

Archives and Record Keeping

It is most important to maintain good Parish records and archives. These records not only have historical merit for the parish, the local community and the wider church, but they also carry important legal weight. In recent years it has become even more important to keep records safely and in good order. It is also important that those records which hold confidential information about the church and about individuals (e.g. registers), are kept securely, and only available to authorised personnel.

Good archives begin firstly with good records management in the parish office including well – kept informational minutes of meetings, which are signed and dated as a correct record at the following meeting.

Secondly inactive records must be kept in a secure and accessible location.

What Records To Keep

- All Vestry Records Books
- All baptismal, marriage banns (if kept) Funeral / burial registers
- Confirmation registers
- Annual vestry Minutes and reports
- Minutes of Parish Council, that should include regular financial reports
- Minutes of parish committees
- Sunday School records, rolls
- All insurance records
- Property and fabric records
- Specific legal documents
- Significant correspondence
- Financial records for legal requirements - Bank Statements, cheque butts, etc need not be kept beyond the legal retention requirements and invoices unless they are a record of a significant transaction, e.g. purchase of an organ.
- Photographs, audio/visual material

There will be other documents and memorabilia that record the life of the parish. The church is not just a building and its fabric, importantly it is the people who meet, worship, work and socialise there.

Ensure data bases are backed up on a regular basis and a copy of the backup is kept off site.

How to maintain Parish Archives

It is difficult to keep all old records under adequate conditions in the parish. Even under the best conditions, they are susceptible to loss by misplacement, water and /or fire damage, temperature variations, and the temptation of some tidy housekeeper, or thoughtless manager, or someone wanting that particular space, to put them into rubbish bin.

Keep your records in half-size archive boxes (not the so called larger archive boxes cheaply available at the supermarket). These boxes are designed to fit five on a metre shelf, and can't become too heavy to lift (if nothing heavier than paper is stored in them).

Use acid – free storage containers as much as possible. This is most important for photos. This can be, but doesn't have to be, a very expensive investment – ask an archivist.

There is still no better system of maintaining records long – term than having ‘Hard Copy’. Electronic records are useful, but their lasting value is still being debated by archivists. However, electronic records can be very useful for office purposes.