

Lambeth Palace Library Research Guide Church Property





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Sources for Church Property

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1. Why did the Church Hold Property?



Church property took a variety of forms and this section is a brief guide to the different categories of ecclesiastical property and identifying the property records held in the archives held at Lambeth Palace Library.

The Church as it became established became an owner and manager of property. One of the first actions of King Ethelbert on the arrival of St. Augustine at Canterbury in 597 was to grant a dwelling house in the city for the use of the early Church.

The Church owned property for the provision of premises for its various activities such as worship, education, accommodation of the clergy and as a source of income for the clergy, maintenance of buildings, education and evangelistic activities and administration. The ownership of property also gave the Church for many centuries cultural, economic and political influence.

This guide primarily relates to historical church property records held at Lambeth Palace Library (LPL). This is not a guide to the contemporary property holdings of the Church of England or to records held at the National Archives and local record offices.

2. The Various Kinds of Church Property

2.1. Introduction

The Church of England has evolved over many centuries and there was no single property owning body within the Church, rather there was a number of different kinds of church property each with its own history and creating its own group of records. This section gives a short description of the major categories of church property and some of the records they create that may be of interest to a researcher. Many of the records cited in this guide are catalogued and can be found in the archives and manuscripts catalogue on the Lambeth Palace Library Website:

<http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org>

2.2. Benefice Property

Glebe was the historical endowment of land that in many benefices formed part of the income of parish clergy. Glebe could be directly cultivated by the clergy or rented out, however the amount of glebe attached to an individual benefice varied greatly which in turn led to a great disparity of incomes between the clergy of different parishes. Glebe is no longer held by parish clergy and was vested in the Diocesan Board of Finance by Section 15 of the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976 and is now managed as one of the sources of diocesan income. The parsonage house the residence provided for the clergy also formed part of the property of the benefice.

Generally from the late 19th century much glebe attached to individual parishes was sold by their incumbents and the capital reinvested in government and other stocks usually held on the behalf of the parish by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (EC)



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and the Queen Anne's Bounty (QAB) and after 1948 the Church Commissioners (CC). The interest from this capital formed a further source of income for the parish clergy.

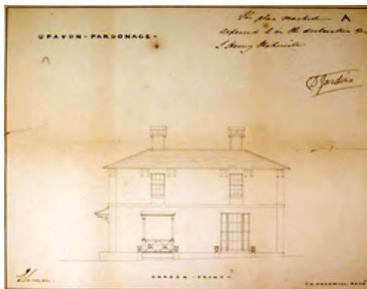
Records relating to glebe can be found in the archives of the QAB, the EC and the Commonwealth records at Lambeth Palace Library, see Section 2.8 below. The QAB was established to augment the incomes of parish clergy and during the 18th and 19th centuries this was often achieved by a purchase of a parcel of land that was added to the parish glebe. The QAB also provided mortgages for the construction, improvement and repair of parsonage houses. The conveyancing files (Series Ref. QAB/7/5/K) for these transactions are held in the Library, however most deeds relating to former parsonage houses have been handed away to their new owners when sold.

Sales, purchases and long leases of glebe lands by incumbents often required the consent of a number of bodies including the bishop, the patron of the benefice, the EC and the QAB and correspondence relating to these transactions can often be found in the files of the relevant bodies before 1948. The CC files relating to glebe made after 1948 do not survive.

2.3. Preferment Estates

Other church bodies, often called preferments, each had their own endowments of property including bishops, deans, chapters and other offices of cathedrals and collegiate churches. Following the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (EC) in 1835 these estates were gradually transferred to the EC to be managed as national asset on behalf of the whole Church. The estates were usually managed on behalf of the Commissioners' through local managing agents such as Cluttons and Smith Gore.

The Commissioners soon after they acquired an individual estate arranged for them to be surveyed and there is a series of survey volumes (Series Ref. **ECE/6/1**) and an associated series of survey maps (Ref. **ECE/11/1**). However, there is relatively little direct correspondence with tenants and the estate files in the Commissioners' main file series mainly consist of correspondence with the local managing agents and relate to the general management of the estate. Subjects included in this series of



files include the surrender and granting of leases, capital investment in new buildings and drainage and purchases and sales of property.

