

A Brief for Chapels Society Visits

This document aims to help any member, or group of members, who are considering arranging a visit for the society. Visits are arranged to give opportunities for informal contact and exchange of ideas, and to help members to build up their knowledge and understanding of non-Anglican religious buildings, the factors which have influenced their architecture and development, and how they are being adapted for current religious and secular use. Thus various considerations may dictate the choice of buildings to be visited. The provision of background notes and a map is much appreciated not only on the day but for later reference.

Venue

Obviously, it is most important to select a town or area where there are a number of interesting chapels which can be visited comfortably in a day or half-day. We are a national society and the area selected should be reasonably accessible to a significant proportion of our membership. Some areas will draw members on a national basis: others may have a clear regional bias but should normally be accessible to those who are prepared to devote a long day (or perhaps an overnight stay) to share in the visit. If the places to be visited warrant it, two consecutive days have sometimes been arranged, e.g. Hampstead followed by London Synagogues. We have also arranged residential weekend visits.

Transport

Most visits so far have consisted of a series of visits to chapels on foot or by coach; occasionally public transport has also been used. If a coach is required for all or part of a day, check whether Public Address is available, and make sure that you use it. Coaches impose a limit on numbers, and the sizes and prices available will affect the budget. Careful planning may mean that a coach is needed for only half the day. If coaches are to be used, please discourage participants from following the tour in their own cars without good reason. Walking tours make a clear map (ideally with scale) essential for each participant, marked up specially for the purpose.

Planning

When contacting local venues to arrange visits, you may find it helpful to send each one a copy of the society's introductory leaflet. The Visits Secretary will gladly supply these if you say how many you need, or you can download it as a pdf from the website. Nearer the time, it is wise to confirm the visit with each venue a week or two beforehand. It is surprising how many forget that we are due to visit!

Many members travel by train, so train times and journey times should be checked and considered. Some come by car, so long-stay parking is also a topic on which members would welcome information. There must be an initial venue where members can meet, with refreshments available. If there are to be introductory talks, projection facilities may be required. Similarly it will be helpful to members to know when they will be free to start their journey home.

Timing should be considered and checked carefully, and it is best to go round the proposed route with a watch and a notebook before finalising the times. Helpful enthusiasts giving talks and acting as guides need to be made aware (diplomatically but firmly if necessary) of our time constraints. Do not attempt too much. A good rule of thumb is to see inside three buildings in each half of the day. Remember that it takes several minutes to offload a coach party – and to get them back on again!

Mobility and access are important considerations. The local organiser needs to check each building visited, for entrances, stairs, toilets, and sometimes amplification. Any specific difficulties should be prominently detailed in the flyer and/or visit notes as appropriate. Please inform people about distances to be walked and whether there are any hills or steps.

Members travel considerable distances to share in these visits, and light refreshments on arrival and a

substantial tea (a salad tea with knife and fork) not too late in the afternoon are very much appreciated. Normally members make their own arrangements for lunch; many prefer to bring their own sandwiches so we need to provide a place where these can be eaten, with hot drinks available if possible. Some will want to know where they can buy lunch, and whether this needs to be done before the tour starts.

Finance

Council expects that these visits will be planned on a financially self-supporting basis, but will underwrite any unpredictable loss. It is therefore very important to cost the visit fully and accurately. Please prepare a simple budget (working on the basis of 25 or 30 paying attenders) to help Council to fix a realistic charge for members. This should include the following costs, where appropriate:

- hiring of venue
- hire of coach
- refreshments in the morning and at lunchtime (£1.50 each time), and tea (we usually allow around £7)
- lecturer's expenses
- organiser's expenses
- suggested donations to chapels visited (£1.50 per head, the total to be rounded up)
- a gratuity for the coach driver
- an amount to cover postage / copying / contingencies (say £1-2 per head).

We welcome non-members to join these tours, but would ask that the charge for them be set at £2 above that for members.

After the visit please submit accounts, with receipts or invoices for large items, to the Treasurer. It is helpful to clarify with the Officers who will handle payments and thank you letters. Where a visit is combined with our AGM, the budget for the AGM will be kept quite separate. Similarly, if we make a visit jointly with a kindred society, the Officers will establish how to split the costs etc.

