

A woman with short grey hair and glasses is looking at a model of a church building. The model is a detailed miniature of a Gothic-style church with a prominent steeple and a blue banner with a gold cross. The background shows the interior of a church with wooden pews and a blue banner with a gold cross.

CHURCH RECORDERS' HANDBOOK

Created by Scotland's Churches Trust, as part of an Historic Environment Scotland supported pilot project, to assist future volunteers with recording the contents of Scotland's closing church buildings.



Contents Page	
1.0	Purpose p3
2.0	Project Background p3
3.0	Approaching a church for permission to record p6
4.0	Recording Methodology
4.1	Google Form p7
4.2	Equipment p10
4.3	Method p10
4.4	Photography p14
4.5	What to record p16
5.0	Safety p16
6.0	Report Writing p17
7.0	Uploading data to the HES Archives P19
8.0	Acknowledgements p20
9.0	Appendices
9.1	Suggested further reading p21
9.2	Further resources and information p21

This handbook is one of a series of documents produced by the office team and volunteers at Scotland's Churches Trust as part of an Historic Environment Scotland supported pilot project.

Set in Calibri 12pt and 14 pt by Scotland's Churches Trust, 15 North Bank Street, Edinburgh, EH1 2LP,

1.0 - Purpose

Many excellent organisations, such as Scottish Church Heritage Research and the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS) and other national and local built heritage groups, have developed and operated, over many years, rolling or intermittent programmes of church recording. This initiative is not intended to replace, replicate or reinvent any of the fine work done by these superb organisations.

This project is intended to empower small groups of volunteers, equipped with little more than a smartphone and a tape measure, to make rapid records of the contents of Scotland's closing churches.



2.0 - Project Background

Scotland's occasionally complicated, sometimes convoluted and sporadically turbulent history of religious activity over the last half a millennium has bequeathed to contemporary Scots a rich stock of a little under 3000 buildings that are, at least on paper, still in use today as places of regular worship and community gathering.

Over the centuries, schisms or internal differences within religious denominations led to new churches being built by dissenting congregations, often quite close to existing church buildings. As generations passed, many of these denominations have reunited, often leading to a surplus of buildings, being used by ever smaller congregations.

The changing relationship between Scots and organized religions since the mid-20th century has also radically diminished regular attendance for worship at these buildings. According to a 2017 Scottish

Social Attitudes Survey, the proportion of people in Scotland identifying as having no religion was six in ten, an 18% increase since 1999 when it stood at four in ten¹.



Changing demographics and falling attendance figures have provided both a philosophical and a financial challenge to the denominational owners of large portfolios of religious buildings. These often large, historic structures are usually costly and difficult to maintain, heat and, where necessary, repair and restore. For decades, religious buildings deemed surplus to requirements have slowly trickled onto the open market. Sometimes these have found new public uses, taken over by other denominations or faith groups, or as community venues, or for various business ventures.

Many churches have been converted into private homes and, sadly all too often, many have been demolished to make way for other buildings.

In 2019, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, aware that it possessed close to half of the church buildings then in use for worship in Scotland, signaled its desire to review its property portfolio and internal governance structures. Presbyteries were instructed to work with their congregations to produce local area “Mission Plans” that would help make the church fit for purpose in contemporary Scotland.²

In practice, this would mean the rationalisation and shared use of buildings, leading to the planned disposal of buildings across the country. The process only really got under way post-pandemic, after the majority of church buildings had spent many months and sometimes even whole years closed to the public. This period of enforced closure exacerbated many of the existing fabric issues with many - of the buildings, encouraging a much-accelerated disposal programme than many had originally predicted.

The slow trickle of church sales continued throughout the three years of “Mission Planning”, which officially closed at the end of December 2022. Buildings were internally categorised as “A”, meaning they are safe from disposal until the next round of Mission Planning or “B”, meaning they are for short-term disposal. Working estimates in February 2023 for church disposal in the next few years suggest the



¹ <https://www.scotcen.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/july/scots-with-no-religion-at-record-level/>

² <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/presbytery-planning>

Church of Scotland will close around 30% of its churches, or between 350 and 400 buildings.



With this social backdrop and with other denominations, similarly charged with maintaining costly church buildings, looking on and mulling over which of theirs to keep, Scotland's Churches Trust approached Historic Environment Scotland in 2019 about potentially supporting a pilot national church recording initiative. Rather than concentrate upon the architectural features and built fabric of these buildings, which we must hope will survive their sale relatively intact, our

project aims to record the moveable contents of each church – the hundreds of fragile artefacts gathered within each building by their local communities, often over many generations, which will inevitably be removed and scattered after the church is closed.

Initially launching in early 2020, our volunteers attempted to get the pilot project off the ground just as COVID appeared. Over the months that followed, as regulations allowed, our volunteers began to visit some churches and keep the initiative alive. They recorded and produced short reports on Dysart St Clair, Sullom and Uyeasound in Shetland and Viewforth Parish Church in Kirkcaldy.

Due to staff changes at our Trust and the inevitable vagaries of public engagement with such initiatives during a pandemic, it wasn't until late summer of 2022 that we were once again able to re-boot the project and effectively start all over again. After beginning a recruitment drive and seeking out churches that were likely to close, in August and September our volunteers visited and recorded the contents of Greenside Parish Church in Edinburgh, Innerwick and Oldhamstocks Parish Churches in East Lothian, and in February 2023 they visited Portnahaven and Kilmeny in Islay and Morham in East Lothian.



3.0 – Approaching a church for permission to record

It is absolutely essential that permission is sought from the appropriate church officer, minister, priest, pastor or session clerk **before** attempting to make a record of any church building, even if that building is normally open to the public.

The ownership status of church buildings within different denominations can be subtly different. If you have a contact in the congregation or you perhaps know the officiating clergy person, reach out to them to explain the purpose of the initiative and, if it would be helpful, give them our contact details and we can tell them more. If you do not have that personal “in”, drop the church office a line or contact them via their social media page and ask for the most appropriate person to speak to.

