

Creating the Perfect Welcome

Workshop Notes



heritage inspired
south yorkshire's faith tourism initiative



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Thank you for attending one or more of our training workshops for welcomers / guides. We hope that you found the sessions interesting and useful, and that you will be able to put into practice some of things we talked about. This booklet contains handouts from the 'Creating the Perfect Welcome' workshop.



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THE BIG PICTURE

UK TOURISM

The benefits of tourism:

- Tourism is the single largest economic activity in the world.
- Tourism is the fifth largest industry in the UK.

UK tourism generated £86 billion in 2006:

- 32 million overseas visitors spent £15.4 billion.
- Mainly from the USA, France, Germany, and Ireland.

The industry provides:

- Information to help people plan their visit:
 - Tourist Information Centres, websites.
- Things to see and do:
 - Visitor attractions, sports facilities, parks, theatres, music venues, leisure shopping centres.
 - Heritage churches and other places of worship, historic properties and monuments, museums, galleries.
- Accommodation:
 - Hotels and motels, B+B's and guest houses, caravan and camp sites, self-catering accommodation.
- Food and drink:
 - Restaurants, fast food, cafes and coffee shops, pubs, clubs and bars.
- Transport:
 - Air travel, ships and ferries, trains, buses and coaches, car hire, taxis, sightseeing tours, travel agents.

YORKSHIRE TOURISM

Tourism generates around £380 million a year in South Yorkshire.

New initiatives are increasing visitor numbers:

- Yorkshire South tourism management and marketing.
- Robin Hood Airport.

HERITAGE FAITH TOURISM

Visiting heritage sites is one of the most popular pastimes in the country.

35 million visits are made to Parish Churches every year.

In 2006 86% of the population visited a church.

Four out of the top five visited historic sites in the year 2000 were churches.

Ecclesiastical Insurance Group say:

“if possible churches should be left open during the day”

“the presence of legitimate visitors will help deter those with criminal intent”

YOUR AREA

Is your area getting its share of visitors?

Is your area getting its share of visitor spend?

What have you got that could attract visitors?

- Your church.
- Local pub or restaurant.
- Local visitor attractions.
- Countryside.

Could you help to encourage visitor spend in your area?

Heritage faith site tourism:

- Supports services and facilities that can benefit the community (eg transport, shops and pubs).
- Promotes and increases the understanding of faith, heritage and culture.
- Provides income to help upkeep and conserve our heritage and environment.
- Acts as a focus for economic regeneration in the local community.



THE VALUE OF AN EXCELLENT WELCOME

When welcoming people to your faith site, it is vital to remember that people are entering a special place, a living place and a place of prayer.

There are many similarities between faith sites and other heritage attractions, but the spiritual significance of a faith site should not be ignored.

People usually expect a faith site to be something of a sanctuary and a place where they can find peace and tranquillity.

Thinking about who will visit and why will help you to make visits welcoming and enjoyable, and encourage visitors to come back!

Knowing your local area will help you promote local facilities and services to encourage longer stays, additional expenditure and repeat visits.



WHO WILL VISIT, WHY AND WHAT DO THEY WANT

WHO WILL VISIT

Heritage faith site tourism is undertaken by people of all ages and all nationalities. Have you visited a church or religious building on holiday?

Have a think about the type of people who might want to visit your church. This will help you to make sure that their visit is a welcoming and pleasant one.

Visitors who have an enjoyable experience are likely to return and bring friends.

Who visits faith sites:

- Local members of the community, their family and friends.
- Casual visitors looking for a quiet place.
- School, college & university groups.

- Tourists - local, national or international.
- Local history societies & special interest groups such as family history researchers, artists, photographers, architects.
- Walkers and cyclists.
- People attending an event or exhibition (or looking for a venue to hold one).

