CASE STUDY TAKING EARLY PREVENTATIVE ACTION ON DAMP INGRESS

N.B. This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

Key Points

- The Church of St Mary and St David in Kilpeck is a renowned Norman church that draws international visitors to its Victorian plasterwork and corbels.
- Degrading of the lead flashings on the roof had led to water ingress that, if left unchecked, could have resulted in serious damp related damage.
- Early response to the need for work minimised the damage caused by the damp and resulted in a much more affordable renovation project.

1 St Mary and St Davids is a Grade I-listed Major Parish Church in Herefordshire.

2 Interior damage caused by the presence of damp can be seen here.

3 The restoration work required plaster to be stripped away.

The context

Through the quinquennial inspection process it was noticed that the lead flashings on the roof of the Church of St Mary and St David had degraded to a significant extent. Following incidences of driving rain, a weather condition that will be more prevalent throughout the next century, damp ingress got into two parts of the church. This caused damage, particularly to some areas of old plaster that had begun to separate from the walls.

It was recommended by the quinquennial architect that work began on the roof as quickly as possible to prevent further water getting into the building and then repair work to take place on the impacted areas.

For more information, visit the church's website or its entry on the Church Heritage Record.

Responding Proactively to the Problem

- There had been very minimal work done on the church over the past century, with very little action required for the church wardens and congregation beyond a regular maintenance regime.
- Over a long period of time the lead flashing on roofs, particularly those that have not been repaired or replaced in many years will become degraded and begin to allow water into the building.
- The church wardens actively engaged with and responded to recommendations made throughout the quinquennial inspections as well as keeping a close eye on their church, and so were able to be proactive in directing their architect and dealing with the problem early.

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What work was undertaken in the church?

The first stage of the work involved two main jobs:

- To strip out all the old lead from the flashings that had degraded and replace it. This ensured that the building was once again protected from further water ingress, particularly during storm events that had likely caused some of the initial problem.
- Inside the church the work focussed on stripping the walls that had already been badly affected by the damp ingress. This was largely areas which had old plaster that, as a result of the damp, had come away from the wall.

The inside of the church is currently being allowed to dry out. In September they plan to begin the replastering process in the way that is sensitive to the look of the surrounding old plaster work. The final stage will be completed with application of a new coat of lime wash paint.

How was the repair work funded?

The repair work to the church has been funded through grants from approximately half a dozen different organisations totalling over £35,000, which accounts for well over half the total cost, but has covered all the work that has been done so far. They are expecting to raise the rest of the money to undertake the final parts of the work. The grants varied in value from the £15,000 given by the Hereford Historic Churches Trust, to 5 smaller grants between £2,000 and £4,000.

Applications were completed by the church warden with support from Hereford Diocese. Despite minimal previous experience, this process was found to be relatively simple and any problems had were easily resolved by communicating with the funding body or diocesan support officer.

How can the church remain resilient in the future?

Whilst the church has been able to fund and complete the majority of works required, there are a number of things they are continuing to do that will ensure the building continues to be protected and enjoyed in the future:

- Engaging the wider community in the life of the church. Ensuring the succession of church wardens is an important task and one that is a struggle for many churches including Kilpeck, but they are using their online presence to engage a wider audience and bring people into the church.
- Continuing to implement their maintenance plan and checking potential weak spots of the building for signs of damp.
- Maintaining a good relationship with their architect and the diocese and not being afraid to ask questions when needed, and developing skills for funding applications.

What could others learn from this case study?

1. Keep a close eye on areas of churches that you think might be particularly vulnerable and don't be afraid to communicate this with your quinquennial architect and diocese.
2. Maintaining a good, thorough maintenance regime and engaging with the recommendations given in your QI will prevent a large number of potential problems before they cause larger, more expensive problems.
3. Don't be intimidated by the funding application process, there is help available from your diocese and online to assist with it.

"Catch it early and keep a close eye… seek and trust the advice you are given"

Church Warden, Church of St Mary and St David

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