The Church of Scotland, as the single biggest owner of church buildings in the country and the institution that is currently disposing of the most churches, have kindly agreed that groups affiliated with Scotland’s Churches Trust can proceed with making a record of their buildings. They will be notifying their local presbyteries about this, asking them to let local congregations know.

Throughout your dealings with the local church, it is important to be very sensitive to exactly what is going on during the closure process. Many congregations are understandably upset and still coming to terms with the pending loss of their beloved church buildings. Most members of a congregation have probably known and perhaps used these buildings their entire lives, for worship, but also as places of fellowship and community. Times of incredible joy and happiness as well as moments of mournful sadness and deep contemplation have all been marked in those pews.

After many, many generations of communal access to and use of these church buildings, often reaching back over several centuries, individuals and communities across Scotland are going through a grieving process for the loss of a much-treasured, local, spiritual “home”. When approaching a church to make a recording, please bear this in mind and tread sensitively and carefully.

When speaking with members of a congregation or church officers about the closure, you occasionally may encounter sadness, anger, despair or other complicated emotions usually experienced during a grieving process. When the recording session eventually takes place, it is worth considering building in a little time for at least one volunteer for ‘grief’-counselling duties. That conversation can also be incredibly important for the recording session too as the volunteer can learn vast amounts of information about the church, its contents and its social history that may be included, with the participants permission, in any eventual report on the church.

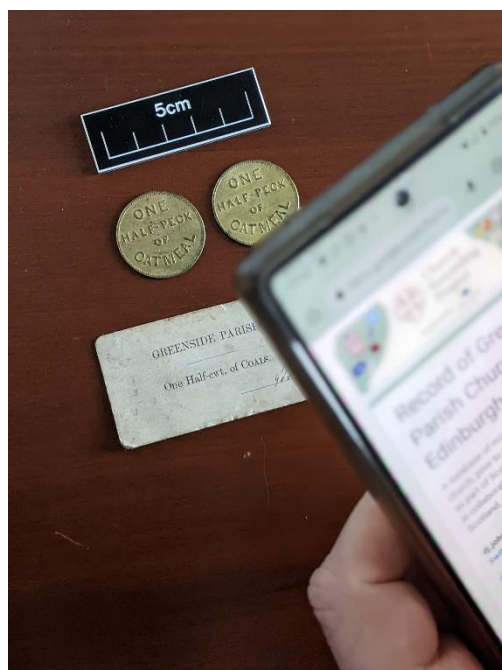
As these buildings enter a new phase in their long history, one we hope that will ensure their survival and long-term care, it is our earnest hope that any recording activity that can be done by willing volunteers will provide some small crumb of comfort to departing congregations during this difficult time. It is so important that a record of the love and human investment by current and previous congregations in these buildings is made for future generations to better appreciate and understand what once took place within those old stone walls.

When arranging permission to make a record of the contents of the church please ensure that the congregation are fully aware that all photographs taken and all recording notes made by volunteers will be eventually be made publicly available for future researchers to access in the HES Archives. Written permission from the church to record is always preferable to ensure that all parties involved are completely clear about what exactly is planned. Responsibility for this rests with the lead volunteer of each recording group, Scotland's Churches Trust and the HES Archive team cannot take any responsibility for any agreement that has been reached between volunteer church recorders and the church being recorded.

If the congregation raises any concerns relating to particular items in their care, for example about the security of communion-ware if its location was divulged in a public report, it would probably be best to exclude such items from any published record. HES can also delay any deposited records from going online for up to twelve months, giving time for the building to be sold, but the Archive team will need to be kept apprised of any reasons for implementing such an embargo (see Section 7.0).

4.0 – Recording Methodology

As our project's aim is to empower a national network of volunteers to record the hundreds of, often small, moveable artefacts in church buildings, our ambition is to make that process as simple as possible. This handbook is not intended to provide a detailed glossary of ecclesiastical building terminology or basic lessons in church building survey techniques, other excellent sources are available for that purpose.³