Lambeth Palace Library hold the records of the administration of the estates of Archbishops of Canterbury situated principally in Kent, Surrey and Middlesex, but also including property in Buckinghamshire, Lancashire and Sussex prior to their transfer to Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1862 (LPL

Ref. **EDT**). The records are catalogued in two sections: Estates Documents and Temporalities. The majority of the pre-Restoration records and most of the court rolls are in the ED series (Estate Documents), whereas most of the post Restoration records are in the following series:



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TA: leases

TB: registers and schedule of leases

TC: surveys of archiepiscopal estates

TD: maps and plans

These records are particularly good sources for local history in Kent, Surrey and Middlesex.

2.4.Church Commissioners

The Church Commissioners were created in 1948 with the amalgamation of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (EC) and the Queen Anne's Bounty (QAB) and inherited the property interests of both bodies. The Commissioners hold substantial investments in property and equities in Britain and overseas, however their records are mainly operational and have not yet been appraised for archive cataloguing. The Church Commissioners corporate estates consists of the property inherited from its predecessors: the Ecclesiastical Commissioners including the various preferment estates transferred to the Commissioners' from about 1840 and the Queen Anne's Bounty who following the reduction in the rate interest on government stock in 1888 began investing its surplus funds in property particularly in ground rents in London, Richmond and Torquay.



The Library holds the surviving records relating to the management of the corporate estates of the Church Commissioners, however many of the title deeds have been handed away to purchasers when properties were sold and most of the older preferment estate deeds have been deposited at the appropriate local record office.

Details of the Commissioner's current property portfolio can be found in their Annual Report available on their website:<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/churchcommissioners/>



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2.5. Tithes

Tithes were the historical payment made by the inhabitants of a parish for the support of the parish church and which were generally payable to the incumbent. Tithes had a complex history; it was a charge on the land that had many the characteristics of a form of property tax and for many centuries formed an important source of income for the Church, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and lay landowners known as lay impropriators. Originally tithe was payable in kind and consisted of the tenth part of all annual profit of the soil (praedial tithes), from farm stock (mixed tithes), and from personal industry (personal tithes). Great tithe was paid to the rector, little tithe to the vicar, and lay tithe to a lay impropriator. Tithes formed part of the endowments



of many benefices and ecclesiastical bodies such as cathedrals, however many great tithes were appropriated to the monasteries during the middle ages and the parish ministry was deputed to a Vicar, following the dissolution of the monasteries many of these tithes passed into lay ownership and came to be regarded by the tithe owners at least as a form of property.

Tithes were controversial and following agitation especially in Ireland the Tithe Act 1836 replace tithes in kind with a tithe rent charge based upon the price of equal quantities of wheat, barley and oats while in counties such as Essex and Kent extraordinary tithe rent charge was levied on hops and other horticultural crops. These arrangements were revised by further legislation notably Tithe Act 1891 that placed the responsibility for collecting tithe on the landowner and the Tithe Act 1925 that made the Queen Anne's Bounty the 'central tithe authority' collecting tithes nationally on behalf of the Church. Following agitation during the 1930's which led to widespread civil disobedience and protests the Tithe Act 1936 abolished tithe rent charges and replaced them with redemption annuities payable to the government for 60 years and the tithe owners were compensated by issues of government stock which came to form an important part of the capital of the newly formed Church Commissioners in 1948.

There are Ecclesiastical Commissioners and Queen Anne's Bounty secretariat files relating to the tithes for the period 1925-1936 in particular leading up to the Tithes Act, 1936 and further details of these records can be obtained from the Library.

The National Archives Domestic Information Guide 41 – *The History of Tithes* provides a short history of tithes and refers to the range of records available at the National Archives such as those of the Tithe Commissioners established under the Tithe Act, 1836 Redemption Commission created by the Tithe Act 1936. Copies of this guide can be obtained from the National Archives web site.

