



# Top tips for re-opening your church and church hall<sup>1</sup>

## A The building

1. Carry out a 'walk round' survey of the building (binoculars will be a great help) noting any damage to window glazing, broken or slipped roof tiles, any disturbed lead (flashings or roof coverings) and note locations. Scan masonry for signs of deterioration/falls of material. Your last QI report should be consulted where there is doubt about when any fabric defects noted became apparent. It is accepted that not all areas of roofing will be visible from ground level, but a general impression can be gained (see note 4).
2. Ground drainage - where rainwater pipes discharge into gullies make sure that the gully gratings are clean and clear of debris. It is always useful to pour a bucket of clean water down each gully to confirm that it is clear. Note the location of any blocked drains for further action. Rainwater pipes should be visually inspected for any obvious defects (material damage/loose mountings etc).
3. Carry out a visual inspection of the church interior, again binoculars will be of great help. Look particularly for signs of leakage at floor and eaves level and around windows. Test all wooden floors for soundness, and the stability of pews (no doubt some may already be known to be suspect). Scan underside of roofs for signs of leakage/water staining where not previously seen.
4. Where it is safe to do so, ascend the tower interior and check for signs of bird ingress at all levels. Note any areas of concern for further attention. Please refer to the bat section later in this paper if evidence of bats is discovered. The condition of the bell installation should be assessed by specialists if thought suspect, but any obvious faults should be noted. The tower roof may provide a good vantage point to survey roof-slopes which cannot be seen from the churchyard. If safe access is possible, the tower roof perimeter gutters and outlets should be checked and cleared as required. Visible accumulations of bird dropping and/or nesting material will indicate locations of bird access. These should be recorded before clearance.

In the interests of safety:

- always let someone know what you are proposing to do and when.
- carry a mobile phone with you at all times.
- do not carry out any inspection above ground-level unaccompanied and always ensure that you have the appropriate experience and equipment for the task. If in any doubt, consult your inspecting architect or surveyor.

## B Contents

### **Pest Infestations**

This is a good time to check for signs of pest infestations. As buildings have been closed with no cleaning, it will be easy to spot piles of frass (sawdust) that may have accumulated under infested woodwork: look above them for signs of fresh holes in the wood. Inspect windowsills for adult *Anobium punctatum* (furniture beetle / woodworm) and *Xestobium rufovillosum* (deathwatch beetle) as they head for the light to find a mate.

You should also check textiles and soft furnishings for signs of clothes moth (such as *Tineola bisselliella*) and carpet beetle (*Anthrenus* species). Pay attention to cushions on chairs and pews, where they are filled with wool or horsehair, as well as woollen carpets and rugs. A useful poster to assist with insect pest identification is available at: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/siteassets/home/blog/blog-posts/2018/pests-at-home-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/insect-pests-historic-houses-poster.pdf>

If you find 10 or more adult beetles in a week, you are advised to seek the advice of a conservator on managing the infestation.

### **Electrical system**

1. Check for any rodent activity and carry out a visual check of exposed cabling for signs of damage.
2. If there is damage, switch off the breaker/fuse serving the damaged circuit and contact your electrician.
3. There may be damage to hidden cables which will become apparent when equipment and appliances are turned back on.
4. Check for failed lamps when lighting is turned on.

## **Cold water system**

1. Where the cold water supply to the building has been left on check for any signs of leaks. If there are any, turn off valves locally where available, or at the mains. (This will then require a plumber).
2. Once the water supply has been safely established, turn on all taps (hot and cold) and allow to run until all stagnant water has been discharged and flush all toilets. (Do not turn on any hot water systems just yet).
3. Check and empty any kettles, urns or water jugs. If any have had to be emptied, fill and boil them and empty them before using them again.
4. If the water supply has been turned off now's the time to listen for any sign of leaks. Listen again when you turn the supply back on. When the taps are opened the water will probably fizz and splutter with air in the system for a while before settling down.