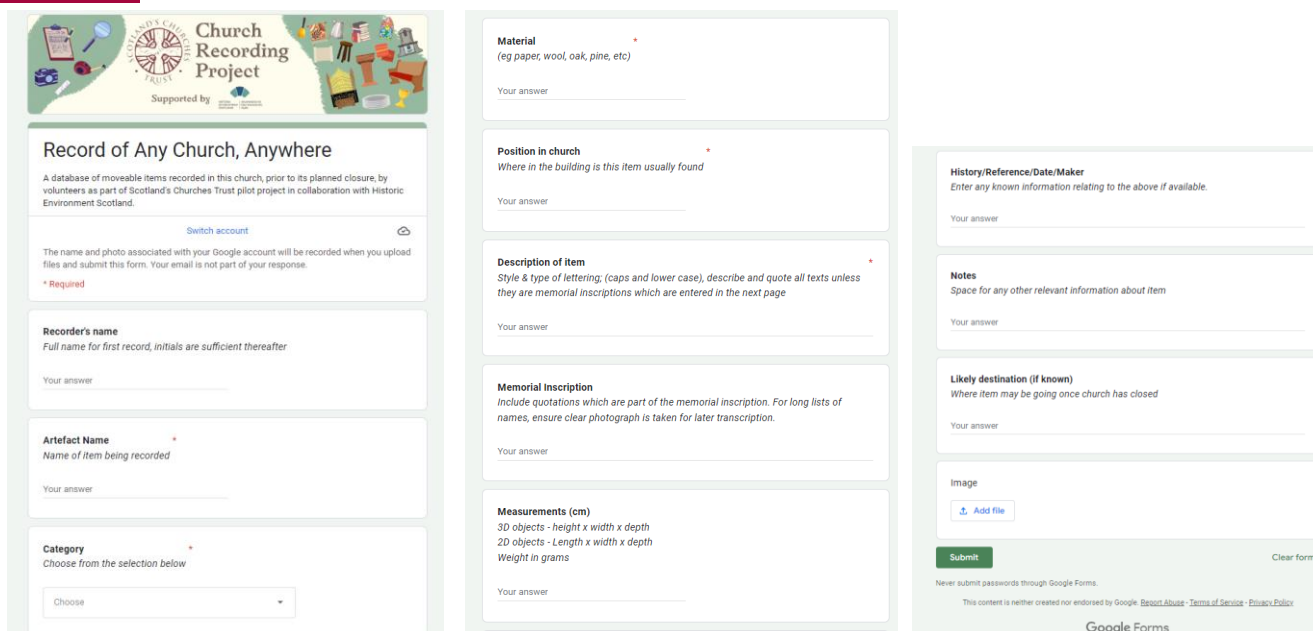


Instead, our office team and core volunteers developed a simple process for church recorders to use their smartphones or tablets to record descriptions and up to five photographs of the many moveable items in the churches that they would visit. This involved creating a simple Google Form for each individual church, that users could easily and simply connect with, allowing them to send their data straight to a central cloud storage, collating that data and making available for further analysis by the project lead after the recording session.

4.1 – Google Form

Prior to visiting a church our volunteers were sent a link to a practice form and encouraged to record a lamp, chair, table or any other items around their homes to practice using the technology.

³ We would recommend two in particular *Recording a Church: An Illustrated Glossary* produced by the Council of British Archaeology and *Inside Churches: A Guide to Church Furnishings* published by The Arts Society. These provide basic and useful primers in the various terminology used to label and describe items and architectural features in church buildings.



The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "Church Recording Project" supported by Historic Environment Scotland. The form is divided into several sections:

- Record of Any Church, Anywhere:** Includes a description of the project and a "Switch account" link.
- Recorder's name:** A text field for the full name, with a note that initials are sufficient for subsequent records.
- Artefact Name:** A text field for the name of the item being recorded.
- Category:** A drop-down menu for selecting the item's category.
- Material:** A text field for the material of the item (e.g., paper, wool, oak, pine, etc.).
- Position in church:** A text field for the location of the item within the building.
- Description of item:** A text field for a detailed description, including lettering style and memorial inscriptions.
- Memorial inscription:** A text field for the inscription text, with instructions to include quotations and take a clear photograph.
- Measurements (cm):** A text field for dimensions (3D objects: height x width x depth; 2D objects: length x width x depth) and weight in grams.
- History/Reference/Date/Maker:** A text field for any known information related to the item.
- Notes:** A text field for any other relevant information.
- Likely destination (if known):** A text field for where the item might go after the church closes.
- Image:** A section for uploading an image of the item, with an "Add file" button.

The form includes a "Submit" button, a "Clear form" link, and a footer with Google Forms branding and a disclaimer: "Never submit passwords through Google Forms. This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google. Report Abuse - Terms of Service - Privacy Policy".

(Screenshots of the online recording form sent to volunteers in advance of church recording sessions to practice with, recording various items around their homes)

The Google Form takes the user through step-by-step questions for each item that they log. Most boxes allow the entry of free text, such as "Artefact Name" or "Position in Church" but the "Category" box offers a drop-down of the specific artefact categories that we have settled upon:

- **Archival Materials** (Photographs, ledgers, hand-written or typed documents, leaflets, newsletters, locally printed songsheets and other materials related to or generated by the church officers or congregation. Usually items of local or site-specific interest that the county or national archives would most likely be interested in)
- **Library** (Any printed books, religious texts of any kind, songbooks, novels, guidebooks, etc that are found in the church building. This could include, as it did in one recent church, a small lending library of fiction lent to the clubs historically associated with the church).
- **Memorials** (All memorial plaques, panels and signs that are not associated with specific pieces of furniture, be they war memorials, commemorating events or memorialising individuals or groups).
- **Metalwork** (Any wholly or predominantly metal artefacts in the building, including communion ware, communion tokens, candlesticks, brasses, chalices, alms dishes, metal furniture or other appropriate items).
- **Miscellaneous** (This is for the uncategorised items, the various one-off or small groups of artefacts found in every church that do not easily fit into longer lists, such as clocks, the occasional moveable stone items, lighting, etc. Volunteers can use their best judgement here).
- **Musical Instruments** (Anything that can play a note or tune, eg pipe or electric organ, harmonium, handbell, guitar, etc)

- **Paintings, murals, wallcoverings, portraits, etc** (Anything found hanging upon or painted directly onto the church walls or perhaps in storage that previously hung on the walls. This includes painted panels, mural work, photo portraits, prints, paintings, decorative items and pretty much most things that are glazed or framed).
- **Textiles** (Any items made of natural or synthetic materials found in the church, eg altar falls, rugs, linens, tablecloths, doilies, vestments, cushions, runners, etc)
- **Stonework** (Any *moveable* stone items that are not part of the building's fabric, eg fonts, crosses, screens, statues, fragments of graves, earlier buildings or other similar items.)
- **Windows** (All decorative windows, internal or external, found in the church building)
- **Wood furnishings** (Any wooden furniture found within the building, including the pulpit, pews, chairs, tables, lecterns, donation boxes and anything else made of wood).

These categories are not exhaustive. If appropriate, we can work with a local group to introduce a new category if the church they intend to record merits this.

Once sent the appropriate URL for the church to be recorded, volunteers were encouraged to “add to home screen” on their phone or tablet, rendering the Google Form as an easily accessible app on their device home screens when they are later in the church.

The only (inevitable) drawback to this system was the availability of wifi or a 3/4/5G connection. For anyone with low data, we provided a mobile hotspot for them to tether their device onto. Where no signal could be detected, groups simply reverted to paper forms to record their items and used their phone cameras. Volunteers who could not input data at the time, simply used the same URL later and transferred their written notes to the Google Form, along with any relevant photographs. This can be done on their mobile devices or they can do it on a laptop onto which they have also moved their photographs.

