

The Archives of The Church of England



Declan Kelly – Director of Libraries, Archives and Information Services at the National Institutions of the Church of England since Nov 2005 – the post having been established following a review of the Documentary Heritage of the Church which focused mainly on its national institutions.

My aim today is to talk about the Archives of the Church of England – what they are and where they are held, and to highlight what I see as some of the key issues facing these religious archives. I will perhaps focus more on those held nationally but as you'll see, they are only a part of a complex picture. What I have tried to do is step back and take a view from the outside (as much as I can) – what it might look like to the average user of our archives.

But first, I think it is important to start by saying something about the organisation itself – the creator of the archives in question.

The Church of England

c12,000 parishes

c10,000 benefices

43 Dioceses

2 Provinces

The General Synod

42 Cathedrals

8 “National Church Institutions”

Religious societies and organisations e.g. Mothers Union, CMS

1.2 million people attending services each week.

c16,000 Church Buildings

And this is where the complexity immediately becomes apparent – after all what exactly is the Church of England?

As you can see from the slide it is a diverse collection of organisations from the parish– the most basic unit of organisation, then there are benefices or livings, 43 dioceses which are themselves organised into two provinces (for simplification I’ve not mentioned some of the intermediary levels).

There’s also General synod – which is the parliament of the Church of England; the Cathedrals – and in case anyone is wondering about the cathedral numbers – I’ve included some peculiars so 42 includes St Pauls Cathedral & Christ Church Oxford but NOT Westminster Abbey or St Georges Chapel Windsor [note – source of the figure of 42 cathedrals is the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (CFCE)]

(Peculiars are places that are exempt from the jurisdiction of the Bishop/Diocese in which they are situated).

Then there are the National Church Institutions, which could be described as the Headquarters of the Church – inasmuch as there is one. These National Institutions include the two Archbishops (Canterbury & York corporately), the Church Commissioners (who fund a great deal of Church activity), The Archbishops’ Council (who co-ordinate a great deal of the national activity of the church such as Education and Ministry training), the Pensions Board, and Lambeth Palace Library, among others.

There are also the religious societies and organisations – detailing just the current ones takes up over 60 pages in the CofE yearbook.

The point to stress here is that this is not simply a hierarchical organisation even though the parish, diocese, province structure may give that impression – there’s a great deal of autonomy within the various Church organisations.

Finally, and most important of all – the churchgoers, who fund a great deal of all of this activity. Worth noting also the vast number of buildings – a major part of the built heritage of the Country.

The Church and its Archives

- A “distributed Church” which has produced distributed archives which are as widespread as the Church itself.



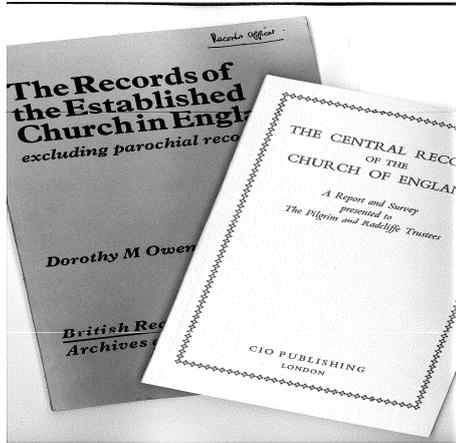
So what you have is a distributed church with an interconnecting mass of organisations who collectively form that thing we know as “The Church of England” – in fact one could say that in a strict organisational sense, there isn’t a single organisation that is “the Church of England”.

The impact of this is seen in the archives – because as we all know the archives are a product of the organisation or in this case organisations – and for the CofE it means a distributed archive – one that is part of every church and community in the country.

As we’ll see this in turn creates a number of issues and challenges as we survey the archives of the Church of England.

There have of course been surveys of the archives in the past -

Previous Surveys



- 1946 – Pilgrim Trust

- 1970 – British Records Association

- 1976 – Pilgrim & Radcliffe Trustees

Surveying the Archives of the Church of England is not new and my own talk today will only skim the surface. But it is worth referring briefly to previous reports and surveys as they were important in mapping this distributed archive.

The Pilgrim Trust produced a 5 volume survey of Ecclesiastical archives begun in 1946 and which covered both provinces, 43 dioceses, (and went to archdeaconry level – surveying over 100), 43 cathedral chapters, and over 50 “peculiars” as well.

