

Rich heritage, poor access

Issues surrounding disability
access to places of worship

Mary Bucknall
Deaf and Disability Ministry Co-ordinator
Diocese of Canterbury



Overview

- Introduction
- Is your church accessible?
- Are your church volunteers trained to assist disabled people?
- Is your church guide available in a variety of formats?
- Conclusion
- Any Questions?



Is your church accessible?

- Background history
- Disability matters – why?
- Access issues in churches
- The DDA 1995 and 2005
- Heritage Lottery Funding
- Brainstorming exercise in 3 groups



Background history

- Over 16,000 parish churches in England
- 42 Cathedrals
- 340 churches are now redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT)
- 404 places of worship are grant-aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage
- Medieval Churches not built with disabled people in mind



Disability matters – why?

- Mobility impaired people – 450,000 wheelchair users
- Blind/partially sighted people – 1 million registered blind
- Deaf/Hearing impaired people – 9 million in the UK
- Learning disabilities & difficulties – 1.2 million
- Hidden conditions e.g. epilepsy, diabetes
- Mental health conditions



Access issues in churches

- Physical barriers e.g. steps, poor lighting
- Communication difficulties
- Lack of access to visual and auditory information
- Financial considerations
- Heritage issues



The DDA 1995 and 2005

- The DDA 1995

Provide access to goods, facilities and services to people with disabilities

- From 1 October 2004, service providers must take steps to remove, alter, avoid or provide a reasonable alternative to a physical barrier or feature.

- The DDA 2005

Widens scope of disability to include HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis



A success story?



Now DDA compliant:

St Mary's Church,
Green Street Green,
Orpington,
Kent

Heritage Lottery Funding

- Available from 1994
- Selection criteria
- Examples of disability-related adaptations e.g. lifts



Built to InSpire Heritage Project



Wheelchair space with
wooden ramp (pew
removed)

Built to InSpire Heritage
Project,
St Mary of Charity,
Faversham, Kent

Brainstorming exercise

What are the key areas to consider when arranging for a disabled person to visit your church?

- Mobility impaired people - wheelchair users, users of supported walking aids
- Blind/partially sighted people
- Deaf/hard of hearing people



Mobility impaired people

Mobility impaired people – wheelchair users, users of supported walking aids need:-

- Disabled parking bays
- Trained welcomers at door/guides to seats
- Space for wheelchairs
- Ramps/lifts
- Door handles
- Accessible lavatories
- Emergency drill



Blind/partially sighted people

Blind/partially sighted people need:-

- Readers/helpers
- Good lighting
- Marked ramps/steps
- Areas kept free from hazard
- Large print materials/Braille
- Plan of church at door – raised outline
- Guide dogs – water provided



Deaf/Hearing impaired people

Deaf/deafened/hard of hearing people need:-

- Advertising of guided tours with BSL signers
- Loop systems for events
- Visual displays of information
- Good lighting
- Printout of plan of church, good signage



Are your church volunteers trained to assist disabled people?

- How to guide a blind person
- How to assist a disabled person
- How to communicate with a deaf or hard of hearing person
- Health & Safety – what to do in an emergency
- Interactive exercise in pairs



Standard Manual Alphabet



RNID • 
for deaf and hard of hearing



Interactive Exercise

How good is your lip-reading?

In pairs, take it in turns to read the words on the lip-reading handout - without using your voice.

The other person has to guess each word.

Fact: Lip-reading is only 30% accurate.

Tip: try lip-reading the newsreader on TV with the sound turned off.



Examples of similar sounds

- T, D, N TIP, DIP, NIP
- P, B, M PET, BET, MET
- F, V FAN, VAN
- K, hard C, G THING, THINK
- J, SH, CH JEWS, SHOES, CHOOSE



Is your church guide available in a variety of formats?

