The Methodist Church

The Methodist Property Office – Resourcing Mission

Inspection, Care and Maintenance of Methodist Buildings - A Guide to their Annual Inspection

Information leaflet
Schedules A/C

Introduction

The conscientious maintenance of our buildings does not, perhaps, provide much glamour but it has been referred to as a "sacrament of the paint-brush, scrubbing brush, garden hoe and spade".

The prevention of decay is not only better than cure but it is also cheaper since much expensive work can be minimised by prompt action. An annual inspection of the fabric (see Schedule 'A') should be made by a responsible person to supplement the quinquennial inspection and immediate action taken when defects are found. Do not postpone treatment because of expense - next year the cost will have increased considerably and many of the most expensive repairs are due to neglect. Better, insist that the Church Council's annual budget caters realistically for regular repair (see the leaflet "Local Church Budgeting for Property"). Find out if, in addition to fund raising, grant aid is available. Call upon those amongst the membership who have skills and knowledge to help.

In the British climate the majority of problems in buildings are caused by dampness, particularly when associated with a lack of adequate air movement. Timber decay, metal corrosion and masonry deterioration may all follow and thus the primary concern in building maintenance must be keeping damp out and promoting ventilation. Rot infection is one defect which can become apparent between major inspections. The Building Research Establishment has stated that the principles which govern successful eradication of decay are - *"the prevention of further entry of dampness into the structure of the building, drying out the moisture which has already entered, dealing with the fungus and repair of the damage it has caused"*. These principles hold good whether the outbreak is small and in a tiny chapel or extensive in a large church.

Cracks in ceilings, walls and floors can cause panic in the observer and once the crack is seen, it is amazing how many more appear! Unless rapid deterioration is obvious, minor cracks can be marked at each end by a fine line and perhaps the date added - all without ostentation. Check in a couple of weeks' time and if the crack has extended beyond the marks, then call in your quinquennial inspector and give him the full, plain facts. Otherwise, check again each month until you are satisfied that there is no extension or additional related cracking.

Wilful damage to property and the dumping of rubbish have been found to be less likely if the building and grounds are well cared for. The first piece of litter attracts the next and the neglected broken window encourages the half-brick.

The notes which follow are intended as a brief summary for the help of those concerned with inspection and maintenance. Remember that experience counts in assessing defects so seek advice if you suspect major problems or feel out of your depth.

A: The Site And Building Surroundings

Paving, Grounds and Boundaries: Check that pavings are free from cracks or holes which could cause injury. Keep clear of moss and leaves.

Check that boundary walls or fences are in good condition and repair as necessary. Pay particular attention to any bulges in walls where collapse could cause injury or landslip.

Repointing should be carried out with care and with particular regard to mortar mix (normally one part cement, one part hydraulic lime, six parts sand) and to character. Flush pointing is generally preferred. Avoid "strap" pointing which stands proud of the face and overlaps the edges of the stones. (see also later notes concerning Listed Buildings and those of Special Interest) If in doubt, it is better to consult your Quinquennial Inspector for an appropriate specification.

Keep grass cut - large areas may be treated with a growth retardant but discuss with the local Parks Department or a reputable landscape contractor if this is considered.

Trees: Discuss felling or pruning of trees with a specialist and remember that the removal of a number of trees can affect ground water and thus foundations just as much as the rapid growth of young trees.

Trees in church grounds are often subject to a preservation order so first check with your local Planning Office if major pruning or felling is to be considered.

Nevertheless, remove all saplings, self-sown seedling shrubs and trees which are close to the building or boundary walls.

Consider carefully any proposals for additional planting of trees or substantial shrubs. This may be suggested by church members or conservation bodies in a laudable attempt to enhance the grounds but care in the selection of species is essential. (See book list)

Drainage: Manhole covers should be lifted for inspection and drains flushed to ensure that they are running freely and without blockage

B: General Structure And Walls

Prefabricated or System Buildings: Generally, the lighter

construction of this type of building whilst satisfactory is less tolerant of neglect than traditional construction and thus inspections and resulting repairs must be carried out conscientiously.

Types of construction used vary but is frequently a lightweight timber or steel frame is combined with large rigid infill panels. Any structural movement cannot then be taken up in a multiplicity of small joints as in brickwork and the movement between panels may be comparatively greater and the jointing must be made good with purpose-made elastic compounds which are usually obtained from the local builders' merchant. The framework is usually formed of members sized by calculation rather than by the empirical methods used in old buildings and this should be borne in mind before, for example, using ceiling joists to support storage which was not originally intended.