If forced to process notes at a later date, it is important to set realistic deadlines with volunteers. If the volunteer is unlikely to have the time to complete the task it might be better to ask them for their completed written forms and ask them to send you their photographs. To maintain the quality and size of photographs, do not ask them to be sent via an app such as WhatsApp as this will reduce considerably the quality of each image. Try a free service such as WeTransfer or other cloud-sharing Service to send these.

Once the recording session is complete, the lead volunteer who has access to the backend of the Google Form should give a quick check over the spreadsheet and images to ensure that they have uploaded correctly. If any appear to be missing, the lead volunteer can reach out to the recorder and ask for the image to be resent before they delete it from their device. We shall further discuss the actual use of the form in section 2.3.

4.2 – Equipment

Volunteers supplied their own smartphones or tablets (or digital cameras if not using the mobile upload), but other equipment and material that we provided for their use on the day included:

- Photographic scales of varying sizes
- Measuring tapes
- Measuring laser
- Measuring calipers
- Notepads and pens
- Magnifying glasses
- Binoculars
- Torches
- First aid kit
- Hand Sanitiser
- Packed lunches and hot drinks!

For new groups of volunteers, if you do not already possess these items, all of this equipment, except the laser, can be picked up relatively cheaply online. There are also a number of websites that offer photo scales that can be printed at home (if doing this though be sure to calibrate the printout against a ruler or tape measure).

4.3 – Method

If at all possible, the recording session organiser should try to arrange a very quick recce of the building in advance of the arranged recording day, to better understand the extent and number of items likely to be recorded (see appendix 9.1). Depending on the number of volunteers, the contents of a small church could be recorded in a single day, if recorders are carefully allocated rooms or categories to work with and monitored to ensure no duplication of effort.

Once allocated a particular artefact, volunteers are encouraged to examine it from every angle before beginning the process of recording, use their magnifying glass if necessary. Many unexpected and important details are found this way. Some examples being:

- Books – Be sure to look inside front and back covers and first few pages for dedications or handwritten notes. Carefully riffle through the books for other notes in margins or bookmarks.
- Metal vessels – Silver or pewter vessels will often have hall marks or other makers' marks on their undersides and occasionally elsewhere if the vessel was made in several pieces. Larger vessels intended to hold large quantities of liquid might also have excise marks, showing the sovereign's seal and the quantity involved (like a modern pint glass). Metal items sometimes

also have words scratched into them on their undersides, noting the donator or other information.

- Pews – Sometimes reused from other buildings, pews can have carvings in unusual places, such as against walls or blocked by other furniture. Be sure to look underneath the pews for features such as hat-holders and check for graffiti (mostly found in the rear seating!).
- China and ceramics – If practical to do so, turn over and look at the underside for makers marks. If it's a vase at the back of a cupboard, check the side facing away, it may have a different design on it.
- Large items of furniture – Those who donate items are often shy about their actions and plaques can be found in the most unusual places. Sometimes it's necessary to get down on your hands and knees to have a look with a torch at the base of a reredos (large screen behind an altar), around the rear of a pulpit or under a table. There may be a plaque or a helpful note left by a previous church officer that is worth recording, or maybe even a bit of graffiti left by another errant child.
- Paintings, carvings and other artworks – Artists' signatures can be hidden in the most unusual of places, from the bottom corners to anywhere at all within the work. Again, a torch and a magnifying glass may be very helpful here. If safe to peek behind a frame do so carefully, but do **not** attempt if the item is at all likely to fall.
- Stained glass windows – As with paintings above, the stained glass artist can sometimes hide their signature in plain sight.

Once ready to record, volunteers should answer each question as prompted by the Google Form.

Recorder's name
Full name for first record, initials are sufficient thereafter

Your answer

Important so that any later queries, if any are necessary can be made with appropriate volunteer.

Artefact Name *

Name of item being recorded

Your answer

A name for the item that will be used in any later report produced from this recording data.

Category *

Choose from the selection below

Choose

Choose

- Archival material (church records, rolls, etc)
- Library (assorted books, hymnals, prayer books, etc)
- Memorials
- Metalwork
- Miscellaneous
- Musical instruments
- Paintings, murals, wallcoverings, etc
- Stonework
- Textiles
- Wooden furnishings
- Windows

Choose a category for the item. Again, this will make later collation and analysis of recording data much easier.

if quote all texts unless
it page

Material

(eg paper, wool, oak, pine, etc)

Your answer _____

Describe the materials the item is predominantly made from. If you are unsure of wood or stone type, do simply say so. Multiple materials are permitted eg glass, wood and brass

Position in church

Where in the building is this item usually found

Your answer _____

Note where the item is usually found in the building, for example the vestry, the chancel, the sanctuary. Agree room names with other volunteers at beginning of session.

Description of item

Style & type of lettering; (caps and lower case), describe and quote all texts unless they are memorial inscriptions which are entered in the next page

Your answer _____

Describe the item. Essays are not required, just a few descriptive sentences in your own words. Include things like shape type, colours, materiality, design features, carvings, condition - anything at all that stands out about the artefact.

It is in this box that you can expand on the material type: if item is made of metal for example, is it brass, pewter, silver plate, etc? Describe it in terms someone without access to an image would be able to picture the item. No specialist knowledge is necessary, but if you have read or brought along one of the glossaries listed above all to the good! Mention if there is a plaque or dedication attached to the item, but write the actual dedication **in the next box**.

Memorial Inscription

Include quotations which are part of the memorial inscription. For long lists of names, ensure clear photograph is taken for later transcription.