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

These simple questions will help you to start thinking about what visitors may want to know when they come to your building, and what you can do to make them feel welcome:

- Is your site open at any times other than during services?
- Are opening times advertised?
- Are there welcomers / guides on duty who can greet visitors and answer questions?
- If your site is closed, are there times when there are people in church (eg flower ladies, the cleaning team) when the building could be opened?
- If your site is normally closed, is there a key available and details of how to obtain it? (for safety reasons it is best to ask a local shop or pub to be a keyholder, not a local resident).
- Is your site clean and tidy? Are ladders, hoovers, buckets and mops stored out of the way?
- Is your site bright and well lit, are the light switches labelled?
- Is there any information available about your site and its interesting features (eg leaflets, paddles, guide books)?
- Do you have a photo board of people involved in your activities and events?
- Is there a board with information about services and future events?
- Is the notice board tidy and well presented?
- Are there copies of the parish magazine available to take or buy?
- Put yourself in the visitors shoes - would YOU find YOUR site welcoming?

REMEMBER:

Everyone wins from excellent service ~ faith sites, visitors, employees and volunteers.

AN ACCESSIBLE SERVICE

There are nine million people with a disability in the UK and they should not be excluded:

- We have legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- There is a strong business case for attracting disabled visitors.
- The reputation of your church is based on the service you offer your visitors.

Meeting other specific needs:

- Make sure you know about your church's facilities and services.
- Ensure that visitors aren't disabled by your attitude.
- Offer services appropriate to the needs of visitors from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Be prepared to welcome visitors of all ages.

SETTING YOUR STANDARDS

The reputation of your site is based on the service you offer your visitors.

Poor service is the fastest way to lose visitors.

How to set your standards:

- Standards should be a guide to help you do your job.
- Standards should help to ensure consistency in levels of service.
- Standards should help you measure the effectiveness of your visitor service.

Delivering excellence:

- Everyone wins from service excellence.
- Aim high ~ make excellent service your goal.
- Exceed visitor expectations.
- Set and maintain standards based on visitor needs.



WELCOMING VISITORS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

If welcomers or the site do not create a favourable first impression, it is difficult to remove that experience from a visitors memory.

Think about the physical environment, what might put you off as a visitor?

- Dirty environment.
- Too hot or too cold / draughty.
- Poor / misleading signage.
- Dim / inappropriate lighting.
- Dirty windows.
- Litter.
- Scruffy / outdated notices.
- Poor parking arrangements.
- Untidy / unsafe churchyard.
- Overgrown churchyard paths.

The outside of your site is very important as this is the first area a visitor will see.

There are a few things that can be done to give a positive first impression:

- A welcome sign displayed near all entrances, letting people know your site is open for visitors. Vinyl banners can be purchased quite cheaply and displayed each time you are open.
- A notice board with times of regular services and opening times.
- A panel giving a short history of your site and community can be displayed near to the entrance.
- A clean and tidy doorway and porch, and cared for churchyard / outside area.
- Some sites have set up a 'club' of people who meet one morning a week to clean and tidy the building, inside and out. This is a good way of getting the community involved.

Once the visitor is inside, there are ways to make your site more welcoming:

- Light the entrance porch and other dark areas with energy saving lamps.
- Print notices in a clear and reasonably sized font. Use plain English.
- Play soft music.

WELCOMER QUALITIES

Your welcomers / guides may be the first and lasting impression in a visitors memory.

We have all experienced poor service of one kind or another.

If your welcomers have a negative attitude towards visitors they may:

- Look bored or disinterested in visitors.
- Fail to acknowledge visitors when appropriate.
- Look miserable and fail to smile.
- Look scruffy and unprofessional.
- Too busy talking to each other to notice visitors.
- Not consider visitors to be important to your site.

“tourism in England needs welcomers and guides with vision, to help show visitors how to start looking for the treasures that our ancient faith sites contain”

“a good guide can make a church come alive, and make it even more interesting for visitors”

Church welcomers / guides come from many backgrounds.

You do not need to be an academic, a history or architectural expert to be a successful welcomer, and to enjoy meeting visitors.

