

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHURCHES



By courtesy of The National Buildings Record

Part of one of the famous City Churches wrecked in a
German Air Raid

*Published for the Central Council for the Care of Churches, by the Press and Publications Board
of the Church Assembly, 2 Great Peter Street, Westminster, S.W.1*

Price One Penny, by post Twopence

THE CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR THE CARE OF CHURCHES

The Central Council of Diocesan Advisory Committees of the Church of England
Chairman: The Very Rev. D. H. S. CRANAGE, Litt.D., F.S.A., Hon. A.R.I.B.A.,
Dean of Norwich.

Secretary: FRANCIS C. EELES, O.B.E., D.Litt., F.S.A.Scot., F.R.Hist.S.

Temporary Office: Earlham, Dunster, Somerset.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHURCHES

DAY by day, as a result of enemy action, many priceless architectural treasures are being destroyed, and of some of them not even the smallest serviceable illustrative record remains. If this lack of record continues it will be tragic, both in the case of the great architectural masterpieces, and of the small country churches, built and added to in many periods, and forming the groundwork of the history of their parishes. With them may be lost their fittings and furnishings—stained glass, woodwork, monuments, pictures and carvings.

Of less than a quarter of the churches in this country is there an adequate illustrative or descriptive survey, which would either enable a competent architect to reconstruct such parts of the building and its fittings as might be damaged, or preserve the image of the building and its contents for posterity, should it be completely destroyed.

I. WHAT THE NATIONAL SURVEY IS

For some years the Central Council has been building up a collection of records, which are of two kinds:

1. Photographs, plans, measured drawings, church guides, architects' reports, descriptive articles, newspaper cuttings, copies of inscriptions, brass rubbings, etc., which are all being filed alphabetically, each under its own church.

2. An index* of material in other collections and libraries, as follows:

- (a) The contents of collections in *public* hands, in so far as they relate to English churches. (For collections in private hands, see sections V and II 3.)
- (b) References to churches in books, the journals of learned societies, and similar publications.

This collection, which already covers many thousands of churches and is rapidly increasing, will be the only one in existence illustrative of the ecclesiastical architecture of the country as a whole. It will, therefore, serve a somewhat different purpose from that of the many excellent local collections in the hands of County Museums, Archaeological Societies, and so on. Its chief value will lie in its national and comprehensive character; every locality and every period, from Saxon to modern times, being fully represented. In this collection the student will be able, with ease, to compare the towers of Yorkshire with those of Somerset, and the ancient roofs of Cheshire with those of other districts, the screens of Devon with those of Cornwall, and so

* Work on this index, begun many years before the war, is now in abeyance, owing to the inaccessibility of many collections, and the greater urgency of other work.

on. The collection will have a further value in that it will be kept up to date, and will therefore become of increasing educational and historical importance as time goes on. It is at present housed in safety in the offices of the Central Council in Somerset, but it will be removed to Church House, Westminster as soon as circumstances permit, where it will be accessible to the public.

The extension of the collection has now become a work of first-class importance and urgency. Neither this Council nor any other body in the country has adequate funds to devote to the purpose: all that has been done already has been the work of voluntary labour, and the material filed has been presented to the Survey without cost.

II. WHAT IS REQUIRED

The Central Council is appealing for help in the formation of the National Survey of Churches under the following heads:

1. The presentation of copies of existing plans and measured drawings, and offers to make such plans and drawings.
2. Offers to make photographic records of churches. A leaflet giving full and simple directions on this subject will be sent free on request.* These can easily be made by amateurs, using any make of camera with reasonable skill, provided the directions are followed.
3. The presentation of prints from existing collections, representing either single views of scattered churches or complete surveys.
4. Offers to undertake the printing of negatives from collections placed at the disposal of the Council for this purpose.
5. The presentation of church guide books, journals of the Proceedings of learned societies containing matter relating to churches, architects' reports, etc.
6. Offers to organise the collection of records in an area of a convenient size, whether a county, a rural deanery or a few parishes.

The Council's office will be glad to answer any questions with regard to offers in any of these categories, and to receive suggestions of persons and organisations whom they might usefully approach.

III. ORGANISATION

The Council has appealed widely for help during the past few months, and now has a nucleus of photographers, small in some places, larger in others, at work in every county. Whenever possible, a local organiser, with special knowledge of the churches in his area, is appointed, to whom individuals are referred, and by whom the work is divided up, to avoid overlapping. Where no organiser has yet been found, the work is directed from the central office. In some areas, county Architectural Record Committees have been set up, which are doing excellent work in obtaining thorough surveys of the churches and of the important secular buildings of the area. One set of their ecclesiastical records is being deposited locally, and the duplicate set goes to the National Survey, which is being prepared by this Council.

The Council is working in conjunction with the National Buildings Record which has been set up by the Ministry of Works and Buildings to stimulate the indexing of existing records and the making of fresh surveys where they are needed. The National Buildings Record, the Central Council understands, is concerned with the recording of secular buildings of which no complete survey exists, and with damaged buildings of all classes. The Central Council hopes to be able to co-operate with them in the formation

* The leaflet mentioned in section 2 gives information with regard to obtaining police permits where necessary, photographic supplies of which ample stocks are available, precautions for safeguarding photographer's copyright, etc., as well as technical directions for photography.

of further county record committees, to survey buildings of all categories, when and where this becomes possible.

If you can possibly do so, will you help us with your knowledge of local people and conditions by undertaking to organise the collection of photographic and other records in your own district ?

The clergy, if personally appealed to, would probably collaborate. Help might also be obtained from such sources as the local photographic societies, professional photographers in their spare time, members of the county archaeological societies, and of the associations of architects, the staff and pupils of technical and senior schools, and so on, if the work were represented as an urgent form of national service. Modern as well as ancient churches should be included in the collection, as both categories would present some of the same elements of difficulty if extensive repair became necessary, though old churches, and ancient fittings and features in modern churches should have precedence in the present emergency.

No more detailed suggestions for organising the collection have been volunteered, as it seems best to leave it to be shaped by local circumstances and initiative, but any further details or help would be gladly given.

IV. EXISTING COLLECTIONS

The Council would be glad to hear of the whereabouts of any public or private collections of photographs, prints, drawings or descriptive matter, but it would be as well, at this point, to define its position with regard to such collections.

Public Collections.—These will be indexed, in so far as their contents relate to churches, as indicated in section I.

Private Collections.—These are in a different category from those in public hands. They can be dispersed at any time at the discretion of the owner, and are not accessible to the public. The Council considers, therefore, that it would be unprofitable to index their contents, however important they might be. The Council sincerely hopes that, in course of time, they will pass into the custody of a public body, and thus become eligible for indexing. In this connection, particular attention is drawn to the next section.

V. A SUGGESTION

If you are the owner of a collection, whether large or small, containing illustrative or descriptive matter relating to churches, may we venture to enquire if you have ever considered the question of its ultimate disposition ? The collection has probably taken many years to assemble, and perhaps represents a record of places once visited which you may not again be able to reach, or contains matter to which you are likely to want to refer from time to time. For this and other reasons you may not want to disperse it during your lifetime. If you have not already made any other arrangement will you consider bequeathing your collection to this Council by will ? In this way you will secure the permanent usefulness of your collection to the largest possible number of people. (Matter relating to foreign churches, and to English or foreign religious houses and other ecclesiastical buildings, would also be welcome for purposes of comparison.)

The full title and permanent address of the Council are: Central Council of Diocesan Advisory Committees for the Care of Churches, Church House, Westminster, London, S.W.1 [All communications during the war to Earham, Dunster, Somerset].