2.6. Church Trusts

There a variety of property owning trusts supplementing the work of the Church ranging from the Overseas Bishopricks Fund supporting the overseas bishopricks across the world to the local trusts who hold property on behalf of local churches an example is the Rochester and Southwark Diocesan Church Trust who assisted the



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development of new churches across South London and North Kent. These records are usually either held by the trusts themselves or have been deposited with the appropriate record office. The Library holds the archives of Overseas Bishops Fund (formerly the Colonial Bishops Fund) which as the Church grew contributed to the endowment of a growing number of Anglican bishoprics overseas from Jerusalem to Hong Kong and sometimes owned property overseas (Fonds Ref. **OBF**)..

Many trust deeds for local church and chapel charities were enrolled with the Close Rolls Court of Chancery (**C54**) and National Archives Legal Information *8 Land Conveyances: Trust Deeds (Land for Charitable Uses), 1736-1924* provides further information on these records.

2.7. Diocesan Boards of Finance

Diocesan Boards of Finance (DBF) were established by the Diocesan Board of Finance Measure, 1925. They are usually companies limited by guarantee and are subject to regulation under charity, company and financial legislation. Since 1978 DBFs have owned the glebe which is now managed as a source of income for the dioceses and their records are held locally usually in the diocesan office or registry while their archive material may be deposited with the Diocesan Record Office which is usually the local Record Office.

2.8. Commonwealth Ecclesiastical Estate Administration

During the Civil War and Commonwealth the Church of England was disestablished and church property came under the control of parliament and from 1654 under the supervision of the Lord Protector and his Council and was vested in trustees. Some church property belonging to the bishops and cathedrals were sold, however the rest were subject to a national administration. The surviving records are held at Lambeth Palace Library and include surveys of parochial, former episcopal and capitular estates dating from 1649-1650 and 1655-1656, the appointment of clergy and augmentation of benefices, dated roughly between 1643-1659 (LPL Ref. Fonds Ref **COMM**)

2.9. National Enquiries into Church Property

There have been a number of national enquiries into church property. The Ecclesiastical Revenues Commission established in 1832 sent in August 1832 a questionnaire to all the benefices, bishoprics, cathedrals and collegiate churches. However these returns only record the amount and sources of income for each church estate and do not identify individual properties.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners conducted a Church Property and Revenue Return in 1887 which recorded the various sources of income from rents, tithe rent charges, mineral royalties, dividends; grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and expenditure particularly on the parsonage house including for example mortgages advanced to incumbents by the Queen Anne's Bounty.



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Most of the returns for these surveys survive and were subsequently incorporated in the appropriate benefice (Series Ref. **NB**) or preferment estate file (Series Ref. **ECE/7/1**) within the main series of files created by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and these are held at the Library.

Following the establishment of the Church Assembly in 1919 as a central legislative body and policy forum for the Church of England, the Assembly in 1921 appointed a 'Commission of Enquiry into the Property and Revenues of the Church' which reported in 1924. The report reviews the property and sources of income received by the Church of England through its various bodies and made a number of recommendations including the gradual transfer of glebe to the Diocesan Board of Finance and the effective amalgamation of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Queen Anne's Bounty. The report provides a lot of information about the contemporary management of the various kinds of church property and included taking evidence from variety of witnesses drawn from the clergy, ecclesiastical officials and lay experts giving a general snapshot of the extent and management of the church's property immediately after the First World War [Lambeth Palace Library Ref. **H5165. (C4)**]

3. Research Value

Property records can provide a valuable source for a variety of research relating to architectural history, genealogy, local history and the changing relationship between the Church and the society it served. For example the QAB series of files relating to the purchase of land to augment the existing endowments of a benefice provide a source not only for the direct history of the property, but also depending on the contents of each file for the evolution of conveyancing practice, the financial and pastoral circumstances of individual incumbents, local genealogies of the vendors and their predecessors in title and incidental information relating to local land use, economic and social conditions at the time of the purchase (Series Ref. **QAB/7/5/K**).