- Guides for blind/partially sighted people
- Guides for Deaf/hard of hearing people
- Virtual reality tours/visual touch screens for mobility-impaired people
- Church noticeboards and websites
- Advertising – use of symbols and levels of accessibility
- Discussion on how to develop accessible guides



Conclusion

Take small steps – they do add up:-

- Hold an accessibility audit
- Keep noticeboards and websites up to date
- Hold special heritage open days
- Learn good communication tactics
- Obtain feedback from disabled visitors



Any Questions?



Contact details

- Mary Bucknall
- Canterbury Deaf & Disability Ministry Co-ordinator
- Church in Society, 2-3 Bedford Place, Maidstone, Kent. ME16 8JB.
- Tel: 01622 755014 Fax: 01622 693531
- mary@churchinsociety.org www.churchinsociety.org
- John Cunningham, Partnership Development Advisor
- Church in Society, 2-3 Bedford Place, Maidstone, Kent. ME16 8JB.
- Tel: 01622 755014 Fax: 01622 693531
- john@churchinsociety.org





Rich heritage, poor access

Issues surrounding disability access to places of worship

Presentation for Churches Tourism Association Convention 2008

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, 24th-26th November 2008

Introduction

Hello, I hope you can all hear me properly?

My name is Mary Bucknall.

I am profoundly deaf (from birth) but with the help of a powerful digital hearing aid I can speak and lipread to some extent depending on circumstances. I am currently learning British Sign Language level 2.

I have brought a signer with me called Mark Smith. He is the Chaplain for Deaf People for the Diocese of Derby. He will help me with any questions you might have for me afterwards.

I am delighted to be invited to speak at this Convention, as I have a particular interest in Church History, having studied History at Oxford University and more recently theology at London School of Theology.

I have now started work as the 'Deaf and Disability Ministry Co-ordinator' for the Canterbury Diocese, based at Church in Society in Maidstone, Kent.

I am not ordained, but I am working with others to encourage Deaf people to go to church with interpreters and note-takers where possible. Another part of my role is to deliver Deaf and Disability awareness sessions to churchwardens and also Cathedral staff and volunteers. My long-term aim is for churches and church services to be fully accessible to all in the diocese.

This workshop is intended to highlight the needs of disabled people visiting your church, whether they wish to just look around or take part in a church service.

(see slide)

There are 3 main issues surrounding disability access to places of worship:-



- Is your church accessible?
- Are your church volunteers trained to assist disabled people?
- Is your church guide available in a variety of formats?

Is your church accessible? (see slide)

- Background History
- Disability matters – why?
- Access issues in churches
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- Heritage Lottery Funding
- Brainstorming exercise

Background History

England's 16,000 parish churches (according to Sir Roy Strong in his recent book "A Little History of the English Country Church") are a vast and largely unexplored part of the nation's heritage. Although many historic houses, museums and art galleries are now accessible to disabled people, is this true of our churches?

As well as parish churches, there are 42 Cathedrals which have had varying degrees of success in making all areas accessible for disabled people.

For the purposes of this talk I will concentrate on redundant and grant-aided churches.

There are now 340 redundant churches in England which are cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust (see website www.visitchurches.org.uk)

There are also about 400 places of worship grant-aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage under the Repair Grants for Places of Worship in England scheme (see website www.english-heritage.org.uk). As a condition of receiving these grants, these places have to be open to the public for at least 28 days a year outside hours of worship.

Medieval cathedrals and churches were not built with the needs of disabled people in mind. At a time when few people could read or write, emphasis was placed on standing in the nave and hearing the spoken word, and seeing the scriptures in visual form e.g. wall-paintings, pictorial images, stained glass windows, known as the "poor man's Bible".



There were benches running round the walls for the sick and disabled (the origin of the phrase “the weak go to the wall”). Pews were not introduced until after the Reformation and only now are parish churches able to remove some of them in favour of more flexible seating arrangements, including provision of wheelchair spaces.

Disability matters – why?