Your answer _____

Use this box to input any memorial inscriptions. When copying text try to match the upper or lower case of the original, include punctuation and differentiate line breaks with a forward slash (/) between the appropriate words. Like in this example:



“IN LOVING MEMORY OF / REV. JOHN ALEXANDER CAMPBELL. / MINISTER OF THIS PARISH / 1882-1916. / ERECTED BY HIS WIDOW AND FAMILY”

If the memorial has a list of names too long to copy there and then, be sure to take a clear photograph (or several photographs if necessary) to aid later transcription when a report is being written. The lead volunteer will thank volunteers even more if they choose to make that transcription themselves and send it over!

Measurements (cm)

3D objects - height x width x depth

2D objects - Length x width

Weight in grams

Your answer

Use a tape measure (or laser measure if you have one for longer items like pews) to record the dimensions of the item. Measurements should be in centimetres and 3D items should be recorded Height x Width x Depth and 2D objects Length x Width.

Many items are unwieldy and difficult to accurately measure. Best efforts are welcome. If the item is circular record its diameter and mark that (the box is free text for this purpose). If the item is simply too large or difficult to reach, do **NOT** put yourself in danger to record its dimensions. Record what you can at ground level and make a note to this effect in the box. This is where good photographs with scales in the image come into their own.

History/Reference/Date/Maker

Enter any known information relating to the above if available.

Your answer

This box is for any other known history of the item. It could be the maker's mark or the publisher. These maker's marks can be found under, inside or behind items, be sure to carefully look at each artefact all

over. This entry could also be derived from information a volunteer has read in a church leaflet or heard from a church officer. If the data entered is *not* from an observation and comes instead from a third party source, be sure to make a note of where it came from.

Notes

Space for any other relevant information about item

Your answer

Space for any other relevant information about the item.

Likely destination (if known)

Where item may be going once church has closed

Your answer

This box is rarely used, but volunteers may hear from a church officer that particular items are going to other nearby churches, being returned to family members or going elsewhere. Record this

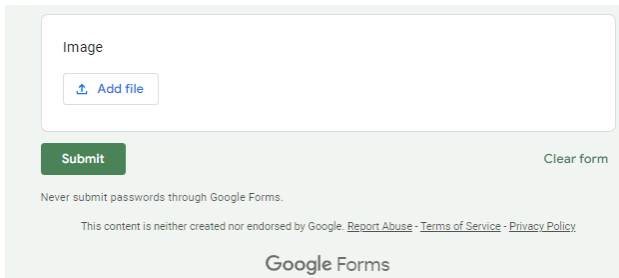
information here.

Image


 Add file

Add **up to five** images of the item. If more are needed, simply run through another form making mention that this is a duplicate entry of the same item to add more photos. Press the button and

follow the prompts to either take a new picture with your mobile device or add a photograph from your device library. The latter option is usually best as you can select the best image (we shall discuss photography in more detail below).



If you are content that the images you have selected are included on the form press “Submit” and wait a few moments for all information to be sent to the Google Cloud. After which you will be asked if you wish to complete a new record and can begin recording the next item.

It should be noted that the use of this form on a mobile device will use up data. Be sure to warn volunteers of this beforehand in order to avoid anyone running over their data limit and being penalised by their service provider. If there are individuals in the group with unlimited data or lots remaining in their monthly plan, perhaps they might consider creating a “hotspot” from their device and sharing with the other members of the group?

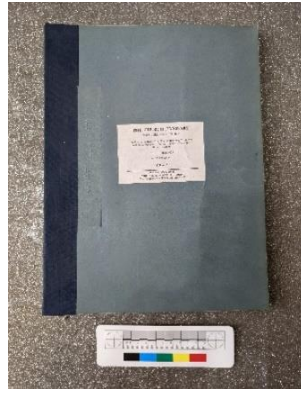
4.4 – Photography

The purpose of this project is to make a tangible, long-lasting record of these items that will be placed in the Historic Environment Scotland archives for future researchers to gain a better understanding and insight of these artefacts as they were found in their original contexts. Good, clear photographs are a vital part of this process to ensure the long-term value of the record. Please provide photographs at as high a resolution as your smartphone or camera will allow. Images can be in TIF or JPG format.

Modern smartphones and digital cameras take excellent images and are easy to adjust when adequate lighting in some dim corners of an old church building cannot be relied upon. Sometimes it might be necessary to take a few pictures and choose the clearest images. Volunteers might ask each other to shine a torch on darker subjects when a camera flash provides too much glare.

Placing a visual scale in the image can be very important and is really the gold standard practice, particularly when items are very large or very small. These scales can be bought relatively cheaply online from archaeology equipment suppliers or even made at home. Some websites allow you to download and print a photo scale (do calibrate with a ruler after printing) and a scaled metre stick can be made from an old broom handle, using two alternating colours of insulating tape wrapped around the pole at 10cm or 20cm intervals.





For detailed, close-up photographs of artefact details such as makers' marks, faint inscriptions, signatures on stained glass windows or other artworks, several attempts to photograph the item might be necessary to provide the clearest possible image for the archives.



Do not dwell on this for too long, *almost* any photograph can be better than no photograph at all. But a little practice photographing everyday items of furniture and tableware around the home (things that most of us would not normally take photos of) will pay dividends when the time comes to record similar dimensioned items in a church!

The local lead project volunteer might also want to take some wider shots of the interior of the building too. Best done by positioning the camera in the corners of the room and on the pulpit or gallery to bring in as many details as possible. Several shots from different angles should be taken, placing the larger items such as pulpits, pews and or altars in their wider context. These images will add further context to any report produced and will be a useful addition to the submitted archival record.

Please only use photographs generated by the volunteers during the recording project; do not include photographs from any other source(s) as these cannot be covered by the HES deposit agreement mentioned below in 7.0.

4.5 – What to record

Again, this will be a judgement call for individual volunteers and groups. This project aspires to make a permanent record of the moveable contents within the country's many churches. In lots of locations, these items will have built up over many generations. This can feel a little daunting if confronted by a wall press filled books or a cupboard of assorted Guild chinaware. An individual case-by-case assessment of the overall contents of each unique church will be required.

