

PARISH HISTORY AUDIT

By the Revd Dr Neil Evans (Diocesan Director of Ministry Development)

The following introduction to the Building on History resource guide is written particularly with members of Anglican parish congregations in mind. Other helpful 'ways in' to the research guide include [How to Write a Church and Parish History](#) and [Important Historical Themes in the Diocese of London](#) (see the Building on History website for further details).

Introduction

Every parish in the London Diocese is expected to have a Mission Action Plan (MAP) or equivalent, spelling out its vision, goals and objectives (see www.london.anglican.org/MAP for further details, particularly *Introduction to Mission Action Planning*).

In order to produce an effective MAP with wide ownership it is recommended that parishes undertake background research to embed the process in the local context. This research will include a **Parish Audit** (focused particularly on the church and congregation) and a **Community Audit** (which explores the reality of the geographical parish and local demography). A further tool in producing an effective and fruitful MAP would be a **History Audit**.

What is a History Audit?

A History Audit is a process of exploring and naming the historical themes of church, congregation and neighbourhood. *It is not same as a parish history* (although there are clear links between the two).

Why do a History Audit?

Evidence suggests that history tends to repeat itself and that high dividends can be paid in naming and understanding the themes that have repeated themselves in any given situation.

How do I do a History Audit?

The process for carrying out a **History Audit** would closely resemble the **Look ~ Listen ~ Read ~ Research** pattern given in [How to Write a Church and Parish History](#) (see the Building on History website for further details), but the audit will be much more of an overview, identifying specific themes, rather than a detailed history.

Possible themes for a History Audit include:

- Church attendance (Electoral Roll and average Sunday attendance figures)
- Children and youth ministry (including numbers, focus, etc)
- Style of worship and changes in worship
- Use of the church and buildings; architectural developments and changes in use
- Length of stay and profiles of incumbents
- Recurring themes in PCC minutes, parish magazines, etc
- Patterns of lay leadership
- Issues and initiatives in outreach, mission and evangelism
- Church music
- Social, funding raising and other church events
- Finance
- Church and congregation planting
- Socio demographic changes in parish population and church congregation

For advice on how to find out about these themes see [How to write a Church and Parish History](#) (see the Building on History website for further details).

Whilst undertaking a History Audit it is worth considering these questions:

- Can you identify and name cultural themes?
- Is there evidence of significant, ground-breaking change taking place? If so, what events or actions enabled these to take place?
- Are there clear sticking points that nobody has ever managed to address?

Naming the Themes

There is enormous power in the naming of particular issues and themes for two specific reasons:

1. The accepted wisdom of what it was like 'in the good old days' (or 'bad old days'!) may not actually be true when researched in detail (the myth of the full church is one good example of this).
2. There will almost certainly be issues and themes which recur throughout the history of a church which no one has ever really explored and identified (for example, the cry that 'we can't get people to attend the Harvest Festival service' might be researched to discover that for 150 years the Harvest Festival service has been poorly attended; does this say something?).

See the Building on History website for some **History Audit** case studies.

References

Walter Wink *Naming the Powers* (1984)
Rick Warren *Purpose driven Church* (1995)
Bob Jackson *Hope for the Church* (2002)

This document is online at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/history-audit.htm>