Quiz (if time) – hand out blue sheets to each person (& pens)

The latest Disability Statistics available from the Office of National Statistics show that 15.2% of the population in the United Kingdom of working age are disabled (this includes people with limited longstanding illnesses). 57% of the population aged 75 and over are disabled. (UK Health Statistics 2005-6, published by ONS, p.10).

According to the Disability Rights Commission (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) this translates as “approximately 10 million disabled adults in our society. The nature and extent of their disabilities vary widely, as do their requirements for overcoming any difficulties they may face”. (Disability Rights Commission, Code of Practice for DDA (part 2) 2004, p.8).

The proportion of disabled people will grow as we are all living longer. There were 60,587 million people resident in the UK in 2006 and this figure is projected to rise to 62,761 million by 2011. (Source: ONS-AAS 2008 in Whitakers’ Almanack 2009).

The main areas of disability are as follows:-

- Mobility impaired people – 450,000 are wheelchair users, which is 8% of the UK’s disabled population. Others are ambulant disabled or have problems with manual dexterity.
- Blind/partially sighted people – 1 million are registered blind, while 750,000 cannot read a newspaper or recognise someone across the street.
- Deaf/Hearing impaired people – 9 million in the UK, of which 8.3 million are hard of hearing people, mostly over 60 years of age.
- Learning disabilities & difficulties e.g. Down’s syndrome, autism, dyslexia – 1.2 million people



- Hidden conditions e.g. epilepsy, diabetes
- Mental health conditions

Access issues in churches

Visually-impaired and mobility-impaired people face great difficulties obtaining access as many old churches are not easily accessible – for example steps, fixed pews, uneven paving, pillars in the line of sight, poor lighting. The Victorians often raised the level of the chancel e.g. at Boxley Church, making it difficult for wheelchair users to reach the altar rail.

Hearing-impaired people face difficulties with communication, and not so much the built environment, but they still lack access to information.

People with learning disabilities and difficulties, also those with hidden conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes, or mental health conditions, often find it difficult to cope with new situations or access information properly.

Finance considerations and heritage issues make it difficult and costly to make alterations needed in order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Around 13,000 of 16,000 parish churches are listed buildings, and of these 4000 churches (40%) are Grade I listed, which imposes strict restrictions on what you can and cannot do, although this is now being challenged by English Heritage under its “Inspired!” initiative.

The Church of England is still responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of all its buildings, rather than the local municipality, as in France for pre-1904 church buildings. (see A Guide to the Church of England by Martin Davie p.57). As you can imagine this is a great burden on its finances, and many cathedrals now rely heavily on admission charges and donations to meet the cost of essential repairs to the fabric.

The Churches Conservation Trust also struggles to find sources of funding for the churches in its care. John Vigar reports: “At the Churches Conservation Trust we have been putting ramps in our churches to help those with physical disabilities. We have also been installing PIR lighting (Passive infra-red lighting) to assist those with poor vision who might find the steps a problem. We also install loop systems in those churches which are used for events.



As our churches are mostly kept for visitors alone we are always on the look out for ways in which we can improve access, but have little experience of working with the hard of hearing.

Our greatest problem is working with Grade I listed buildings and finding the funding.”

The DDA 1995 and 2005

As you all know, the Disability Discrimination Act was passed in 1995. Currently the DDA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Service providers are obliged to provide access to goods, facilities and services to people with disabilities. This includes places of worship. From 1 October 2004 physical features such as doors must be removed or altered if these create barriers to accessing the service, or at least they should be avoided, or a “reasonable” alternative provided.

Since then, there have been some updates to Disability Discrimination legislation and other issues as follows:-

1. The DDA 2005. This extended protection to cover people who have HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis from the moment they are diagnosed. Mental illness no longer has to be “clinically well recognised” to count as an impairment under the DDA.
2. Transport operators are now required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, if you are organising coach trips for church groups. See the Disabled People section of the Government website, Directgov for details www.direct.gov.uk.
3. Responsibilities of churches as employers. The exemption for small businesses (fewer than 20 staff) was removed under the Amendment Regulations 2003 with effect from 1st October 2004. This means that small church offices now have to be DDA compliant.