Ask the difficult, somewhat existential, question of each item: will some future researcher find this artefact of interest or use? Items that seem commonplace to us today or during our lives may bewilder future generations, so if in doubt, record it!

That's not to say that volunteers have to record the Hoover in the cleaning cupboard or the mop bucket under the stairs. Concentrate finite voluntary capacity and time on the items that your group believes may have personal, local, regional or national meaning, be that social, cultural, historical or religious. The majority of these items were brought to these buildings and carefully looked after for many generations for a reason. We may not today always know why, but someone in the future might.

5.0 – Safety

Scotland's churches are often very old buildings, with uneven floors, unexpected steps, loose rugs and other trip hazards. Conditions in some rooms can often be less than ideal, with flaking plaster, dampness, dust and occasionally pest infestations. Volunteers must NOT take any risks with their health or personal safety.

Ask volunteers not to lift or move heavy items or pieces of furniture, or to enter rooms that feel unsafe. Advise them too that no one should climb ladders or steps if they have a fear of heights or if the stairs or treads look in any way challenging or hazardous. Check if volunteers have dust or pest allergies and suggest that they might consider, where appropriate, wearing a mask. If there is the slightest risk that an item might fall, remind volunteers to avoid the temptation to remove from or pull at large objects on walls to look behind them for labels or other information. If items are too high to measure or record safely, best guesses and rough notes are absolutely preferable to injury. These "estimates due to safety concerns" can be clearly noted as such in the recording forms.

Ultimately, each volunteer is responsible for their own actions, but absolutely no church record is worth suffering an injury or worse, so great care and attention to personal and group safety must be taken at all times.

6.0 – Report Writing

So, the recording session is over and every volunteer managed to upload their descriptions and images on the day, in real time, what next? All being well the lead project volunteer for each recording session will be left with a Google Folder containing a spreadsheet of answers and another one filled with numerous associated images.

It is important to give this folder a quick once-over soon after the session to check if there are any missing images associated with any records. If there are, get in touch with the relevant volunteer to see if there was meant to be an image or images. If so, ask if they still have the image(s) on their phone and if they can email it or them over.⁴



The next job is to look through the spreadsheet in detail. Look for any obvious spelling mistakes or errors. Decide if any entries need tidied up or changed to make their meaning a little clearer. Click on the hyperlinked images to ensure they correspond to the associated entry. Double-check transcriptions of memorials and the like to ensure that they match with what's on the image. Autocorrect functions on digital devices can often change archaic spellings or grammatical errors to the modern version. This might have gone unnoticed by the volunteer and should be changed back to whatever is actually recorded on the image.

As an extra precaution against accidental deletion, download an offline copy of the spreadsheet in the preferred format and an offline copy of the images. The next stage of the process will be entirely dictated by each group's own local capacity.



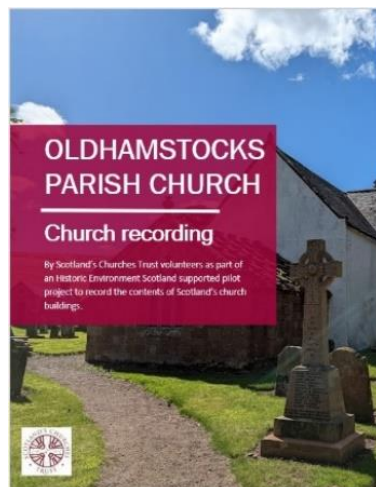
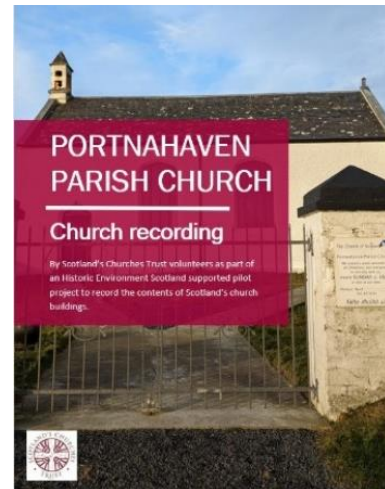
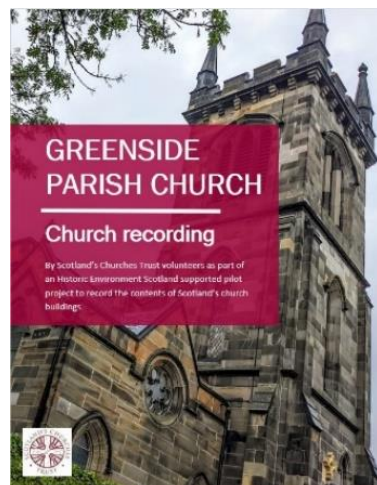
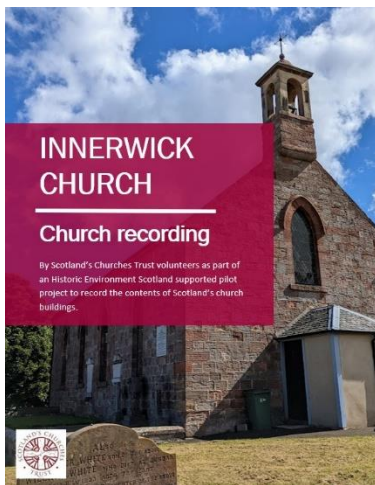
If time and volunteers are both in short supply, the lead volunteer can simply upload to the HES Archives the spreadsheet and the associated images (details on how to contact HES to initiate this procedure can be found in 7.0 below). It will be necessary to rename the images in this downloaded folder and on the corresponding spreadsheet as the Google links will no longer work for anyone without access to the specific Google Form.

