

Interpretation and Assistive Technology

Introduction

This document has been written for churches who are exploring new ways to interpret the history in their churches, and story of their churches. This document provides helpful links and summaries of various types of technology and software that enables churches to explain and interpret their church's history and architecture in a new way.

Booklets and Other Interpretation

When discussing church interpretation, the best and most recognisable place to start is by creating or updating the physical guidebooks in your church. There is help available for this both from the Church Building Support Officers, and through a very helpful document on the Diocese website: [producing-a-church-guidebook-for-visitors---notes-for-churches.pdf](#). Look at the guidance in this document and consider what you could do.

Though this is a guidance document about technology, we must not overlook the value of a well-presented physical booklet that visitors can feel and touch and take away from the church as a memento.

St Mary's in Everton recently put together new church trails for adults and children and received good reviews and reception of them. These show what can be done in a fairly simple and cost-free manner.

Adult trail: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGb1POce-A/nS6XO8ovmCDCxd4tbrJmDQ/edit?utm_content=DAGb1POce-A&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton.

Children's trail: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGY-weR620/5R15PDsGzKf60-xp4qM-OQ/edit?utm_content=DAGY-weR620&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton.

When creating trails like this don't overlook simple things like explaining common features in a church (e.g. font, altar), simple trails, signposts etc that explain what you may find in a church can be great for school visits and for visitors unfamiliar with old churches: [Parts of a church : inside : features : altar, windows, etc.](#)

Websites

Websites are effective ways to communicate your parish news, who is who and what is happening. They can also help those in your community who may not attend church very often, but want to find out more about getting married, baptisms, funerals or confirmations. They are also a great place to offer unique content about your church.

The Diocese of Ely has guidance about creating engaging websites:

<https://elydiocese.org/parish-support/communications/your-parish-website.php>. The Diocese



The Church of St Andrew
Great Staughton

A Guide for the Visitor

Written and researched by Anthony Withers

generally advises uses a Church Near You for a church website, unless you have a fair amount of tech know-how, a commitment to keep it up to date and good succession planning.

You can also buy a domain name and point it to your ACNY page.

<https://achurchnearyou.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/4417463460625-Using-your-ACChurchNearYou-com-site-as-your-main-church-website>

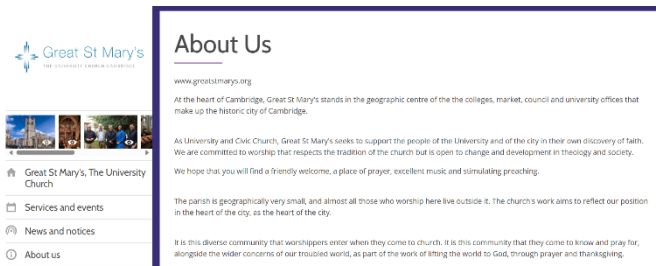
To get started with editing your ACNY, you will first need to request to become an editor -

<https://achurchnearyou.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360008013638-How-to-become-an-approved-editor> - then go from there.

Lots of tips and advice on how to use ACNY in the Editor Help Centre can be found here:

<https://achurchnearyou.zendesk.com/hc/en-us>

Great St Mary's Cambridge ([Visit | Great St Mary's](#)) have done this particularly well, having an easy to navigate and oft updated ACNY page which links to a larger main website. Content on the ACNY includes information about services, the church building, and directions to the church.



Google Streetview Tours

Many of us use Google Maps and Google Street view each day to understand where we are going to and what that place looks like. But Google also has the facility to help us to create 360 tours. These can be really helpful for visitors to explore your church virtually, St Mary's Church in Longstowe recently published a 360 Tour of their own: [St Mary Church, Longstowe - Google Maps](#).

You can learn more about how to create a 360 tour by clicking here: [Create and Publish your own Street View images](#).

Church Tour's

If you want to take your church tour online there are several options. One option many churches are now using is Info-Point ([Case Studies Archive - Info Point](#)), which is a little box that sits inside the church and creates its own private Wi-Fi signal. Visitors can connect on their phone or tablet, without needing mobile data, and instantly see a simple website with history, photos, audio, even prayers or service times. For places without good internet, it's a very practical solution. Other churches are turning to tour apps such as Smartify, STQRY or izi.TRAVEL. These let you scan a QR code with your phone and listen to short stories or follow trails, much like you would in a museum. If you'd rather not use your own phone, there are also audio handsets which visitors borrow at the door and carry around, pressing a button to hear information at each stop. And for those who are blind or partially sighted, groups like VocalEyes help provide clear audio description so everyone can take part. In



short, whether it's Wi-Fi in a box, a phone app, or a simple handset, there are now a range of easy ways to make a church visit more welcoming and engaging.

For a more low cost version, some churches are posting videos to their church website and including a QR code within the church to link towards them. There is guidance on both the Diocese of Ely and NCT websites explaining how to create engaging content: [Welcome visitors | National Churches Trust](#).

Colleagues in the Diocese of Durham have recently started working with AI to help to animate elements of the church. If you are inclined to experiment with AI, there are several programs which will create short clips of stained glass for you from an image. One example is Reelmind.ai, a platform that allows you to take video or imagery and apply a stained-glass-window style or animation effect, complete with light-diffusion, colour shifts and movement across frames. In Durham they used FAL.AI and then Google Veo 3 to animate a stained glass window to great effect. This is early technology though and may be easier to use as time continues and developments are made:

Another project linked to Chartres Cathedral is developing an AI-powered mobile interface, where visitors point their phone at a stained-glass window and the AI recognises the scene or motif, then displays or reads out information about the iconography, biblical characters, and historical context. This project aims to support interpretation and accessibility during visits.

