This Guide has seven sections:

1. Community
2. Identity
3. Tradition
4. Telling your Story
5. Talking to Experts
6. Action!
7. Last Words

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Don’t feel you need to read this Guide cover to cover! Rather, dip in and follow your interest… The following may help you navigate:

- Red dashes link the major themes...
- with supporting material to each side...
- and comments on post-it notes towards the edges

Further material from Buildings for Mission is signposted if needed: (see back cover).

For optional further information on various of the topics see Buildings for Mission, Canterbury Press, 2015.

Nigel Walter is a Cambridge-based Specialist Conservation Architect; much of his work involves change to historic churches. He is a member of the Church Buildings Council and is active in his local church.

This Guide is one product of Nigel’s PhD research at the University of York (‘To Live is to Change’: tradition, narrative and community in the conservation of church buildings). The project considers the implications (for both conservation professionals and church communities) of the traditional approach to churches as living buildings, and includes a case study of five medieval churches in the Diocese of Norwich.

For an animation based on this booklet, see: www.youtube.com/user/churchbuild

The Gough Map of Great Britain: http://www.goughmap.org/map

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www.churchbuildingprojects.co.uk

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1. Community

Why Bother?
Changing a historic building is really hard work!

This Guide places historic church buildings in a wider cultural (and theological) context, helping you to propose better change, and then argue better for it.

Churchill's insight is lost on many people, but it has radical implications.

The journey is a long and winding one, through what at times feels like a hostile landscape. Church communities require courage to set out on this arduous journey, but do so understanding that buildings foster community life.

So hard in fact that the navigation of the process itself is beyond the capacity of some church communities.

The aim of bringing together theology and heritage is to help church communities see their building less as a burden and more as a springboard to ministry.

Fellow Travellers
Everyone wants more public participation in heritage, but without giving up any power to make decisions, impossible!

There is lots of discussion in heritage about the relation of communities to historic buildings, and the balance of power between the expert and the public in deciding their future.

The rest of this Guide provides a map to navigate change to historic buildings, showing you where some of the pitfalls lie…

2. Inter-generational Communal Ongoing Narratives

Communal Stories
Church buildings have typically changed almost every generation. Change is part of their nature; they are communal stories.

Some see a church solely as a work of art, but this does violence to its nature; instead of change being lifeblood it becomes seen as harm.

A Key Player
A church building is not incidental to the life of a church community.

A perfect building does not produce a perfect church community, but a difficult building (or a great building badly handled) can squeeze the life out of a community.

Imagine an unfinished novel in eight chapters, and our task is to write the ninth; we need to fully understand the story to date, write a creative chapter in this generation, and leave plot lines open for those we know will follow.

Otherwise the story simply doesn’t hang together…

We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us
Winston Churchill

‘ICONS’
Historic buildings are ‘iconic,’ i.e., best understood as Inter-generational, Communal, Ongoing Narratives.

We are so used to seeing a building as an artefact, a possession (we speak of ‘property’), a functional tool, or merely as the backdrop to human action.

Church buildings have typically changed almost every generation. Change is part of their nature; they are communal stories.

Churches that can demonstrate thorough community consultation and support are more likely to succeed. And that fits very well with the uniquely Anglican remit to care for all the people of the parish, not just regular church-goers.

Think of the building as your dance partner: if either of you drags your feet, you’re likely to fall over.

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2. Identity

Concentric
Circles

Strength in Weakness

An idea for change may start with an individual, or a small handful of people. But if ownership of that idea doesn’t spread, then the project will fail.

Success depends on wider and wider rings of people embracing it. As it spreads it will, most likely, change, because each widening involves dialogue with others. To survive, an idea must therefore be strong, but it must also be flexible. This is as true of building walls as it is of building ideas.

Who Are We, Anyway?

Are you a community at all, or merely a bundle of individuals with minimal common commitments?

The question of identity has searching implications for any Christian community.

Are you a community at all, or merely a bundle of individuals with minimal common commitments?

Do you understand your locality, or have you turned inwards and become a private members’ religious club?

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Compromise

If good ideas are born whole in the mind of an individual genius, then compromise will mean loss, a dumbing down, mediocrity.

But should we believe in individual genius? Isn’t the Church more about community than individuality?

Most likely you will need an architect as a travelling companion. At times you will need them to represent your best interests, so it is essential that they understand your culture, and the ecclesiastical exemption, and that you can trust them.

Check for conservation accreditation (AABC or RIBA), and ask your diocesan office for advice. Ask for references, and follow them up.

There’s lots of practical information available on traditional materials.

For example:

- www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-q-as/
- www.buildingconservation.com

By contrast, a wall built with lime mortar is more resilient because it is weaker. The mortar has some elasticity, and is weaker than the brick; any movement is spread through all the joints.

‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’

2 Corinthians 12:9

Do some soul-searching before you start. It is better to spend 5 years reconnecting with the people you are there to serve, than to progress a project that isn’t rooted in real need.

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Tradition is only democracy extended through time... It is the democracy of the dead.

