

Maintenance

How to protect your place of worship

Joy Russell *Senior Architect, Chief Conservation Architect's Team*

Modest spending on regular maintenance can reduce the need for costly repairs and protect the fabric of a place of worship.

Maintenance is the routine, everyday work necessary to protect the fabric of a building. When carried out regularly, maintenance helps prevent the types of failure that occur predictably within the life of a building and can result in major repair costs.

Maintenance falls into three main categories: *inspection*, to assess the condition of a building, report any problems and decide whether repair or other work is necessary; *specific tasks*, such as testing building services and clearing debris from gutters; and *minor repair*, such as fixing slipped slates, replacing broken glass and making temporary taped repairs to leadwork. Maintenance differs from repair, which is work carried out to put right defects, significant decay or damage, and work to return a building to a good condition on a long-term basis. Most problems suffered by places of worship are caused by water penetration, so a maintenance inspection should concentrate on the external envelope and, in particular, those elements that protect the building from water and damp penetration:

- Roof coverings; gutters, down pipes and associated rainwater goods; external wall surfaces and joinery; and drains
- Internal roof voids, which will reveal any evidence of water ingress and attendant fungal or insect attack
- Internal areas where maintenance problems are identified in the external walls and/or joinery
- Drains and inspection chambers.

Some maintenance tasks should be carried out by a building contractor or other specialist, either because they require a certain degree of skill and experience or because access to a particular element of the building is difficult or dangerous. For example, a building contractor

could be employed to clear rainwater goods of debris, and a steeplejack to inspect high-level stonework. Many tasks, however, can be carried out by churchwardens or unskilled volunteers, including using binoculars to inspect roofs for missing or slipped slates or tiles or to check external walls for signs of damage or movement. Any problems identified should be reported to the architect or building surveyor.

Other examples of maintenance tasks are identified in the *Calendar of Care* on the Church of England's Church Care website (www.churchcare.co.uk) and English Heritage's publication *Maintenance Plans* (free copies may be obtained from customers@english-heritage.org.uk by quoting Product Code 50858, or from www.english-heritage.org.uk/ConservingHistoricPlaces/ConservationAdvice/PlacesofWorship).

Maintenance should preferably be carried out on a planned basis, to ensure that necessary tasks are not overlooked and to allow the cost of maintenance to be budgeted for. The maintenance plan should be prepared by, or in consultation with, the place of worship's architect or building surveyor. It should identify each element of the building, list the tasks to be carried out, identify the person responsible and indicate when the task should be done. An alternative is to subscribe to a regular maintenance service such as that planned to start in 2005 by Maintain our Heritage in the Gloucester area whereby, to complement the Quinquennial Inspection, basic maintenance tasks such as clearing gutters are carried out together with a limited amount of temporary repair on small but critical areas of disrepair. A similar service is now being investigated by the St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese and English Heritage.