

Church of England buildings management and the *Historic Environment Advice Assistant* apprenticeship standard

Geoffrey Hunter
Head of Church Buildings and Pastoral
Diocese of Ely

Over the fourteen years I've been working professionally with church buildings I have been privileged to train a number of new recruits into this fascinating and rewarding, if sometimes a little arcane, world. I've called them all my "apprentices" with a small "a" at one time or other, but never expected there to be a formal apprenticeship route for this type of work. It hasn't been easy finding affordable professional training to ensure all our staff have the right expertise to do their jobs effectively, with the church's scant resources being, understandably, more focussed on meeting its missional aims.



Leighton Bromswold – George Herbert's Church

We advise on managing church buildings as heritage assets, as well as developing them to be effective sites for the missional work of the Church of England. Increasingly we also research and advise on giving church buildings a sustainable future at the centre of their local communities, both practically as venues for people to meet, and as the more symbolic "heart" of each individual community – a place for today's community to reflect on what has passed, and a place to find its vision for what is to come. There are many parallels between churches and the wider historic environment, as tourism destinations and treasure houses of English fine and applied arts; churches also share in the challenges facing the historic environment, from climate change, crime, and changing local demographics.



Hypostyle naves and aisles at Ss Peter & Paul, Wisbech

The breadth and interest in and of this field meant someone had to come to the rescue, and Historic England, working with other experts in the field, has developed two apprenticeship standards, at levels four and seven. Following the approval of the Level Four *Historic Environment Advice Assistant* on 11 April 2019, the Diocese of Ely, in partnership with the Building Crafts College in Stratford (London) was the first employer in the country to employ an apprentice to this standard.

The apprenticeship is funded with generous assistance from the Nation Church Institutions' apprenticeship levy funding, which is available to all C of E dioceses. Our apprentice, Poppy Crooks has written a short reflection on her first nine months in the job. I have found the Standard to be an excellent fit for the work we do, and really hope colleagues in other dioceses will see this as a route to bringing new people and fresh thinking into this business.

Poppy Crooks
Church Buildings Advice Assistant
Diocese of Ely

It's been nearly 9 months since joining the Diocese of Ely as Church Buildings Advice Assistant, and the time has really flown by. Having been a churchwarden myself, I've found that my perspective from parish-side has helped me to establish positive working relationships with Clergy, PCCs and DAC members, building on the existing success of my colleagues in the Church Buildings and Pastoral Department.

I have been applying the knowledge I'm gaining from my Historic Building Conversation course at the Building Crafts College to my role in the department and use the things I've learned at the BCC every day when consulting with Parishes, contractors and architects. I am much better equipped to answer questions, confidently interact with people on more technical issues, and enjoy my role more, because I have a greater understanding of what's going on!



BCC conservation students Sept 2019

I have found that my role is changing slightly, due to recent events relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and our department and committees moving to home working. I have helped to redesign our review processes so they can function remotely online, and have been providing technical support to the public and committee members, to help them navigate the changes. I am now taking a lead on assessing List B cases for consent to repair works on church buildings, managing the online faculty system, and

implementing the updated faculty regulations, amongst other things. I am pleasantly surprised by how much I have grown in the role, and how much I have learnt on my journey so far.

Steve Houchin
Lead Tutor, Foundation Degree in Heritage and Conservation
Building Crafts College

The Building Crafts College, Stratford, London was founded by the Worshipful Company of Carpenters in 1893 and has been providing the highest quality craft training since that time. Today, the College specialises in stone and wood crafts and also delivers a range of courses and apprenticeships in heritage skills as well as a degree in building conservation delivered in partnership with Kingston University

The team which developed the Historic Advice Assistant Standard was headed by Historic England and the Building Crafts College formed part of that development team. Following approval of the Standard, Geoffrey Hunter approached the College as a prospective training provider and, consequently, Poppy Crooks started her apprenticeship training with us in September 2019. Poppy's colleagues at the College are a cohort of historic building conservation students who, like Poppy, attend the College every Thursday during term time. The practical nature of the College and



BCC Masons Yard

the technical and practically based focus of our building conservation courses provide a vibrant and stimulating environment in which students are able to develop their conservation skills.

For further information please contact: steve.houchin@thebcc.ac.uk



Wighenhall St Peter's