (for churches) or District Property Secretary (for circuits) to make sure that the appropriate **Update** permissions have been set for your account.

- **Managing Trustee** – This role will allow you to view and edit the local church returns for those that you have permission for. Please note that if you only have circuit trustee permission you won't be able to edit the circuit return; you will need the circuit level permission instead.
- **Circuit Trustee** – The Circuit Trustee role allows you to view all church returns within the circuit as well as completing the Circuit Return. You can also view reports on any issues that churches may have through the Property Issue Summaries.
- **District** – As a District user, you will be able to see the returns of all the churches and circuits within your district, as well as completing the District Return. You can also view reports on any issues that churches may have through the Property Issue Summaries.

## I have more than one role, but when I try logging in with a different role, I keep seeing a "404 Not Found" error message on the screen and am stuck in a loop.

Make sure you click on the **Clear Selection button** in the left-hand sidebar of the returns site. This should resolve the issue. You can then proceed to logging on with a different role via the Role link in the top right corner of the screen. For example, if you are in a church record as Managing Trustee, you will see an error message when changing your role to Circuit Trustee. Change back to your previous role, clear your current selection and then the role change will function correctly.

## I can't seem to go back to the start page. What do I need to do?

You can use the red **ONLINE PORTAL button** visible in the top left corner of each page to return to the Online Suite welcome page. You are in the right place if the website address reads [online.methodist.org.uk](http://online.methodist.org.uk).

## Finding, adding and removing properties

### When does a new property appear on the returns site?

A new property record is created the moment when a purchase project is raised via the consents site. However, the record shouldn't appear on the returns site until the purchase date has been entered by the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP). So whilst you should see the property record on the consents site, nothing should appear in the returns list until the purchase has been completed.

## Some of our properties do not appear on the returns site. How can I add them?

Properties may not appear because of incomplete information held on the Connexional Database (e.g. missing purchase year or incorrect trusteeship) or because TMCP had never been informed of the existence of this property. The [Web Support Officer](#) can amend or add records accordingly.

## Where are manses and other circuit properties listed?

If you have access to one circuit only, you should immediately see the Circuit Return as well as all Churches after logging onto the returns site as Circuit Trustee (see screenshot).

> ONLINE PORTAL

### Poolo Bay Circuit Return

OVERDUE/MISSING QUINQUENNIALS	INFORMATION ISSUES	ALERT ISSUES	RETURN COMPLETED?	OPTIONS
Yes			No	<a href="#">VIEW RETURN</a>

### Churches within Poolo Bay

CHURCH	OVERDUE/MISSING QUINQUENNIALS	INFORMATION ISSUES	ALERT ISSUES	RETURN COMPLETED?	OPTIONS
Bournemouth	Yes			No	<a href="#">VIEW RETURN</a>
Broadstone	Yes			No	<a href="#">VIEW RETURN</a>
Kinson	Yes			No	<a href="#">VIEW RETURN</a>
Lytchett Matravers				No	<a href="#">VIEW RETURN</a>

Show Returns ^

Select a Circuit >

Select a Church >

If you have access to more than one circuit, you will need to choose a circuit from the left-hand menu first before arriving at the view pictured above.

**Access to District returns follows the same logic.**

## Our building has been sold. How can I delete it from the returns site?

The [TMCP Legal Team](#) are responsible for updating the database when a property is sold. Once this has been done, the record will disappear from the returns site.

## What to do when a building and/or a society closes

### Our society has ceased to meet but the church building will be used by the circuit or another church. How can I reflect this on the returns site?

When a society registers its cessation via its profile page on the statistics for mission site, the process is handled by the Web Support Officer and includes the transfer of the trusteeship to the circuit.

If the trusteeship of the relevant building is to be held by another society (e.g. if the former society becomes a class of another society and retains its building for worship as before), changes will need to be made manually by the [Web Support Officer](#).

**Our building is being sold but the congregation will continue to meet elsewhere. What do I need to do?**

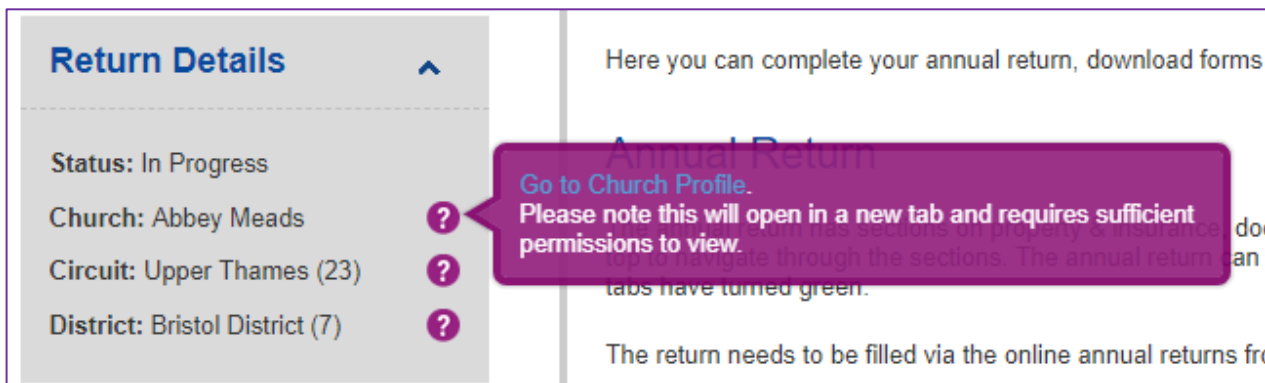
If a building and is being sold, the sale needs to be recorded on the consents site and is primarily dealt with by TMCP.