G.K. Chesterton

A Third Way – Tradition-Centred Heritage

A narrative perspective considers ‘impact’ rather than ‘harm’ and sees the importance of a building as dynamic, as much related to people as to physical fabric. It recognises that change can add to as well as subtract from a building. Tradition is not about fixed things - the ‘crown jewels’ approach – it is alive, creative and future-facing.

Community Hubs

Many of our church buildings pre-date the Reformation, inviting us to engage with an earlier, richer understanding of what a church community and its buildings could be.

HARM

Focus of attention

Poor relation

An ‘old school’ approach sees the meaning of a building independent of its community;

The ‘new school’ approach brings people onto the margins;

A ‘tradition-centred’ approach sees a building without people as wholly meaningless.

Naturally, different heritage bodies and individuals take different approaches; do not be surprised if the experts disagree. Section 5 introduces the key players...

The current criteria for buildings being listed relates only to this ‘old school’ approach.

Historic England’s current guidance adds communal significance into the mix; this causes argument, but at least puts community onto the map.

The current system firstly assesses ‘harm’ to significance (architecture and history only - ‘old school’) and then judges whether community benefit outweighs that ‘harm’. Two things result: change is easily confused with harm, and community benefit becomes the poor relation, a consolation prize.

To be tradition-centred means to be genuinely historical - that is, seeing history as an ongoing continuity, as much concerned with the present and future as the past.

An ‘old school’ approach that sees historic churches as fixed works of art, only as products of the past, is thus deeply anti-historical.

BfM

C6

For Picasso & Chesterton tradition is creative, because it is alive, not dead...

Pablo Picasso

An ‘old school’ approach sees heritage primarily as historic and architectural: the ‘crown jewels.’

Two Approaches To Heritage

New School

By contrast, many in heritage recognise the role of people and communities in what makes a building important; this is the ‘new school’ approach

So where are all the people?

An ‘old school’ approach sees the meaning of a building independent of its community;

Whether we like it or not, a historic church building is a player in this argument over the nature of tradition. Because our culture is desperate for heritage they present a huge opportunity for mission, a medium through which a church can (re)build relationships with the broader local community.

Tradition is like giving birth, not like wearing your father’s hat.

Pablo Picasso

Most historic churches are listed; we call them ‘traditional’ buildings, as opposed to ‘modern’ ones. But being listed – and traditional – doesn’t mean they can’t change. Instead, it means they should be able to change. Here’s why...

4. Implicated!

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Implicated!
As a living community, you will always be on a journey. Your Statement of Needs (‘SoN’) articulates your sense of direction, telling the narrative of the community to date, and sketching the outline of the next chapters in the story.

As your project progresses, the internal dialogue from which it started will widen. There are two key documents that frame that wider dialogue, and in large part determine the outcome:

1. **Significance (Homework)**
   - **To change a historic building well you need to do your homework;** this becomes your Statement of Significance (‘SoS’).
   - Good homework does not guarantee success, but a lack of it almost guarantees failure.
   - Show that you care!
   - When writing your statements, try to bind community into significance, referencing Historic England’s Conservation Principles – get your architect to help, if needed.

2. **Needs (Direction)**
   - **As a living community, you will always be on a journey. Your Statement of Needs (‘SoN’) articulates your sense of direction, telling the narrative of the community to date, and sketching the outline of the next chapters in the story.**
   - These are working documents that will go through multiple iterations.
   - The SoS describes the story of the building to date, how it was formed by community.
   - The SoN tells the story of the community formed around that building, and where that community is heading.

**WARNING!** Beware attempting to minimise the importance of a part of the existing building simply because you envisage changing it - you will be found out!

Good drawings are the best means of thinking through your proposals, but they’re not an end in themselves; more important is the story they tell. Always be ready to explain how your proposals fit into the **wider narrative** of the community.

**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

1 Peter 3:15
5. Talking to Experts

Own Your Expertise
This multiplication of experts, resulting from the professionalisation of the care of historic buildings, means that church communities can easily feel de-skilled. Don’t forget that you too are experts: you are, or should be, EXPERTS IN COMMUNITY.

Your Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) is central to gaining your permission; it comprises clergy, architects and specialists in bells, clocks, furnishings etc. Your DAC Secretary can coach you through the process of applying for faculty.

The DAC acts like a planning committee, recommending your scheme for approval (or not) to the diocesan chancellor, who decides. A well-chaired DAC will understand your mission and ministry priorities.

Remember: It’s not a building project, but a mission project that happens to involve a building...

Context is Everything
A working church knows its locality. You are the ones to champion the needs of your particular parish.

You also (should) uniquely understand how individuals come together to form community, what it means to be more than the sum of the parts – you are, after all, the Body of Christ.

Most of the other participants bring different forms of technical knowledge; valuable as this is, it is meaningless without the context of your local, cultural knowledge.

So Who Else Has A Say?
The law relating to changing a listed church building is set out in the Care of Churches Measure 1991. Section 1 frames the whole process in terms of mission and worship.

The DAC acts like a planning committee, recommending your scheme for approval (or not) to the diocesan chancellor, who decides. A well-chaired DAC will understand your mission and ministry priorities.