A success story? St Mary’s Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, is now DDA compliant.



The website says:

“We are delighted to say that St Mary's is fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act offering: a sound loop hearing system, full audio and visual display system, ramp access to all areas, large print materials and excellent levels of light. St Mary's is a warm building with efficient fully controllable heating.”

Heritage Lottery Funding

This became available in 1994. The specialised field of Disabled people and heritage is attracting much more attention now as disabled people, particularly the elderly, form a significant proportion of the UK population and many now have the time and leisure to visit places of interest.

Selection criteria for these projects.

These projects have to meet previous criteria of:-

- Conserving heritage and/or involving people in heritage

Plus all projects must have included proposals for:-

- Access (to the heritage)
- Learning

I should add that some churches do not accept funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Disability-related adaptations

The Heritage Lottery Fund have funded several disability-related adaptations to places of worship, for example at Blisworth Church in Northamptonshire, where a platform has been installed to allow disabled people to ring the bells. At St Mary on the Quay, Bristol, a project involved an innovative solution by providing a lift just to get into the church usually accessed by a flight of steps. Other projects include:-

- St Leonards Church, Padiham, Burnley
- St Mary on the Quay, Bristol
- Newhall Central Methodist Church, South Derbyshire
- Capel Seion (A) Pernmorfa, Gynedd, Wales
- St Mary's Improvement Scheme, Wychavon, W. Midlands



The Built to InSpire Project at St Mary of Charity Faversham, which is a project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund under the Local Heritage Initiative, has wheelchair access, display boards for visually impaired people, but unfortunately the rolling DVD is not subtitled.

Brainstorming session: (in 3 groups) with flipchart paper & pens

What are the key areas to consider when arranging for a disabled person to visit your church?

- Mobility impaired people – wheelchair users, users of supported walking aids
- Blind/partially sighted people
- Deaf/hard of hearing people

Report back (in groups)
See slides for comparison

Are your church volunteers trained to assist disabled people? (see slide)

- How to guide a blind person
- How to assist a disabled person
- How to communicate with a deaf or hard of hearing person
- Health & Safety – what to do in an emergency
- Interactive exercise in pairs

What impression of our church do we want disabled people to have? Our aim is for them to have a positive visitor experience, whether they are coming for church services, events, concerts, guided tours, and occasional services such as weddings, or just having a look around the church.

The disabled person may be accompanied by their carer or supportive friend, but it is worth knowing a few basic skills which can help in any situation that may arise.

Avoid making assumptions as not all disabled people use wheelchairs, British Sign Language, Braille etc. Many disabilities are hidden.



How to guide a blind person

The following guidance is taken from a booklet called "It's more than installing a ramp" by Elisabeth Davies-Johns (Methodist Publishing House, 1990) p.12.

"Always ask the blind person if guidance is needed, then allow him or her to walk a little behind you whilst holding your elbow or upper arm. As you go up or down stairs or turn a corner the movement will be felt by him or her, so that he or she is prepared for the change. It is also helpful to you to say that a change is about to happen. (Say "step up" or "step down").

To enable a blind person to sit in a seat, allow him or her to feel the height of the back and the seat before sitting down.

Verbal descriptions are needed when there is no sight..... A card from the book stall may need such a description to enable a blind person to make an informed choice.....

These general instructions are only guidelines. Ask the blind person for advice on what help is needed. He or she may be willing to instruct a group of helpers."

Guide dogs and other assistance dogs must be allowed inside a church and given a bowl of water if necessary.

How to assist a disabled person

I read an interesting article in the Church Times dated 17th October 2008 by David Reason, a wheelchair user. He explained that the correct way to carry a disabled person up a flight of steps is for two people to carry him or her top-half first.