Good quality work will employ new materials such as preservative treatments, sealants and plastics together with new methods of construction but, with some exceptions, maintenance methods are commonsense and similar to those of traditional buildings.

Walls: There should not normally be much deterioration between quinquennial inspections unless the inspector's report has been ignored or settlement taken place. Nonetheless, check externally for defective pointing and that all air-bricks are clear of rubbish to permit free ventilation to roof and underfloor voids. Note and mark any cracks or bulges and call for professional advice if a marked deterioration is suspected. Remove ivy and tree or shrub seedlings and weeds at the base of walls. Check prevention of entry of birds to towers and roof spaces.

C: Roof Structure And Coverings

Roofs: Generally, try to inspect during or after a period of rainfall and first check internally for signs of damp penetration, stains on ceilings or floors and marks of water-runs on external walls at high level. Obtain good vantage points, if necessary from neighbouring buildings, in order to gain a good view of the roof(s). The use of binoculars will be an advantage. Check for displaced, loose or missing flashings and cement angle fillets. Check all roof lights, dormers and clerestory windows for leaks and check that condensation grooves and weepholes are clear.

Pitched roofs: Check for broken, slipped or missing slates or tiles and ridge and hip tiles. Check pointing of ridges, hips and copings.

Flat roofs: Check for cracks in upstands and junctions with walls, kerbs and roof lights. Lead or zinc coverings may eventually crack along lines of stress and perforations can occur in old material. Asphalt may "creep" along slopes and upstands and, as with felts and polymer sheets, may bubble, especially where exposed to the direct **heat of the sun.** Cracking due to fatigue of the material or physical damage eventually occurs in the bubbles and in the angles against walls and kerbs. Check that a solar reflective finish in the form of chippings or special paint provides a complete cover and that the surface is free of moss.

Temporary repairs may be applied using bituminous-based compounds or bandages under several trade names but only for minor defects and if professional or specialist advice cannot be obtained immediately. Such repairs must be regarded as only first aid until proper treatment is available.

When renewal of coverings to flat roofs, especially those covered in bituminous felt, is required consideration should be given to provision of high performance polymer which is much more cost effective.

Lightning Conductor: Check that the terminals and tapes are intact and firmly fixed.

D: Rainwater Disposal

Check all gutters, outlets and fall-pipes for drips or leaks. Badly fitting joints or cracks are often indicated by green algae on walls, drip stains on the ground and dampness inside the building. Ensure that gutters are clear of debris and leaves, that outlets are not blocked by balls and that wire balloons are in position at the top of fall-pipes.

Special attention should be given to lead-lined stone or cast iron gutters which sit on the top of external walls and to valley and parapet gutters. Any defects should always receive specialist repair.

This inspection is best carried out during rainfall s o that any leaks are visible and it is possible to check that there is a free flow of water throughout the system. Painting may be reduced if plastic (uPVC) goods are used but never replace gutters or pipes with fittings of a smaller size than the original.

Gullies must be kept clear of soil, gravel, leaves and rubbish. Check that gratings are in position and that no overflow takes place in normal heavy rain.

Managing trustees are strongly advised to enter into a contract with a local builder for the cleaning out of gutters and downpipes once a year.

E: External Doors & Windows

Check frames, especially sills, for decay by pushing a fine screwdriver or knife into frames. You've got problems if it goes in like a knife through butter! Check operation of opening sashes. Repair locks, sash-cords and oil hinges as required. Replace broken glazing, preferably using a vandal-resistant material (note the type used so that for future repairs the same material can be used). The additional initial cost is usually worthwhile expenditure.

F: External Decorations

Check external painting and make good any defects in the protection of joinery. The particular exposure of the building will dictate the frequency of repainting but it should be at least every five years. Internal redecoration will be required when dictated by dirt or defects in the plaster or timber backing. A phased redecoration is kinder on the collection plate than major works which may be delayed or even abandoned because of high cost.

G: Ceilings, Walls, Partitions & Doors

Ceilings: Check for bulges and any extensive cracking which may precede the collapse of an area of plaster. Hairline or thin isolated cracks seldom indicate serious problems. New bubbling or flaking of painted surfaces should be investigated as indicative of damp penetration or rot infection.

Walls and partitions: Internally, check for signs of damp penetration and for deterioration of plaster surfaces and timber dados and rails which may indicate early signs of rot or insect attack.