Alternatively, if there is sufficient time and interest from the group, a longer report on the church might be

⁴ Sometimes photos might not have been deemed necessary, for example a repetitive record of similar items, such as identical box files, where the noted description will probably be more valuable,

produced, into which all recording data and images can be collated along with any further research volunteers might be able to add. Categories could be shared among key volunteers, with particular interests in them, for further desk-based research and the report could include a short history of the church, gleaned from existing sources, and further information about key items inside or the individuals noted during the recording visit.

A PDF of this full church report would then be submitted to the HES archive, along with the raw image data and the recording spreadsheet. Such a report will also hopefully be well-received by the former congregation of the church as it settles into its new shared building elsewhere.



If useful, we can supply, on request, copies of the recent reports we collated from volunteer recording sessions at churches in East Lothian, Edinburgh and Islay as we trialed our online recording system. Or, we can send groups a blank template report in Word format to simply fill in with information about the church that they have recently recorded.

7.0 – Uploading data to the HES Archives

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) welcomes deposits of material relating to church recording. Before making a deposit, please contact Archives staff at archives@hes.scot with Church Recording in the subject line. HES will accept well-ordered digital material of the highest resolution possible. HES Archive staff will advise about any further work required on the records before they are deposited. You will then be given instructions in how to upload your results.

As part of the deposit process, HES Archives will ask you to complete a deposit agreement. This will allow HES to curate the results of your research and make it available to other researchers. The person signing the agreement must ensure that all contributors to the record of the church are aware of the terms of the agreement. Under the terms of the agreement, contributors may continue to use the material they have created and retained for all uses other than commercial. HES cannot accept material before a deposit agreement has been completed. A copy of the agreement may be obtained at any time from archives@hes.scot

An embargo of the records going online is possible and can be made for up to 12 months from the submission date. Reasons for an embargo will have to be specified to HES.



The iconic green folder boxes in the John Sinclair House Search Room of the HES Archives - Image © Historic Environment Scotland

Established in 1908, The HES Archives and Library in Edinburgh contains over five million historic photographs, drawings and other items that can assist researchers exploring Scotland's historic and archaeological environment.

Its extensive physical and digital archive spans a whole range of buildings, archaeological monuments and industrial and maritime sites, giving unparalleled insights into Scotland's stories.

Find out more about the HES Archives and Library here:

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/hes-archives-and-library/overview/>

And CANMORE, the HES online catalogue to Scotland's archaeology, buildings, industrial and maritime heritage, here:

<https://canmore.org.uk/>

8.0 – Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the financial, moral and practical support of Historic Environment Scotland and its officers, particularly in the grants and archive teams. HES assistance has allowed us to develop a simple methodology for the rapid recording of the contents of Scotland's churches and to begin locating and empowering a nationwide body of potential church recording volunteers. Their Archive team have also been especially supportive, drafting the advice contained in section 7.0 and creating a dedicated space in their archives into which the material gathered by volunteers can be safely deposited for future researchers to use.

Scotland's Churches Trust has only been able to develop this methodology by being allowed to visit and record the contents of several churches across Scotland. Our sincerest thanks to the congregations and members of these churches for giving us permission to do so and sharing stories and tales of these wonderful buildings and to the officers of small sanctuary team and General Trustees of the Church of Scotland for their assistance and advice.

But the most particular thanks is reserved most of all for our incredible volunteers who have kept this project alive during COVID and helped relaunch it in late 2022, by joining our small office team to record a number of churches across Scotland, especially our leading volunteer Lesley Cumming who helped keep the project going throughout and helped with the production of this guide. Also, to the many potential volunteers from every corner of the country who have come forward recently to offer help as the full scale of closures becomes fully apparent, we offer our thanks and we look forward to working with you!



To find out more about the work of Scotland's Churches Trust, protecting, promoting and preserving Scotland's rich and eclectic range of ecclesiastical buildings, visit our website at the url below or drop our director a line at office@scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk

9.0 – Appendices

9.1 – Suggested further reading

A few books that volunteers might find useful to assist them when reacquainting themselves with Scotland's church buildings and with naming the items found inside. Most of these can be picked up quite cheaply second-hand at bookshops or online.

- *Recording a Church: An Illustrated Glossary* by Thomas Cocke, Donald Findlay, Richard Halsey, Elizabeth Williamson, George Wilson and David Rust (Council for British Archaeology, 2015)
- *Inside Churches: A guide to church furnishings* by Patricia Dirsztay (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies/The Arts Society, 2001)
- *Investigating Buildings and Urban Spaces – Reading buildings* (Series of very useful free guides [published online](#) by Historic Environment Scotland, 2019)
- *Scotland's Best Churches* by John R. Hume (Edinburgh University Press, 2005)
- *The Scottish Parish Kirk* by Ian G. Lindsay (St Andrew's Press, 1960)
- *1000 Churches to Visit in Scotland* (Scotland's Churches Scheme, 2005)

Also, do visit our website (www.scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk) and our Twitter and Facebook pages for regular blogs or updates about church recording and information about church closures as we hear about them.

If your group would like to try the practice Google Recording Form we have created, or you have any church recording questions or you would like to join our mailing list for church recording news, do get in touch with us at office@scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk.

9.2 – Other Resources and information

Our lead project volunteer, Lesley Cumming, produced this example of a checklist for a pre-recording visit made by a local project lead.

Given the emergency nature of this recordings project, such visits are not always possible. But, if your group can have an initial scout and take a few sample photos, such a list as this might prove invaluable on the actual day to ensure nothing of importance is missed and no duplication of effort occurs.