If possible keep the same eye-level as the person in a wheelchair, i.e. sit down next to him or her. Never talk to the carer instead of the person.

Consider installing raised platforms – so that the wheelchair user can see what is happening at the same eye-level as everyone else.

How to communicate with a deaf or hard of hearing person

For example, there are lots of ways you can make life easier by developing good communication tactics, such as speaking slowly and clearly, or writing things



down, or even learning the fingerspelling alphabet. This is a real help when names of people and places are mentioned. There are also environmental factors to be taken into consideration such as lighting, space, background noise and visual distractions.

Different disabilities need to be catered for if the church is to be truly inclusive and welcoming. The key word is SUPPORT – both human and technological.

One of the barriers to full acceptance of disabled people is FEAR and unwillingness to change the status quo. Yet Jesus' ministry was among the vulnerable and disabled as that was where his glory shone through in response to their great faith. Paradoxical, yes, but true.

Welcoming churches are deaf aware and disability aware. Keeping the church notice board or website up to date is important.

Health & Safety – what to do in an emergency

It helps if you can identify your disabled visitors, but this is especially difficult if they have an invisible disability like deafness. Volunteers on duty may have to tap them on the shoulder if they are not responding as they should to the fire alarm. It may be worth installing visual as well as audible fire alarm systems. Vibrating pagers are also useful.

Install an Evac-chair for higher or lower levels and ensure a wheelchair is available at all times for speedy evacuation of any disabled or injured people.

Evacuation routes should provide for progress towards places of greater safety. There must be a refuge provided for wheelchair users if they cannot evacuate from the building independently. Further information on means of escape is available in "Widening the eye of the needle" (2nd ed) by John Penton (Church House Publishing, 2001).

Note: Health & Safety legislation takes priority over the Disability Discrimination Act.

Interactive exercise in pairs (slide)

Hand out lipreading sheets & pens – for person 1 and person 2.

Full instructions are on the sheets.



How did you find it? Lip-reading is only 30% accurate and a deaf person relies heavily on guesswork. Context is also important.

See next slide on similar sounding letters.

Break (5 minutes)

Is your church guide available in a variety of formats? (see slide)

- Guides for blind/partially sighted people
- Guides for Deaf/hard of hearing people
- Virtual reality tours/visual touch screens for mobility-impaired people
- Church noticeboards and websites
- Advertising – use of symbols and levels of accessibility
- Discussion on how to develop accessible guides

Guides for blind/partially sighted people

Mary Nunns, a blind lady from Rochester, writes:

“Last week, we visited Hereford Cathedral which had a Braille guide with a tactile floor plan. We also took the opportunity to visit the Mapa Munde exhibition which had a very good Braille guide and also a talking tactile plan. As you touch each bit of the plan each item was explained and it also told you which part of the plan to press in order to get the next piece of the story.

Canterbury Cathedral has an audio floor plan”.

A Braille touch tour at Westminster Abbey allows blind people to touch the monuments and learn the history behind them.

Alternative ways of presenting information for visually impaired people include large print materials in a sans serif font (use font size 16-20) and of course audiotape guides. Information can also be contained in a E-mail attachment for screen reader software used by many visually impaired people.

Guides for Deaf/hard of hearing people



Deaf people rely on visual, not auditory input. Therefore it goes without saying that everything should be as visually accessible as possible.

Examples of accessible information include: subtitled DVD's, hand-held palm-pilots with short British Sign Language clips that can be downloaded (these are used at the Tate Modern), transcripts of guided tours, or guided tours in British Sign Language.

I visited Cuxton Chapel which was taken down from its original location near Rochester in Kent and rebuilt at the Museum of Kent Life – there was a visual exhibition with objects like a child's shoe in glass cases covered with cloth. This was a great success with visitors young and old and a talking-point for my Deaf friends.

Good signage is also important as many Deaf people, especially British Sign Language users, find it hard to communicate their needs clearly let alone understand the answer they are given.