But it helps if you are a ‘people person’, in other words:

- That you like meeting people.
- That you are a good communicator, curious and interested in people.
- That you are confident about standing up in front of a group of people ~ you will be talking to visitors of all ages, backgrounds and cultures.
- That you are able to LISTEN as well as talk. You will need to find out what visitors want from their visit, and may learn something from a visitor that you can use on future tours.
- That you have a sense of humour ~ this will come in handy on lots of occasions!

It also helps:

- If you are reasonably fit, you could be standing and walking for long periods.

- If you are flexible, adaptable and able to think quickly.
- If you are knowledgeable about your church. You can use a file for detailed information, and if you don't know the answer to a question, you could take the visitors contact details and get back to them.

If you were 'press-ganged' into doing the job, or are worried about it and are not sleeping, DON'T DO IT!

MEETING VISITORS

The most important thing to do is make all visitors feel welcome and relaxed in your building.

Smile, say hello and welcome.

- Offer your services, and any written information.
- Let people know what their options are for exploring.
- Pass the time of day, but do give visitors the time and space to make their own decisions.

Visiting a faith site can be intimidating for some people.

- They could be visiting for a variety of reasons.
- Welcomers need to be sensitive to peoples feelings and needs.

Working in pairs can be useful.

- If you are expecting lots of visitors it can stop queues building up.
- One person can spend more time with a particular group without it affecting other visitors.
- If a visitor has special needs, one person can go off to fetch any equipment needed without leaving anyone feeling abandoned.

Make sure your welcomer / guides are easily identified so that visitors know who to go to with any questions.

- Perhaps by a badge, sash or uniform.

There are many ways to explore a faith site.

- Some people like to browse around a building on their own, perhaps with a leaflet explaining some of the interesting details.

- Other people will enjoy the experience more if they are accompanied by a knowledgeable guide.
- If possible allow people to choose how they would like to explore.

Try not to make assumptions about what a visitor knows or understands.

- Someone who has been attending the same church for 50 years may not know the significance of a particular carving right next to their seat, whilst a Muslim teenager may have studied church architecture at school or college.

TALKING TO VISITORS

There are three types of communication used in face to face conversation.

- **VERBAL** ~ 7% ~ What we say.
 - Choice of words, grammar, vocabulary.
- **VOCAL** ~ 38% ~ How we say things.
 - Volume, pace, tone, pronunciation, pitch, variety.
- **NON-VERBAL** ~ 55% ~ Body language.
 - Eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, postures.

To communicate successfully:

- Choose your words with care.
- Use your voice effectively.
- Use positive body language and smile.
- Concentrate on what visitors are saying to you.
- Ask appropriate questions to find out what visitors need.

LISTENING TO VISITORS

It is important that visitors should feel confident enough to talk to welcomers.

When a visitor approaches you with a question or comment:

- Stop talking to other welcomers / guides.
- Concentrate.

- Don't carry on with other tasks.
- Listen to the speaker's tone of voice.
- Watch for visual clues.
- Listen with an open mind.
- Listen all the way through.
- Give feedback.
- Summarise key points.

COMPLAINTS

Complaints:

- 10% of dissatisfied visitors complain.
- 90% of dissatisfied visitors do not complain, but they do tell an average of 7 people about the problem.
- 13% tell as many as 20 people.

Dealing with feelings:

- Don't take complaints personally or get angry, most of the time it is not you who has caused the problem.
- Remain calm and in control, and listen to the complaint.

Dealing with the problem:

- Know your site's policies.
- Take action to deal with complaints as quickly as possible.
- Thank visitors for bringing problems to your attention.
- Apologise and empathise with the visitors.
- Find out what the visitor wants.
- Suggest alternatives and agree what is to happen next.
- Follow through and try to stop the problem recurring.

Visitors who are not satisfied may not actually complain. Obtain and use visitor feedback wherever possible.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

All faith sites should have a health and safety policy. This policy should consider staff, volunteers and visitors.

Old buildings can be minefields of potential health and safety hazards:

- They are buildings whose shape, size and floor levels may have been changed several times through the centuries.

Lighting:

- Some old buildings are quite dark.
- Light switches may not be easy to find.
- In exceptional cases, the lighting scheme may not be up to required standards.