At present we offer full refunds to those cancelling before the cut-off date for applications, and sometimes later if there is a decent chance of reselling the space. Thereafter we have sent partial refunds (e.g. £10 out of £26 for the Vale of White Horse in May 2009) as a goodwill gift in the case of last minute withdrawal *through illness or accidents*. Those involved should be contacted to see whether they wish to receive such a refund, or to convert their payment to a donation for the society.

Publicity

It is useful to publicise the agreed date of the visit a year ahead, so early planning is necessary, in discussion with the officers of the Society. As local organiser, you will need a supply of our leaflets well before the visit, for contacting chapels we will be visiting.

The person receiving applications (the local organiser, or if necessary the Visits Secretary) needs to liaise with the Editor, so that some member can be asked beforehand to write the report for our Newsletter. A member who is keen on photography or drawing can also be an asset, to provide illustrations. If you have good contacts with the local press, these can be exploited both before and after the visit.

Flyers (one side of A4) advertising a visit are posted with the appropriate Newsletter; a draft should reach the Visits Secretary by 30 November for the January issue; 31 March for the May issue; and 31 July for the September issue. This gives time for it to be finalized before being passed on to the Editor for inclusion with the Newsletter.

The job of the flyer is to attract members to join the visit by telling them what the area and its buildings can offer; to that end an appealing title is helpful. Essential elements to include are:

- time and place of meeting,
- cost,
- times of starting / finishing,
- some information about refreshment arrangements,
- what venues we are visiting,
- a disclaimer: 'As the number of places available is limited, early application is advised to avoid disappointment.'
- whether we walk or go by coach,
- and the address to which to send bookings.

It is useful to give the local Tourist Information Centre phone number / website, especially if they offer a booking service for visitors. A tear-off booking form should appear at the bottom of the page.

Once the text of the flyer is agreed with the Visits Secretary and Editor, it will be passed to the webmaster for a web page to be prepared, though this will not normally be published until the printed flyer has been posted to members. Bookings, however, are only accepted by post.

Application forms (see the pro forma at the end of these notes)

These should allow space for dietary requirements (e.g. allergies, requests for vegetarian food), names and addresses of each person booking (for insurance purposes; 'guest' is not sufficient), and whether or not they are members. They are returned to whoever is handling the bookings, with a C5 s.a.e. (162 x 229 mm) unless those booking are happy to receive information by e-mail, and cheques payable to 'The Chapels Society'. (Incidentally, please indicate what postage will be required on the s.a.e.) Keep a list of bookings, on which you note any issues (e.g. individuals requiring to leave part way through a tour).

Visit notes

You will need to provide a sheet with full details regarding the practical arrangements for the day, together with a clear map (preferably with scale). If you can obtain a quantity of a useful local information leaflet (not a booklet, which would be too heavy), these can be mailed out to those attending. The notes and map should be ready one month before the visit, for duplication and distribution in the s.a.e.s: two copies of these will be sent to couples unless they indicate otherwise (a question could be included on the application form if space permits). Alternatively, these may be made available on the day. If you can include a bibliography of useful items to read and websites to consult for further research, this would be greatly appreciated. A spare copy of the notes is needed by the Secretary and the Visits Secretary for permanent filing (the latter would also appreciate electronic copies). Please ensure that you do not infringe copyright if copying maps, photographs etc.

NB: if sending items electronically, it is wise to ask that receipt be acknowledged; if you have heard nothing within a fortnight, you can resend the information. It is not unknown for e-mails to go astray!

Insurance

The society holds an insurance policy which covers visits. For details of the policy, see <http://www.balh.co.uk/insurance.html>.

On the day

If you would find it helpful to have someone else registering participants, please feel free to ask. The Visits Secretary may be able to help, or another Council member. You may need the help of a whipper-in or sheep-dog, not least to round folk up when moving on to the next venue. In crowded town streets a simple sign or umbrella held aloft may do wonders. It is often helpful to divide the participants into smaller groups, each with a guide (briefed in advance) who can keep them together and deal with any practical questions.

After the day

We should try to learn from our experiences, and after a visit it could be very helpful if you and Council members note any constructive criticisms or lessons learned, and send them to the Visits Secretary for a short de-briefing at the next Council.

Updated Tim Grass 11/2014

Visit to [place] – [date]

Please reserve ____ places

Enclosed is a cheque for £____

Capital letters, please

Name(s) of members:

Address:

Telephone:

I am happy to receive visit notes by e-mail.

I/we have the following dietary requirements:

Name(s) of guest(s):

E-mail: