

## **The Church of England and its many parts**

Robert Piggott reflects on his Heritage Consortium placement

Undertaking a placement at the Church of England proved to be informative. One of the first things I became aware of was that the Church of England isn't singular entity - its administration is broken up into several organisations, including the Archbishops' Council, the Church Commissioners, and its Pension Board, as well as the individual dioceses and their parishes. My placement was working on the Church Heritage Record, an initiative of the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division, which sits within the Archbishops' Council and is based at Church House in Westminster.

My first weeks at Church House working were unseasonably warm and the central London location might have contributed to a feeling of having headed off on a city break. Certainly seeing Westminster Abbey from the office window and hearing Big Ben chimes at my desk was a novel experience. Obviously though I was under no illusions and was there to work. Having said that, when part of this work was to visit the expansive archive that is the Church of England's Record Centre and Lambeth Palace Library, it didn't feel too onerous. Added to that, I was also made to feel welcome in the office as a part of the team, albeit only for just over two months.

The Church Heritage Record (CHR) is a form of Historic Environment Record (HER) with individual records on each of the buildings of the Church of England. HERs are generally set up by Local Planning Authorities, mainly in order to help developers assess the impact of potential developments on the historic environment, although they are useful tools for researchers too (go to <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/> and search for a place you are interested in). The CHR has been set up to assist parishes in the permission system that the Church of England runs for authorising changes to parish churches. This is known as Faculty Jurisdiction. CHR records are used to provide a range of information on a building, including an assessment of its significant elements in order to inform the process of consent.

The CHR has over 16,000 records and will eventually provide an unparalleled resource for researchers, but as it's relatively new it's still waiting for a fair amount of the information it needs.

As well as updating some of this low-level information, my main task was to research a record to the standards of the CHR. Not exactly at random, but without much care, I chose St Augustine's, Kilburn. This was partly because of its spire, which was the tallest in London at one point, and partly because of its beautiful interior, which is filled with wall paintings and stained glass from the workshop of Clayton and Bell.

The church was also a short ride on the Number 16 bus from near where I was working and having arranged a site visit with the vicar, I and a couple of colleagues, went out to visit the church. We were treated to an impromptu tour by one of the churchwardens. This was as interesting as it was informative, and provided a good basis for describing the building for the purposes of the CHR. I combined this with a visit to Lambeth Palace Library and to the Church of England Record Centre, which are both hold a wealth of material, not only for ecclesiastical historians but for social historians too.

Updating entries on the CHR was what kept me busy through the majority of the placement, but I was also lucky enough to be able to sit in the gallery for a synod debate on the recent report of the Church Buildings Review Group, which was examining the future use and management of the Church of England's buildings, a key theme of my academic research. It was interesting to see how this

worked in practice, and the whole experience of the placement added a depth to my research which would have been unavailable otherwise.

The Church Heritage Record is being continuously updated and can be found here: <https://facultyonline.churchofengland.org/churches>. If you are interested in possibly helping out with the record, contact [julie.patenaude@churchofengland.org](mailto:julie.patenaude@churchofengland.org).