The new worship site, which may not be under Methodist trusteeship, needs to be reported to the [Web Support Officer](#) so that it can be correctly added and recorded onto the Connexional database, and consequently appear on the Methodist webmap.

**Our building is being sold and the remaining congregation will cease to meet. How do I start the process?**

The closure of a church building is not the same as the "closure" (cessation) of a church society. If a building closes and is sold, the sale needs to be recorded on the consents site and is primarily dealt with by TMCP. A change in status of a society needs to be registered via its profile page on the **statistics for mission site** and is dealt with by the Web Support Officer.

These two processes, while ultimately connected via the Connexional Database, are independent from each other and need to be registered as such. The church profile on the statistics for mission site can be accessed directly via the sidebar of the returns site as shown in the screenshot below. Further guidance: [www.methodist.org.uk/onlinesuite](http://www.methodist.org.uk/onlinesuite)



**Do I need to fill in a Notice of Disuse after a church building closes for worship?**

This is a Local Authority matter and as such not directly related to the change of status / closure procedure as pursued by the Methodist Church. The registration of a building as a place of worship was started under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855. Registration is a voluntary procedure, although a marriage cannot legally take place in an unregistered place of worship (Marriage Acts 1949 & 2013). Further information:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/notice-of-disuse-form-77](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notice-of-disuse-form-77)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/places-of-worship-registered-for-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/places-of-worship-registered-for-marriage)

**Circuit mergers & name changes**

**Our circuit will merge with another circuit at the start of September. Do I need to transfer all our properties to the new circuit?**

No, this should happen automatically as part of the annual update performed by the Connexional Team, but it is worth checking at the end of August just to make sure all the changes as ratified by Conference have come through correctly. This applies to all sections of the Methodist Online Suite.

## **Our church has changed its name. How do I amend this on the website?**

Any requests for name changes need to be submitted to the [Conference Office](#) and copied to the [Web Support Officer](#).

## **User interface & general questions**

### **I have entered information in a field and it's not accepted. Why?**

If information is not accepted, an error message should appear with further instructions. Make sure that you enter numbers without £ signs into fields that require numerical information. If the answer is "none" or "not applicable", enter the number zero ("0").

### **I cannot submit my return. What do I need to do?**

If all **mandatory questions with a red asterisk** next to them have been completed in each of the individual tabs (property, documents, safeguarding, finance, general administration), the tabs should have turned green. Press the **SAVE button** at the bottom of each tab, and tick any adjacent **tick boxes** where prompted. You should then be able to submit the return via the Sign off tab.

### **My church has several properties. Do I need to complete a return for each one of them?**

Specific questions are asked about the individual properties within the Property tab under **Checking Property Information**. You will only be able to submit the annual return once all the properties listed have a **Y** (for Yes) next to them in the **Details Checked?** column. However, for the rest of the return, the questions are against the society as a whole. In the case of multiple properties, you are in effect completing an **exception report**, which may be followed up by the circuit or district.

### **The location of our church building is shown incorrectly on the returns site map. How can I change this?**

The property location can be changed by moving the red pin on the map which is part of the **Checking Property Information** section under each property listed. When new properties had been created in the past, they sometimes had an incomplete or no postcode, which resulted in the map pin being located at zero longitude and latitude, which happens to be in the Atlantic Ocean. After correcting the location, don't forget to click **Save** at the bottom of the page. From 1 September 2020, the map will only appear for churches and worship sites.

### **My congregation is part of an LEP and worships on non-Methodist premises. Do I need to fill in a return?**

Yes. As a member of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), any Methodist congregation will have a Methodist Church Council, which is part of the Joint Church Council. It has the same responsibilities as a regular Methodist Church Council, and therefore all sections of the return need to be completed. The property details section is conditional to the site type and ownership, which means the questions for non-Methodist premises are fewer but still required.

## Useful websites

- Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes  
[www.tmcp.org.uk](http://www.tmcp.org.uk)
- Methodist Online Suite of Applications  
(including annual returns, property consents, statistics for mission)  
[online.methodist.org.uk](http://online.methodist.org.uk)
- Methodist Online Suite of Applications guidance (including annual returns)  
[www.methodist.org.uk/onlinesuite](http://www.methodist.org.uk/onlinesuite)
- Property pages on the Methodist website  
[www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/property](http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/property)
- Managing Trustee guidance  
[www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/office-holders/managing-trustees](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/office-holders/managing-trustees)
- Constitutional Practice and Discipline (CPD)  
[www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/governance/cpd](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/governance/cpd)
- Methodist Insurance  
[www.methodistinsurance.co.uk](http://www.methodistinsurance.co.uk)

## Useful contacts

- Web Support Officer: [onlinesuitesupport@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:onlinesuitesupport@methodistchurch.org.uk)
- Property Support Officer: [property@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:property@methodistchurch.org.uk)
- TMCP Legal Team: [legal@tmcp.methodist.org.uk](mailto:legal@tmcp.methodist.org.uk)
- Methodist Church House Reception: 0207 486 5502