Virtual reality tours/visual touch screens for mobility-impaired people

At Canterbury Cathedral there is a lift to the Quire, but the corona and site of Becket's shrine are not accessible. There is a visual touch presentation as an alternative to visiting the higher level.

There are virtual reality tours available at National Trust properties like Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, so that a disabled person can view all the rooms in the building on a computer without having to physically climb any steps.

Also consider installing low counter levels and shelf levels so that wheelchair users can reach booklets and other information instead of having to ask for assistance.

Church noticeboards and websites

Some thought should be given to how you utilise the space on your church noticeboard, as this is often the first thing people notice about your church.

As regards colour – for dyslexics, bold black type on yellow paper is best. Also consider the font size – Arial point 14 as a minimum, but Arial point 26 for display purposes is recommended.



Add a line about Disability Access: Y or N to your website listing, as well as opening hours, parking facilities, OS grid reference etc.

On your website specify text size: small, medium or large – this gives people more flexibility. Also provide a “Text only” version of your website for screen reader software for visually impaired people.

Advertising – use of symbols and levels of accessibility

Some information signs from “Essentially Free – Best Practice Guidelines” (Church in Society, 2006) p.40 include:-

Accessible car parking, ramped entrance, accessible facilities, public telephone for wheelchair users, induction loop, sympathetic hearing scheme, signed proceedings, facilities for blind and partially sighted people, assistance dogs welcome.

These signs can be used on church noticeboards, websites, welcome leaflets, tourist information brochures etc.

Bronze, silver, and gold levels of accessibility are awarded by the “Churches for All” campaign. This is organised by Through the Roof and other disabled charities, and is based on the British Tourist Authority’s earlier “Tourism for All” initiative. Churches can display the appropriate badges. (See article “The challenge of being open to all” in Church Times, 8 October 2004)

Churches could also consider joining the National Accessible Scheme run by VisitBritain (see website www.visitbritain.org). This grading scheme is widely used for assessing accommodation, and also for visiting heritage properties.

There are 4 levels of mobility:-

1. The person is able to climb a flight of steps with a handrail
2. The person has restricted walking ability and can climb a maximum of 3 steps
3. The person is an independent wheelchair user, able to transfer unaided
4. The person is an assisted wheelchair user, needing a carer or hoist

There are two levels of visual impairment:-



1. The person has difficulty reading small print, and is registered blind
2. The person is blind and needs a higher level of service

There are two levels of hearing impairment:-

1. The person is hard-of-hearing or can hear quite well with a hearing aid
2. The person is profoundly deaf and needs a higher level of service

However, meeting these standards *will not* guarantee compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Discussion on how to develop accessible guides

Other accessible formats to consider:-

“Basic language tours” in the English Heritage Access Guide are available for people with learning difficulties.

“Easy Read” which is simple language with pictures.

British Sign Language clips on websites, and subtitled You-tube clips.

Lower level heritage displays for wheelchair users.

Leaflets with plan of church building and details of facilities for disabled visitors.

Conclusion

Take small steps – they do add up. For example:-

Hold an accessibility audit – see John Penton’s “Widening the Eye of the Needle” for a template you can use.

Keep noticeboards and websites up to date and use accessibility symbols.

Hold special heritage open days where you can ensure the church is well staffed and disabled people are welcomed.



Learn good communication tactics – this will improve matters for everyone, not just for Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Obtain feedback from disabled visitors. They together with their carers form a surprisingly large proportion of the UK population and their views should be taken into account.

Changes need not be costly, e.g. providing large print guide sheets.

Be imaginative – provide a welcoming information point for example.

Many of the changes you make will benefit other people, e.g. parents with children in pushchairs, and overseas visitors, as well as disabled people.

I have brought some copies of a leaflet called “Welcoming Visitors to your Church” which will give you some more ideas. You are welcome to take one away with you.

Any questions?

Thank you. Mark here, thank you.

Thanks to the facilitator for chairing the discussion.