The British Records Association in 1970 published Dorothy Owen’s “Records of the Established Church in England” and the Pilgrim Trust were active again in 1976 with “The Central Records of the CofE”

In addition there have been many reports and publications covering other aspects of Church archives for examples parish registers and archives and their whereabouts.

All of these have served to emphasise the complex and distributed nature of the archives.

National & Provincial Archives

Lambeth Palace Library

Church of England Record Centre

Borthwick Institute

Capitular Archives

Cathedral archives – e.g. Canterbury, Durham

Diocesan Archives

Local Record Offices

In the next few slides I'll look at the what and where of these archives – starting with National and Provincial archives and then taking a brief look at Capitular and Diocesan archives.

The archives of the “National Church” and the provinces of Canterbury and York are held at three institutions –

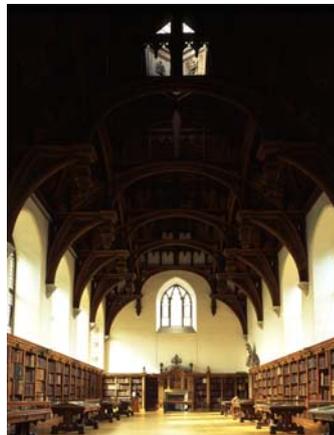
- Capitular archives are generally held by the Cathedrals themselves
- Diocesan archives will generally be at local record offices throughout the country.

Starting at the National level –

Lambeth Palace Library



- Historic Library of the Archbishops of Canterbury
- Public Library since 1610
- Library and *Archive*
- Online catalogues



<http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org>

The first of the archives holding National and Provincial records is also the oldest – in fact one of the oldest public library's in Britain and the principal record office for the history of the CofE

The papers of the Archbishops of Canterbury are of course of major importance, but the archives here contain much else besides, including the Lambeth conference since their start in 1867 (with the next scheduled for 2008), ecclesiastical records of the commonwealth period, correspondence and papers of Bishops of London, and those of many religious societies.

There are extensive finding aids – many now online and an ambitious programme to produce a full online catalogue by 2010, with the first fruits of this endeavour seen when catalogue went online at the end of 2006.

I'll draw attention to one issue - as more has gone online, the hits, enquiries and workload and demand for reprographics have all increased. Yet the number of readers – the physical users - after decades of increases has fallen in the last two years.

This is something seen in other institutions as well – the rise of the virtual visitor?

Church of England Record Centre (CERC)

- Archives of Central Church Organisations
- Public access via Lambeth Palace Library
- Shared online catalogue with Lambeth Palace Library



Less well known than Lambeth Palace Library – this is really the record office of those central church institutions outside of the Archbishop of Canterbury – you may recall the mention of 8 national Church institutions – well five of them hold their material here (Church Commissioners, Archbishops' Council, Pensions Board, Advisory Board for Redundant Churches, the National Society).

The 6th – the Archbishop of Canterbury is of course at Lambeth Palace Library, the 7th – the Archbishop of York is at the Borthwick, which we'll come onto, and the 8th of course is the Library itself.

Given that it holds such a spread of material – including the Church Commissioners records back through predecessor bodies such as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Queen Annes Bounty (from 1704) it might seem surprising that is so less developed than LPL.

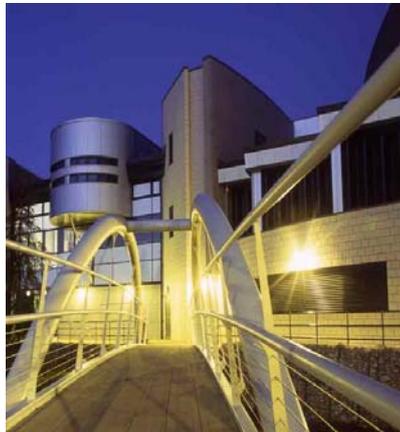
It has however functioned primarily as a record office and its archival role is more recent and it is really only now starting to really work through the cataloguing of its archival collections. Nevertheless it has only scratched the surface so far.

In the last few months the online catalogue (now merged with that of the library) has been put online. Access is via the Library reading room, which while it has the advantage of having a single reading room for centrally held archives does mean some prior notice is necessary.

The centre also holds records of the Church Assembly & Synod and the National Society.

The Borthwick Institute for Archives

- Records of the Province of York
- Diocesan and parish records
- Major public archive



Finally at a National/Provincial level – the Borthwick Institute for Archives at The University of York – one of the largest archive repositories outside of London and a specialist in Ecclesiastical History.