ARTEFACTS (This is meant ONLY as an example guide, Items to be recorded in every church will vary!)	Photo taken on pre-visit	Photo(s) needed on main recording day
ARCHIVAL MATERIAL		
Offertory Book_in porch desk cupboard		Y
Register of Services in desk drawer	Y	
Visitor's Book on porch desk		Y
LIBRARY		

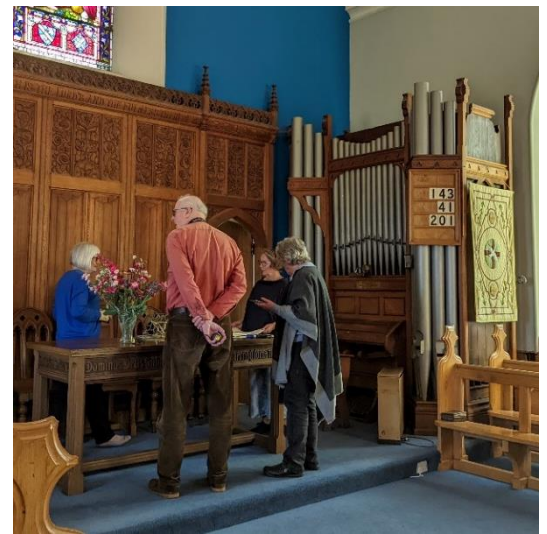
Bible 1 on shelf of Communion Table 1	Y	
Lectern Bible on shelf of Communion Table 1	Y	
Bible 3		Y
Bible 4		Y
Bible 5		Y
Bible 6		Y
At least 11 Bibles in Gallery		Y
Several books of Psalms in Gallery		Y
Good News Bible in Porch cupboard Sophia Hay	Y	Y
MEMORIALS		
War memorial on porch wall		Y
Memorial tablet To Revd Cleg(?) on exterior wall		Y
METALWORK		
Floorstanding candlesticks x 2 in Chancel		Y
Candleholders x 6 by organ	Y	
Candleholders x 2 on Communion Table 1	Y	
Copper Vase in porch cupboard	Y	
Offering plates x 2	Y	
MISCELLANEOUS		
Bell in bell tower		Y
Glass candleholder on Communion Table 1		Y
Lamp in porch	Y	
Carved stone in porch		Y
Sundial on exterior corner	Y	
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS		
Electronic technics organ in porch		Y
Organ in Kirk	Y	
Electronic organ in Kirk		Y
PAINTINGS, MURALS, PICTURES, Etc		
Unframed photo on top of porch cupboard	Y	
Framed photo on top of porch cupboard	Y	
Framed B&W photo on porch wall		Y
Framed photo of Kirk in porch	Y	
Framed drawing of 2 minister in porch		Y
Framed drawing of a minister in porch		Y
Framed picture of Kirk to left of Chancel arch		Y
Framed words to left of Chancel arch		Y
Unframed photo of memorial plaque in a churchyard (Elgin)	Y	
TEXTILES		
Various fabric bookmarks in porch cupboard		Y
Material covered squares in left hand cupboard of		Y

porch desk		
Various fabrics in left hand cupboard of porch desk		Y
Pulpit Falls in box in Gallery		Y
WINDOWS		
Stained glass Chancel window	Y	
WOODEN FURNISHINGS		
Communion chairs for Communion Table 1 – 1 minister's chair and elders' chairs		Y
Communion Table 1 with wooden shelves	Y	
Communion Table 2 ornately carved	Y	
Communion chairs x 2 for Communion Table 2		Y
Wooden donation box in porch		Y
Octagonal font		Y
Plantstand by organ		Y
Wooden lectern with dedication plaque	Y	
Wooden pulpit	Y	
Chairs x 2 in porch		Y
Writing desk in porch		Y
Boxed wooden pews	Y	

Sample recording sheet

If a lead local volunteer discovers on their recce visit that there is no wifi or 3/4/5G signal, they will need to resort to old fashioned paper and pens on the day and ask the volunteers to upload their comments and photographs afterwards.

Ask for an honest answer about capacity. The volunteer might only be able to commit to that day's recording and may not have time to upload this material at a later date. In which case, it might be best to take charge of the recording sheets at the end of the recording session from that person and ask that they simply send over the relevant photographs for someone else to upload.



It is very important that when sending images not to use a social media image transfer platform, such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. These sorts of services drastically reduce the size and quality of the images. We suggest using Google Folders, DropBox, WeTransfer or similar online cloud platforms as these will maintain the quality of the pictures.

You will find below a sample recording sheet that can be printed for use on the day. Contact our office if you would like this sent to you in PDF format.

Building name:		Recorder:.....	Date: / /
Category (tick as appropriate) <input type="checkbox"/> Archival Material <input type="checkbox"/> Library (Books, religious texts, songbooks, etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Memorials <input type="checkbox"/> Metalwork <input type="checkbox"/> Miscellaneous <input type="checkbox"/> Musical Instruments <input type="checkbox"/> Paintings, Murals, Wallcoverings, etc <input type="checkbox"/> Stonework <input type="checkbox"/> Textiles <input type="checkbox"/> Windows <input type="checkbox"/> Wooden Furnishings		Artefact name: Material (eg paper, wool, oak, pine, etc): Location of item in building:	
Description of item – Use your own words to describe the shape, size, colour and materiality of the artefact. Note and describe any distinguishing features, such as carvings, graffiti, mouldings, designs, tool marks, etc. List anything that might not be obvious from a photograph:		Memorial Inscription – Transcribe any texts that are part of a memorial inscription. For long lists of names, ensure a clear photograph is taken for later transcription. Differentiate line breaks with a forward slash (/) and match use of upper and lower case lettering.:	
Measurements (length in cm, weights in grams) – 3D Objects – Height x Width x Depth / 2D objects – Length x Width		History/Reference/Date/Maker – Add any other known info relating to item, eg makers' marks, publisher, label info.	
Notes – Any other relevant information		Likely Destination of Item (if known) Number of photos taken: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	



CHURCH RECORDERS' HANDBOOK

Created by Scotland's Churches Trust, as part of an Historic Environment Scotland supported pilot project, to assist future volunteers with recording the contents of Scotland's closing church buildings.