The main series of administrative files of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners include many files relating to the management of their estates which provide a source of information on a wide range of subjects which can include local agriculture and industry, the restoration of the parish churches, the local market and customs such as the detailed description of the "Customs of the North Curry Feast" held each year on Christmas Eve, at North Curry in Somerset"(Ref.**ECE/7/1**). While the Estate Documents and Temporalities archives of the Archbishops of Canterbury will provide sources for similar information stretching from the 13th century through to the 19th century. These records can provide a glimpse of the church's role as landlord and its relationship of mutual obligations with tenants. For example Thomas Middleton who served as the Archbishop's manorial steward at Reculver wrote on 2 November 1771 to the Archbishop 'only a few tenants appeared, and not one of them would sworn of the Homage of for their holding of the Court Baron unless the Lord of the Manor paid them for their time by treating them with a Dinner. The People at this court have always been dissatisfied and troublesome stirred up as I have always thought by Mr Richard Reynolds of the Place' (Ref. **TR 17 f.63**)'.



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4. Other Sources

4.1. The National Archives

The National Archives at Kew holds a variety of records relating to church property and publish information on their web site relating to various kinds of the church property records. These include in addition to those relating to tithes and trust deeds enrolled in the Close Rolls deeds (see section 2.5 above): *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, *Domestic Records Information 14* and *The law relating to Chancel Repairs*, *Domestic Records Information 33*.

For further information see the research guides cited above which can be downloaded from the National Archives web site: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

4.2. Local Record Offices

Many historical records relating to church property have been deposited by parishes; diocese and church collegiate bodies such as cathedrals at the appropriate local Record Office. For example the records of St. Paul's Cathedral have been deposited at the Guildhall Library. The National Register of Archives hosted on the National Archives web site can searched on line to provide information concerning the location of records of individual benefices, cathedrals and other church preferments: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra>

5. Glossary

Benefice – is the church office held by the clergy and by reason of its historical origins or the result of statutory provisions can be termed a rectory or vicarage.

Church Assembly – Established by the Church of England (Powers) Act, 1919 as the central legislative body for the Church of England. Renamed and reconstituted in 1970 as the General Synod by the Synodical Government Measure 1969.

Diocesan Record Office (DRO) – A Record Office which is an agreed place of deposit for diocesan records and usually parish records as well. This will usually be the local authority archive service.

Ecclesiastical Commissioners – Established in 1835, reorganised on a permanent basis as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England in 1840 and amalgamated with the Queen Anne's Bounty to form the Church Commissioners in 1948. The Commissioners' formed a central church administration with a range of activities supporting the Church of England nationally. These included the management of their estates acquired from the bishops and cathedrals and increasingly other investments to financially support the ministry of the Church of England nationally. The Commissioners financially contributed towards the repair of church chancels, the maintenance of episcopal residences and regulated the leasing and sale of glebe land.

Glebe - Land attached to a benefice as part of its endowment.

Incumbent – The priest in charge of a parish whether as Rector, Vicar or Priest in Charge.



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Parish – Is the geographical area entrusted by a bishop to a priest who has the responsibility for the care of the souls within it.

Preferment – A church office or dignity for example, Bishop, Dean and Prebendary which were often supported by an endowment estate which was later transferred to the ownership of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

Queen Anne's Bounty- Established in 1704 to improve the incomes of the clergy of poorer benefices and amalgamated with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England to form the Church Commissioners in 1948. The Queen Anne's Bounty provided loans for the improvement or replacement of parsonage houses.

Rector – An incumbent of a benefice or a lay person or corporation who historically received the Great Tithes.

Tithes – originally a payment by the inhabitants of a parish for the support of the parish church, see section 2.5 of this guide for further information.

Vicar – the incumbent of a benefice who historically received the Small Tithes.

Visitation – The periodic visit to inspect the temporal and spiritual affairs of the parish carried out by the bishop or the archdeacon. Records created by a visitation for example include the

6. Selective Bibliography

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<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/churchcommissioners/pastoralandclosedchurches/pastoral/churchproperty>

Lambeth Palace Library: <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org>

National Archives: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>