The Borthwick holds the records of the province of York as well as many diocesan and parish records with extensive online guides to the holdings.

Capitular Archives

- Historical Archives –
e.g. Canterbury,
Durham, Westminster
- Varied access – often by
appointment
- Limited online
catalogues



As we go beyond the national and provincial, the issues of access (and resources) become more predominant – for the capitular archives funding and resources vary – and it is common to find part time staff supplemented by volunteers, which necessarily restricts access – most Cathedral archives (and Libraries) for example have limited weekday opening and are generally (though not all) accessible by appointment only.

In terms of catalogues there are many printed catalogues but few online.

Usage – interestingly some see same pattern as at LPL – e.g. Norwich – more use, more enquiries, less users through the door.

Diocesan Archives

- Held mainly at Local Record Offices throughout the country.
- National Register of Archives – NRA - is a starting point for tracking these.



The records of the 43 dioceses of the Church Of England are held at Local record offices across the country and are accessible through them and through their websites and also through the NRA.

Some are held at other institutions – e.g. I've already mentioned the Borthwick, and some records are held at or in conjunction with academic institutions.

Parish registers – vital records for the ever increasing army of family historians – are also held at our local record offices up and down the country.

Societies and other organisations

- A wide range of organisations who hold their own archives (e.g. The Mothers Union), or have them on deposit at a variety of archives (e.g. Lambeth Palace Library) or Universities (e.g. Birmingham, SOAS).



I've already indicated that there are very many religious societies and organisations and these archives are more likely than anything already mentioned to slip through the net – some organisations still hold their own material and haven't really addressed archiving issues or are only now trying to work out what to do with their material. Others are more fortunate and have deposited their archives with a variety of institutions –for example :

- The Church Missionary Society – Archives held at Birmingham and some more recent material store at CERC – some searching of the archive is possible via Birmingham University Library catalogue online.
- The National Society – CERC hold their extensive archives covering nearly two hundred years of involvement in education in this country.
- Lambeth Palace Library holds a number of society archives e.g. The Christian Faith Society and the Church Society

Others are still seeking a home – e.g. Christian Assoc of Business Executives (CABE)

But it remains the case that a large number of societies and organisations face difficulties regarding their archives – particularly as accepting organisations will these days often want some resources with any “donation” to cover the costs of making the collection accessible.

C of E Website

- Gateway to the central collections
- Links to capitular archives
- Advice on Parish records – “Keep or Bin”



www.cofe.anglican.org/about/librariesandarchives

I've mentioned a number of issues, which I'll summarise in a minute but before I do I'd like to mention the Church of England website and some of the developments there in relation to Anglican Archives –

We've built pages which aim to be a gateway to the central collections at LPL & CERC with basic descriptions and links

We've also provided links to Capitular archives and libraries and the Borthwick, and finally we have used the site to promote simple practical advice – initially with a publication called “Keep or Bin- Care of your parish records”

This year we aim to extend the practical advice to Diocesan records and possibly episcopal as well...

I mention this as it may have relevance to some of the issues facing Anglican archives.

Summary & Issues

- **Access to the archives**
- **Cataloguing – in particular online catalogues**
- **Virtual Users**
- **Advice and support – TNA, C of E National institutions**

So to conclude what are the issues facing Anglican archives?

I think that **ACCESS** is the key issue – particularly for an archive so complex and widely distributed as that of the Church of England.

As we've seen it varies widely and is commonly hampered by lack of resources.

There is also the fact that there are so many entry points and so many collections and organisations housing these archives.

We've seen the previous attempts to map all of this – is it time for a fresh map?

CATALOGUES – In an increasingly online world, the demand is for online catalogues – how can we provide these?

There's also the conundrum of increasing use of the archives without necessarily leading to more physical users – in a sense the rise of a new class of “**virtual users**”.

These present real challenges for us as I think that they are in many ways more time consuming and demanding of our limited resources.

Another issue is that of **advice and support** – particularly where resources are most limited – And on this I will finish by posing some questions –

- What can The National Archives (TNA) and the Church Nationally do to help?
- Are initiatives such as “Care of your parish records” a useful model and can they be extended across denominations?
- Can TNA or CofE nationally be the virtual gateways to the archives?

I'll leave you with those - Thanks very much for your attention – do feel free to ask any questions.

**The Archives of
The Church of England**
Presentation to the Religious Group
Archives 2007 Conference

The State of Religious Archives in the UK
at The British Library, London
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