## **Hot water system**

1. Turn on any storage hot water heaters and allow them to heat up and then run the hot water taps for enough time for the water to run fully hot.
2. For instantaneous heaters run the water for enough time to fill a bowl of water. This will help to clear the waste pipes.
3. Do not turn on heating boilers that serve hot water either through a storage tank or a combi boiler at this stage.
4. Halls may have electric showers. Run these at maximum temperature for a couple of minutes.

## **The heating system**

1. Electric heating whether radiant, under pew, under floor, fan convectors or portable, should be ready to run, subject to the electrical procedure above having been followed.
2. Heating systems served by warm air heaters, gas or oil, internal gas heaters, etc., should be ready to run as for any normal summer shut down.

3. For gas/oil boilers or heat pumps serving a piped water-based system, the following should apply:
  - a. Where the electrical procedure has been followed and where the water supply has been maintained the heating should be ready to run.
  - b. Where the water supply has been turned off, the supply to a pressurised system may have dropped and air may have entered the system when the supply is turned back on. Pressurised systems are usually replacements for older systems with more modern boilers which show a fault code. This may be a fault that can be dealt with as a DIY item, but it may require the attention of a heating engineer. For older systems, which are served by a feed and expansion tank, the water level in the tank may have dropped and there is a possibility that the ball valve will have become stuck. In any case, all feed and expansion tanks should be checked before turning the heating on. For combi boilers, once safe operation has been established, the hot water procedure outlined above can be carried out. For boilers serving a storage cistern, the hot water procedure can be carried out; however, it will take some time for the cistern to heat up to its operating temperature.

**Specific Coronavirus Action: Any heating system that includes some recirculation of air should be adjusted where possible. Warm air heating should have any recirculation function isolated where practical: this will mean a reduction in heating capacity. Fan convectors, with electrical or piped water heating, should be cleaned of dust and debris before setting to work and be regularly cleaned during the operating period. For churches in regular daily use this could be monthly, while for churches with weekly (or fewer) services, quarterly should suffice. This procedure should continue until an effective vaccine is available and has been widely distributed. Thereafter it would be sensible for the procedure to form part of the annual heating service. It is acknowledged that access to the inner parts of the heaters may not always be possible.**

### **The clock**

1. Clean off any bird nests and other detritus.
2. Check the cables to make sure they have not come off the pulleys or tangled as the clock wound down.
3. Wind the clock and restart it. Set to time.
4. If the clock is auto-wound, check the time and adjust to summertime if necessary.
5. Check that the strike and chimes are in the correct sequence.

## The bells

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers advises no bell ringing at all until the current threat level is much lower. There are relatively high risks associated with bell-ringing and the CCCBR has had medical advice on this: <https://cccbr.org.uk/>

## The organ

1. The blower. Is it oiled regularly, probably once a year, often by the organ tuner?
2. Are the keys reasonably dust-free? The organist's fingers probably do the trick most of the time. Otherwise a small soft brush is best.
3. The key actions may well be a bit stiff, especially if the weather has changed a lot since it was last played. If a note is inclined to stick, it can often be freed off by a bit of repeated playing.
4. Try out each stop in turn to see that every pipe is sounding.

**Never be tempted to go inside the organ and try to fix it yourself.**

## Monumental brasses

1. Check (especially under carpets) to ensure that none of your monumental brasses have not been stolen.
2. Gently sweep brasses with a soft brush to remove any particles of dust or grit and wipe with a soft duster.
3. Apply Renaissance\* micro-crystalline wax to both metal and the stone or wood into which the brass is mounted – this should be undertaken on a bi-annual basis. Do not use *Brasso*, *Duraglit* or any other proprietary brand of cleaner.

\* Available from Picreator Enterprises Limited, 44 Park View Gardens, Hendon, London NW4 2PN. Email: [info@picreator.co.uk](mailto:info@picreator.co.uk) – <http://www.picreator.co.uk>. The average price for a 65ml tin is £8.25.