Aisles & pews:

- Spaces between rows of benches can be inadequate for wheelchair users.
- Wheelchair users will also have problems if seating areas are on platforms.

Uneven floor:

- Floor levels may be uneven due to graves and gravestones settling.
- In churches, there are usually steps between porch and nave, nave and chancel, and chancel and sanctuary. These need white edging strips.
- Carpeting, particularly patterned carpets, on floors and steps can hide steps.
- Where practical you should use ramps to overcome the problem of floor levels, for older visitors and those with wheelchairs or push chairs.

Tower visits:

- If churches have towers, consider carefully whether to allow tower tours.
- The difficulties these raise are numerous. Guidance is available in a free tower tour pack available from HERITAGE INSPIRED.

Churchyards & outside space:

- Visitors will also visit the churchyard, where there are also risks. Are gravestones secure? Is the grass cut, so that trip hazards can be seen? Has moss gathered on paths, making them slippery?

Your site should be checked regularly and risk assessments completed. This will identify risks and help you to take action to overcome them.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm to people within your site, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt.

You should carry out regular risk assessments of your site, and for any special event or activity.

Hazard:

- A hazard means anything that can cause harm.

Risk:

- A risk is the chance, high or low, that someone will be harmed by the hazard, and the severity of the harm.

To assess the risks at your site, follow the five steps below:

STEP 1 ~ Review the hazards.

- Walk around the site, inside and out.
- Look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- Make a note of each of these.
- Ask a colleague to do the same, and compare notes.
- Remember, some hazards may not be immediately obvious.

STEP 2 ~ Consider who might be harmed and how.

- Staff, as well as visitors, should be considered.
- Think about all the groups of people who use your site. In addition to the congregation attending services (including baptisms, weddings and funerals), many sites encourage school parties to visit during the week, have coffee mornings and other events. Some are open for casual visitors.
- Identify the hazards each might face.

STEP 3 ~ Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done.

- Consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm ~ this will

determine whether or not you need to do more to reduce the risk.

- If action is required, ask yourself “can I get rid of this hazard altogether?” If not, “how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?”
- If you find that something needs to be done, draw up an action list and give priority to any risks which are high or those which affect most people.

STEP 4 ~ Record your findings.

- Record your findings and inform your staff and volunteers of any precautions, procedures or facilities available to minimise risk.
- Keep a written record of your assessment. It will remind you of particular hazards and precautions and will help in any insurance case.

STEP 5 ~ Review your assessment, and revise if necessary.

- It is good practice to repeat and update your assessment whenever there is a change to the premises, or if new events are proposed to be held.
- If a change may introduce new hazards, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever you need to keep the risks down.

ACCIDENT RECORDING

You should make a written record of all accidents that occur on your site (including those to visitors, staff and volunteers).

Details of the accident should include:

- Name and contact details of the person(s) involved.
- Date, time and location of the accident.
- Any injuries or damage suffered.
- Details of any medical or other attention required.

To ensure that a full and proper record is kept, and to meet your responsibilities under the Data Protection Act, we recommend that you use an accident book published by the Health and Safety Executive or similar professional body.

You can find out more information at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/>

HERITAGE INSPIRED

HERITAGE INSPIRED works with all heritage faith sites, and related buildings across South Yorkshire. This includes churches, chapels, mosques, gurudwaras, synagogues, Buddhist centres, temples, abbeys and more.

HERITAGE INSPIRED increases access to heritage and provides interactive experiences with it. We organise events, activities, guided walks, interpretation leaflets, guidebooks, local heritage talks & courses, website and of course volunteer workshops.

HERITAGE INSPIRED is unique, the only project of its kind in the country. It is independent and funded by grants and donations.

HERITAGE INSPIRED is a national leader in the field of faith site tourism.

www.heritageinspired.org.uk

Make sure your site is represented on our website!

You can download copies of all the leaflets we produce.

There is also more information for welcomers / guides to use when planning your heritage and tourism activities.



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