

Guidance note Recording stained glass windows

ChurchCare



16,000 buildings. One resource



Getting to know your windows is the first step for effective preservation and good maintenance. If you know your windows and have a systematic photographic record it will be easier to spot sudden changes and signs of deterioration. Try to learn as much as possible about your windows and record your research in an inventory. (The Church Recorders of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Society (NADFAS) are compiling inventories of the contents of all the churches in the UK and may already have one for your church.)

Such an inventory should include a full set of dated photographs of every window, both of the internal and external surfaces. A photographic inventory will also provide invaluable help to the conservator after major damage.

You may wish to undertake the photography yourselves or you may prefer to employ a professional photographer or stained glass studio.

Please note that this text has been written with traditional photography

in mind. If you are using a digital camera, most of the advice is still valid. However, in relation to the storage of photos, please bear in mind that technology changes very quickly and that the archival performance of digital data is still unproven. Therefore it is wise to keep professional hard-copy prints of the photos as well as digital copies. Professional prints on paper of archival quality are always preferable to photos printed on normal paper. Digital photos need to be of a high resolution, i.e. of more than 300 dpi, clearly labelled and safely stored.

Plan of church – make a plan of the church and number the windows following the CVMA numbering system (available at <http://www.cvma.ac.uk/index.html>).

Film - Transparencies (slides) are preferable to negatives and prints and will turn out to be more useful in whatever use you put them to. If you use a digital camera, make sure it is set for a high resolution.

Labelling - Label each slide, or each print, with the name of the church and the window number.

Numbers of copies and storage - Make at least two complete sets, stored at different locations.

Framing - For large windows, do not attempt to show the whole window in one frame.

Lighting - Turn all church lights off. Do not use a flash or photographic lighting.

Focus - The most common problem seen in photographs of stained glass is poor focus, possibly due to having to deal with transmitted light in a relatively dark environment. Careful use of automatic focus is of great help here.

Tripod - use a tripod - the taller the better - and a cable release.

Weather - Choose a day, or time of day, when there is not direct sunlight. The ideal conditions are bright but overcast.