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## General cleaning advice<sup>1</sup>

1. If the church is particularly damp and smells musty or very unpleasant, ventilate it first. Leave the doors and windows open for a few hours before tackling the cleaning.
2. Dry clean first. Get rid of all the dust. If you instantly go in with a wet cloth you run the risk of mixing dirt with water and staining porous materials especially stone and wood.
3. For quick cleaning on metalwork use a Goddard's Silver Cloth. Buff very gently to remove tarnish and surface dirt. It is clean, simple and affordable. It does not heavily abrade or damage the metal like Brasso does. Make sure the cloth is completely sealed and airtight while stored otherwise it will dry out. (**DO NOT use for medieval items, monumental brasses or brass plaques.**)
4. Check for rodent activity especially round servery / kitchen areas.

## Specific cleaning if your church hosts bats

If you have resident bats and usually clean regularly because of them, there is likely to be a build-up of droppings and urine. Droppings, dust and damp combined are a haven for bacterial growth, pests and mould. Follow these tips to clean large amounts of dirt and droppings:

1. Make sure you have all the necessary equipment before starting, including a face mask (FFP3 standard), gloves, safety glasses, brushes, a vacuum, cloths and water, and a stable platform or stepladder to stand on.
2. Try not to disturb the dust too much. The aim is to clean up the droppings without dispersing too much dust and potential mould spores into the air. Use slow gentle movements while brushing the worst of the droppings straight onto a dustpan, into a rubbish bag or into a vacuum cleaner.
3. The first task is to get rid of the droppings and dust from flat surfaces. Work from the highest areas to the lowest. Starting with window sills and other high surfaces, then pews and other low surfaces and finally the floor.
4. While dusting, you may have noticed sticky residue from bat urine on some of the surfaces. This can be removed using a cloth with water. If you feel that something stronger is needed, you can dilute some (conservation approved) detergent with water to use. The best store-bought detergents are Ecover (fragrance and paraben free) and Boots Sensitive.
5. If you have severe staining or damage on particular surfaces like metal or wood, consider asking for advice. Sadly, some items can become permanently damaged and more cleaning will just abrade layers of historic fabric.



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If you find that there is still an unpleasant smell, or the church is very damp, and you have already removed the dust and droppings, increase the levels of ventilation to the building. Consider using fans while leaving the windows and doors open. Also use naturally nice smelling things like lavender or citron. (These have the added benefit of repelling cluster flies).

Look out for dead bats. If you find a dead bat you should call the National Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228 and they will tell you what to do with it (it is very unlikely to be a problem unless there are lots of them, in which case a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor may want to come and have a look).

For further advice visit: [bats.churches@naturalengland.co.uk](mailto:bats.churches@naturalengland.co.uk)

## C The churchyard

1. Check that paths and walkways are clear of obstructions and trip hazards such as overgrown grass.
2. Keep an eye on closed churchyards and note any issues to the local council responsible for its maintenance.
3. Check structures such as headstones, vaults, memorials, benches and kerbstones for damage or subsidence. Where possible, contact family members if you notice damage to modern head or kerbstones. Check condition and security of churchyard structures such as sheds, outbuildings and toilets.
4. Check boundary walls, railings or fences for damage and subsidence, check trees and shrubs for damage or disease.
5. Check water supplies coming into the church such as standpipes for leaks.

## D Works in churches and Churchyards

Contractors may carry out work in your church and churchyard where it is safe for them to do so, please refer to the national guidance here:

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Access%20to%20church%20buildings%20for%20construction%20%20professional%20contractors%20v.2\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Access%20to%20church%20buildings%20for%20construction%20%20professional%20contractors%20v.2_0.pdf)



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## E Further information

The national guidance on cleaning your church building can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v.2.pdf>

Historic England guidance for cleaning historic surfaces can be found here:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>

A risk assessment template for access to church buildings for clergy, volunteers, lay staff and members of the public can be found on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

**For further advice or information please contact the Church Buildings Team**

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from guidance produced by St. Edmondsbury and Ipswich DAC with their kind permission

<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Rachel Arnold, Heritage Adviser for the Bats in Churches project, for the advice on cleaning



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