Doors: Check that all internal doors are operational; check that doors forming part of fire protection or means of escape are not blocked or locked shut.

H: Floors & Balconies Etc

Floors: Check for any excessive "spring" in timber floors by jumping or bouncing at mid-span. This can indicate decay in joists or loose bearings. Check for uneven surfaces in boarding or wood blocks - and in carpets - or proud-standing nails which could cause someone to trip. Ensure that the sub-floor is well ventilated (is there enough draught to "wobble" a candle flame?) and remove all rubbish including old hymnbooks, the remains of the last jumble sale and stored trestle tables!

Solid Floors: Check any cracking which may first be indicated by defects in the tile or block finishes. The cause of such cracks should be diagnosed by a professionally qualified consultant as these could be symptoms of settlement or heave.

Staircases and Ramps: Check for firmness and for any defects especially to nosings which may be dangerous to elderly or disabled people. See later notes on Health and Safety and the DDA. Are the premises accessible to people who are impaired in any way?

Voids: Where access is not possible to voids, especially roof and floor voids, inspection hatches should be provided to facilitate detailed inspection. Discuss the size and location of such hatches with your quinquennial inspector.

J: Heating System

Plumbing and Heating Installation: A proper examination and test should be made of the heating apparatus each summer before the heating season begins. The managing trustees should consider arranging an inspection and maintenance contract.

K: Electrical Installation and appliances

Electrical Installation: Installations should be checked by a specialist contractor at the time of the quinquennial inspection and any defects rectified immediately. Minor defects may occur or additional outlets **be required between these major inspections.**

A list of specialist contractors local to your area can be obtained from the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC). The address of NICEIC is Vintage House, 37 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7UJ, tel: 0207 582 7746. Under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, unqualified persons must not meddle!

Considerable permanent damage to the appearance of a building can be caused by thoughtless surface wiring - by telephone engineers also - so consider the installation carefully or call in your architect for advice.

Electrical Equipment: Under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, where one or more persons are employed in a church under a contract of employment, all electrical equipment (as distinct from electrical installations) should be checked at least once a year by a "competent person".

L: Kitchen & Sanitary Facilities

Check for dripping taps, valves and joints and repair before autumn. Check overflows - a constant drip may indicate that a new washer is needed on a ball valve. Check the floor behind WC pans for signs of leaking which can lead to rot in timber. Do the stop valves or taps work? Are there any signs of leaking in the storage or expansion tanks and are any supporting brackets in good condition? Check that controls are protected against misuse.

M: Fire Precautions

Ensure that all escape routes are free from hindrance and that exit doors are operable. Check that statutory signs are in position and legible. Check that all fire fighting equipment is in position and has not been vandalised.

Arrange for an annual test of extinguishers in accordance with the approved British Standard by a specialist contractor. Consider contacting the Connexional Fire Precautions Adviser, Mr Colin Domville, 64 Monks Drive, Formby, Liverpool, L37 6DW, tel: 017048 75597, with a view to joining the extremely cost-effective programme for the provision and maintenance of fire extinguishers etc, which is provided by Kidde Thorn Ltd on recommendation of Mr Domville.

Church premises should be provided with one 9 litre water/gas extinguisher or a 6 litre AFFF Multi Spray (foam) or equivalent fire extinguisher for each 210 sq metres (250 sq yards) of floor area with a minimum of two on each floor.

Kitchens should be equipped with a 1 sqm (3' x 3') fire blanket and a 2 litre AFFF Multi Spray (foam) or equivalent fire extinguisher.

Oil fired boilers and the larger electrical distribution boards should be protected with one 2kg Dry Powder extinguisher.

Electronic organs and office equipment should be protected with a 2 litre AFFF Multi Spray (foam) or equivalent extinguisher.

N: Health & Safety

Carry out Health and Safety assessment as detailed by Methodist Insurance (Self-Assessment Form available from MI or from Methodist Property Office) (see Property Points 2001/1) Simple checks on safety mean reducing the likelihood of accidents. For instance a worn or torn area of lino or carpet is a hazard, particularly to those with any visual impairment.

P: Facilities For The Disabled

Compliance with this legislation is not an option, it is a legal requirement and will also improve facilities for all users of the buildings, not just those with impairments. Some form of disability affects many of us (not just the 4% of disabled who are wheelchair-bound)

Carry out audit in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act (see Property Points 2001/1)

Q: Furniture & Fittings

Organ: Check for damp penetration and sound fabric in the organ chamber. Remove rubbish and odd items of furniture stored out of sight. Check that the annual tuning and maintenance has been carried out.