These latter AI examples may be out of reach for most churches and may appear scary to some but is an example worth mentioning as it demonstrates a fresh way for visitors to engage with elements of our buildings.

Church Trails

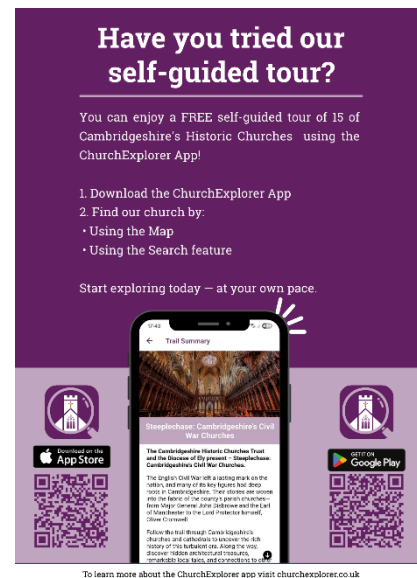
On the back of the previous point about church tours, you may also explore church trails more broadly. Partnering with other churches or organisations in your area to create a unified church trail. National Churches Trust have worked with the Art Society to help to design such trails and have good guidance on their website about how to do this: [Trails of discovery : children | National Churches Trust](#).

Romney Marsh Churches Trust have worked with a company called Izi travel to create a church trail with interactive church trails. This is an alternative version of the Church Explorer app:

<https://www.romneymarshchurches.org.uk/news-and-events/tourapp>.

Recently the Diocese of Ely worked with Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust to launch a Church Trail on the Church Explorer app. This thematic trail takes in 'Cambridgeshire's Civil War Churches' and includes a guided tour that can be followed virtually or in person of 13 churches and Peterborough and Ely Cathedrals. This app is FREE to download and only cost £100 per church to launch, so is a cost effective way of boosting the visitor experience at your church. By linking with other churches and around another

3D scans



An increasing number of churches have recently paid for 3D scans to be done of their buildings. These can be helpful for surveyors and architects to see elements of the church close up and can be used as part of building projects. But they can also be used as a tool for visitors to explore your church virtually. There are several examples including recently St Mark's Friday Bridge in the Diocese of Ely. The following website has some great examples of what can be done: [Churches and Cathedrals - A 3D model collection by Benkeat 88 - Sketchfab](#).

Certain AI apps can animate both 2D and 3D objects. This can be done on your smartphone using apps like [Adobe Firefly's AI animation generator](#), [AniMagic](#), and [Krikey AI](#), which can bring static images or sketches to life. These images can then be posted to your website and help to draw attention to special features of church statues, objects, and art.

An increasing number of museums and some large cathedrals are starting to also invest in holograms. This may sound very science fiction but can be done using photogrammetry apps on your phone, just simply download one of these apps (e.g. Halo AR) and you can for FREE create a 3D scan of your church. The image to the right is an example kindly shared by my colleague Chris Young of the Diocese of Durham which he shot using an iPhone app.



Online Video Tour and Drone Tours

Some churches have also created online video tours of their church and posted them to Youtube. This is a potentially low-cost for people to explore your church in depth in-person or online. St Mary's Church in Fishley (Diocese of Norwich) paid for a drone company to take footage of their church, this video gives people a different view of the church and is a unique way for visitors to discover new elements of the building: [St mary Church fishley by air - YouTube](#). This tour has been a good way of a rural church demonstrating their value and attracting new visitors.

Augmented Reality

By definition Augmented Reality (AR) is: 'a technology that super imposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, thus providing a composite view.' This technology was first made famous by apps such as Pokémon Go which allowed users to see and 'catch' animated Pokémon on their phone screen roaming around in the physical world around them. More recently several towns and cities have invested in AR apps, for example Ipswich has created an AR app which brings that city to life. You can read more about it here: [/www.ipswich.gov.uk/business/ipswich-towns-fund/digital-ipswich](http://www.ipswich.gov.uk/business/ipswich-towns-fund/digital-ipswich).



There are several augmented reality apps on the market currently also for museums. The Stained-Glass Museum at Ely Cathedral recently had an app created that brings their Stained Glass to life. As they put it; 'Augmented reality allows us, through the use of a phone or tablet, to create a 'real world environment' where we can display a new layer of information on top of what we can see with the naked eye. It allows us to create new exhibition spaces

and share more information about our windows. When you download it you will be able to see each window in greater detail on your phone screen and learn more about the glass in the gallery. You can read more about their app here: <https://stainedglassmuseum.com/augmented-reality-app>.

Several churches and cathedrals have also invested in similar technology. Westminster Abbey, - York Minster and Gloucester Cathedral have been noted to invest in apps that allow visitors to use their phones to explore the cathedral, more closely inspect the architecture and learn stories about the history and life of the cathedral:

<https://gloucestercathedral.org.uk/visit/things-to-see-and-do/cathedral-app>.

St Laurence Church in Ludlow (Diocese of Hereford) have also gamified an AR app, allowing visitors to explore their church through AR that allows visitors to explore the church in immersive new ways: <https://stlaurences.org.uk/vr-app/>. This type of technology allows you to edit the content you provide and offer an interactive experience to guests of all ages. Church Resources have more guidance about it: <https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/digital-churches/digital-churches.html>.