Under the faculty system, when changing historic buildings you must also consult a variety of external stakeholders – up to 8 in all...

Build bridges - the DAC are your friends! Ask your DAC Secretary for advice on which of these bodies should be consulted, and when.

The World and his Wife!

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For those who do not understand tradition, change is too easily confused with loss. Part of the role of the Church is to be prophetic, that is, to call for change. Heritage is neither culturally nor theologically neutral.

The Law
"GENERAL PRINCIPLE
1 Duty to have regard to church’s purpose. Any person or body carrying out functions of care and conservation under this Measure or under any other enactment or rule of law relating to churches shall have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission."

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A working church knows its locality. You are the ones to champion the needs of your particular parish.

Which means that anyone involved in the process who ignores questions of mission and worship is breaking the law!

The Law
'Prophet & Loss'
Ancient Monuments Society
Care of Churches & Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991

Your duty is to consult the relevant stakeholder bodies, you should listen well, but you are not obliged to obey...

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6. Action!

Relax!

The End is Equally, a successful project may raise expectations; implementation and sustainability are just as important as completing the building work.

Change can be scary! Like a trapeze artist, we must let go of one thing, fly through the air, and grab hold of another.

Don’t Panic!

During construction your builder may uncover something of archaeological importance – such as a medieval wall painting, or graves under the floor.

This may cause delay in the construction phase, and perhaps some redesign, but even so it should be welcomed. Such discoveries add to our collective knowledge.

The design is deliberately simple, following the grain of the historic building and using quality materials in an unashamedly modern way. Because it doesn’t mimic earlier styles it extends the tradition.

What was all the fuss about?

Equally, a successful project may raise expectations; implementation and sustainability are just as important as completing the building work.

Sometimes those most opposed to a set of proposals are reconciled to them once completed. What at first seemed so alien quickly becomes ‘normal’.

The Flying Trapeze!

Change can be scary! Like a trapeze artist, we must let go of one thing, fly through the air, and grab hold of another.

See Rod Street & Nick Cuthbert, Better change in Church, 2015, ch 4.

If your application is contested, then the chancellor’s judgment will be made after a consistory court hearing – the court sits, usually in the church building, with gowns, wigs and all.

Whether or not a court hearing is held, the chancellor will expect the church community to have sought (and listened to) advice from the statutory consultees (previous page). None of them can veto your proposals, and their advice may be contradictory.

But note that it is unusual for a faculty to be granted against the advice of the DAC...

Remember other areas of legislation affecting scheduled monuments, existing burials, trees...

If your scheme involves change to the outside of the building, you will also need local authority Planning Permission.

Losing the use of your building for a time is disruptive, but also brings opportunities – new ways of relating as a church, and with the wider community.

A kitchen and WC were added within the base of the tower of this grade 2* listed medieval church, with a platform for bellringers above. Pews were cleared to create a community area to the rear of the nave, and the gallery also provides space for musicians.

The Flying Trapeze!

Church of St Nicholas, Great Wilbraham

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Judgment Day

All the consultees mentioned on the previous page play an advisory role. The person they advise, and the gatekeeper for your permission, is the chancellor of your diocese.

Gate Keepers

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Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. Matt. 5.17

Like it or not, historic buildings raise the much bigger, mission-shaped question of how the Church relates to the culture as a whole.

Options include:

- Making Church fit culture (collusion).
- Accepting defeat andretreating into managed decline.
- Positive cultural engagement.
- Withdrawal into a Christian sub-culture (isolation).

A tradition in good health combines both adherence and subversion; it is marked by creativity and results in human flourishing.

If cultural engagement is indeed our vocation, then we need to be theologically literate, and to know our church history. We need to reclaim a holistic (and denominationally non-partisan) understanding of tradition.

More than once Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a party. Parties are about being convivial. People then, and now, easily assume that God is the opposite, that He is ‘contravivial’.

You can see the same opposition mirrored in our approach to tradition (static or dynamic) and to historic buildings (dead monuments or living buildings).

‘Choose Life!’

Isn’t this precisely what Jesus was pursuing in his arguments with the Scribes and Pharisees?

“True tradition is always a living tradition. It changes while remaining always the same. It changes because it faces different situations, not because its essential content is modified. This content is not an abstract proposition: it is the living Christ Himself, who said, I am the Truth.”

John Meyendorff, Living Tradition (1978)
A Guide for the Perplexed

Nigel Walter

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Red dashes link the major themes...

Further material from Buildings for Mission is signposted if needed:
(see back cover).

...with supporting material to each side

...and comments on post-it notes towards the edges

For optional further information on various of the topics see Buildings for Mission, Canterbury Press, 2015.

Nigel Walter is a Cambridge-based Specialist Conservation Architect; much of his work involves change to historic churches. He is a member of the Church Buildings Council and is active in his local church. This Guide is one product of Nigel’s PhD research at the University of York (‘To Live is to Change’: tradition, narrative and community in the conservation of church buildings). The project considers the implications (for both conservation professionals and church communities) of the traditional approach to churches as living buildings, and includes a case study of five medieval churches in the Diocese of Norwich.