Furniture: Check that all loose furniture is in good condition; and damage has been repaired. Dispose of all unwanted and surplus items of furniture and fittings

Budgeting For Maintenance Expenses: Experience suggests that a church should set aside monies each year for major repairs, regular maintenance, renewals and redecoration rather than rely upon special efforts when an emergency arises. At least a third of the churches that close do so because adequate provision has not been made annually for the upkeep of the property.

Maintenance expenses begin immediately a new building is completed and thought should, therefore, be given even at the planning stage to means of securing sufficient finance for regular maintenance. A very rough guide to routine annual maintenance costs is the sum of 0.5% of the Capital Replacement Cost, that is the current construction cost of a new building of the same size and floor area as the present building, excluding site value and VAT. To this sum must be added the cost of :

i External redecoration at about 5 year intervals

ii Refurbishing the heating system, replacing softwood timber windows and recovering felt flat roofs at about 15/20 year intervals.

iii Replacement of plastic gutters and general refurbishment of fittings, kitchens etc at about 30 year intervals.

iv Recovering pitched roofs and asphalt flat roofs at about 60 year intervals.

Listed Buildings and Those Of Special Interest

Some buildings are of particular importance, being of special architectural or historic interest and official protection is given through their listing and the designation of conservation areas. Also some buildings have a special place in the affection of Methodists because of their place in the history of the Connexion. Special care must be taken to maintain the fabric of such buildings in a manner which will not affect their character by reason of inappropriate extension, partial demolition or the use of cement rendering, plastic window frames or unsympathetic roofing material.

Although ecclesiastical buildings in ecclesiastical use enjoy the benefit of "ecclesiastical exemption" from Listed Building and Conservation Area Control by the local planning authority, the approval of the **Connexional Property Committee** is required for any works which may affect the character of the building. This includes works to the interior. When alterations to a chapel that is listed or in a conservation area are proposed, the **Methodist Property Office** should be consulted at the earliest possible stage. *Also see leaflet "Listed Buildings and Buildings in Conservation Areas".*

There may be a conflict of interests between various statutory bodies such as in considering smoke stop screens and fire escapes. It is essential that any such alterations, repairs, removal of fittings and the like should be **considered under the advice of a knowledgeable architect, and the approval of the** Connexional Property Comm**ittee obtained before any action is taken.**

Conclusion

Anything which you find during your inspection which concerns or puzzles you should be referred to your quinquennial inspector who will advise you or refer the problem to a specialist. Your consultants are there to help you and share your concern for your premises.

Further Reading

Amongst a growing number of books concerned with maintenance, these have proved useful -

Technical Note No 44 - Decay in buildings; recognition, prevention and cure Obtainable free from: The Building Research Establishment , Garston Watford, WD2 7JR.

Building Defects and Maintenance Published by: MTP Construction 1974 - a collection of relevant Digests originally published by the BRE.

The Care and Conservation of Georgian Houses Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee Published by the Architectural Press 1980. *A maintenance manual with excellent guidance not necessarily confined to houses or to the Georgian period - highly recommended.*

Fire Precautions for Church Premises K. Colam - available from **Methodist Property Office** published by the Churches Main Committee(£2.00)

A Guide to Church Inspection and Repairs Published by Church Information Office CIO Publishing, Deans Yard, London ,SW1P 3NZ

How to look after your Church Council for Care of Churches published by Church Information Office

Tree Roots and Buildings D. F. Cutler and I. B. K. Richardson, Construction Press 1981

The Repair of Historic Buildings Christopher Brereton Published by English Heritage, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London, W1X 1AB

Health and Safety Methodist Insurance's Self-Assessment Form Brazenose House Brazenose Street Manchester M2 5AS)

Disability Discrimination Act Numerous guidance sheets etc, including “Through the Roof” – Churches and the Disability Discrimination Act. Published by Through the Roof, P O Box 178, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 1YN
The Church Action on Disability (50 Scrutton Street , London, EC2 4XQ) produce an Access Audit for Churches (£2.50)

Methodist Property Office , Resourcing Mission, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ tel 0161 236 5194 Fax 0161 236 8908 e mail enquiries@property.org.uk website www.methodist.org.uk
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