

## WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL AMENITY SOCIETIES

Plans for work to churches involving changes to the historic building and its contents are referred to a number of organisations for comment. Consultation with the National Amenity Societies is directed under Circular 01/01 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister\* on those works which include any form of demolition to a listed building. This might include breaching historic walls with new openings as well as the removal of historic fixtures and fittings. Whatever the change being proposed, early consultation with the appropriate amenity society as well as with Historic England and the Church Buildings Council, is recommended. A good time to do this is when initial plans are produced. This might be arranged via your DAC Secretary or equivalent, so an early discussion with them on process is also strongly recommended.

The National Amenity Societies relevant to work on churches are:

- The Ancient Monuments Society looks at ancient monuments and historic buildings of all periods.
- The Council for British Archaeology looks at historic buildings of all periods, but with a particular concern for archaeological features.
- The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) looks primarily at buildings of before 1700, but have an interest in buildings and their historic features from all periods, and will often take an 'overview' of buildings with work from a variety of dates.
- The Georgian Group looks at buildings and features of between 1700 to 1837
- The Victorian Society looks at buildings and features of between 1837 and 1915 (Victorian and Edwardian periods)
- The Twentieth Century Society looks at buildings and features of after 1915.

Some work on churches which are complex buildings dating from several historic periods may involve consultation with more than one if not all of these organisations. In general terms amenity societies will appreciate early and wide-ranging consultation to make them aware of forthcoming proposals and invitations to participate in discussions. As many churches were either built or significantly restored in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, it is likely that at least the Victorian Society will need to be consulted. The society has a Churches Conservation Adviser, and its stated aim is 'to help churches make better decisions about adapting Victorian and Edwardian buildings to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them.' With all of the amenity societies early contact and discussion will help to establish what that society considers to be important about the building, and will give an indication of how the society is likely to respond in formal consultation when plans are submitted for approval. It is important to be aware of what these views might be as it may influence how proposals are developed. It is not generally helpful to leave initial consultation with the amenity societies until a later stage, when negotiating changes might add to project costs and cause delays.

Changes to the building will be assessed by the amenity societies with regard to their impact on the character and appearance of the building and its fittings. The impact of such change will be considered with regard to at least the following factors:

- the listed status of the building (Grade I, II\* or II) and its relationship to any designated conservation area;
- is the building or its restoration the work of any known architect of national or local importance? Is it the first, last or considered in published sources to be a good example of their work and why?
- is there an historical significance, such as the burial place of a famous person?
- the completeness of the historic material. Does the church have a complete set of pews or chancel ensemble? Or both? Are they in their original form or position?
- the significance of quality, design and craftsmanship. Are the fittings of unusual design? Were they specially commissioned? Are they handmade or individually decorated?

This list is not exhaustive and each proposal will be considered on a case by case basis.

An awareness of the significance of the building and its contents which can be gained through the production of a detailed and accurate Statement of Significance prior to any consultation with the amenity societies will assist greatly in discussions. Possible further questions may arise during consultation. Any changes to important historic fabric will have to be justified through a robust Statement of Need, which the amenity societies will take into account when they comment on proposals.

Tim Bridges  
West Midlands Conservation Adviser  
The Victorian Society

\*On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Circular 01/01 can be read here: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7666/158304.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7666/158304.pdf)