

Building Volunteers



**Survey of church
building volunteers in
the Diocese of Ely**

Holly Isted, Historic Church Buildings Support Officer

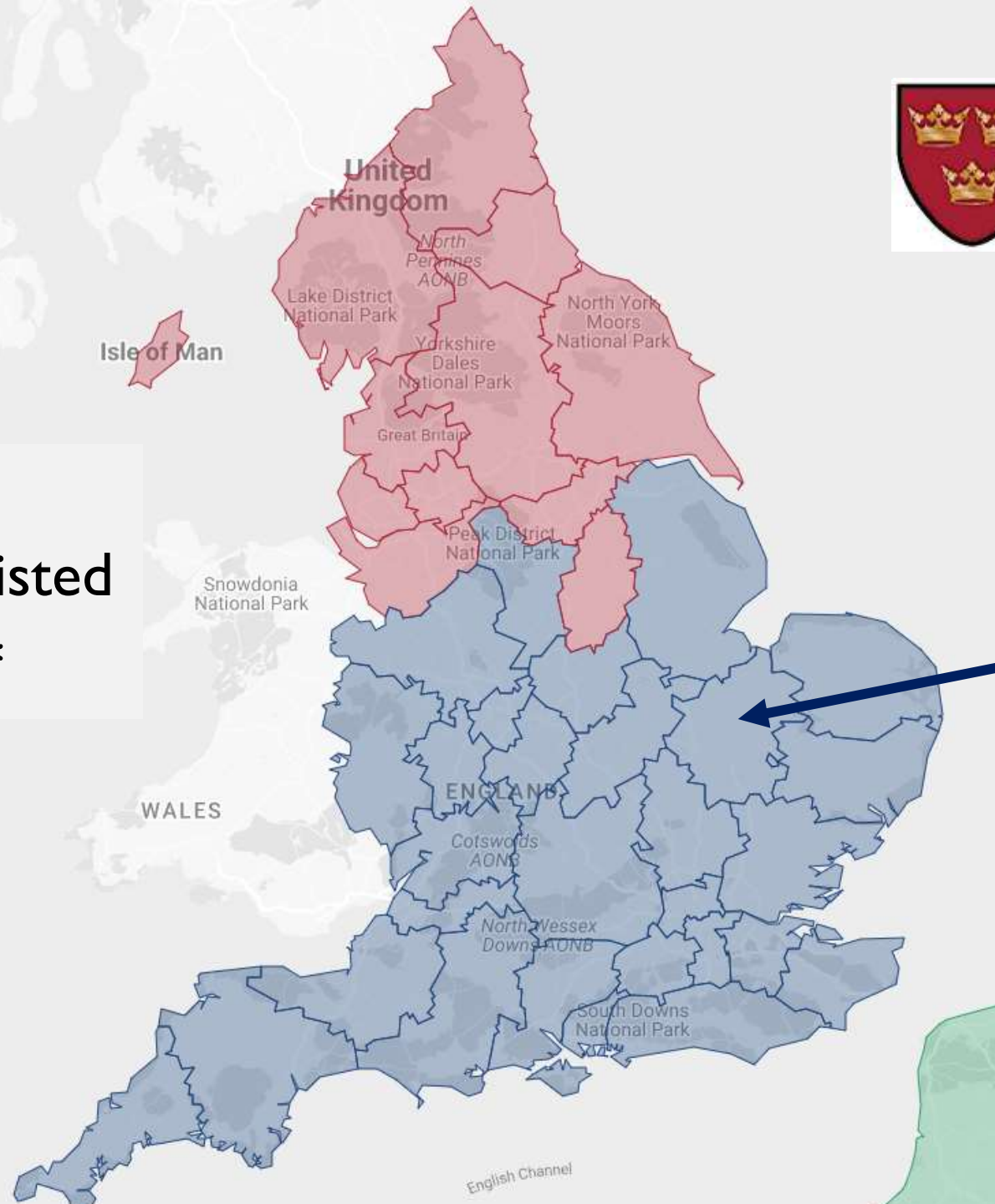
Key Aims

- Gather baseline data on volunteers involved in the care of church buildings including role types, age, length of service etc...
- Capture the first-hand experience of volunteers
- Explore the nature and 'health' of local volunteering at churches within the Diocese of Ely
- Carry out a skills audit
- Identify support and training needs and preferences
- Highlight concerns and aspirations for the future



The Church of England
Diocese of Ely

- 334 churches
- 43% Grade I listed
- 40% Grade II*



“Actually, a very good survey which has raised questions for me”

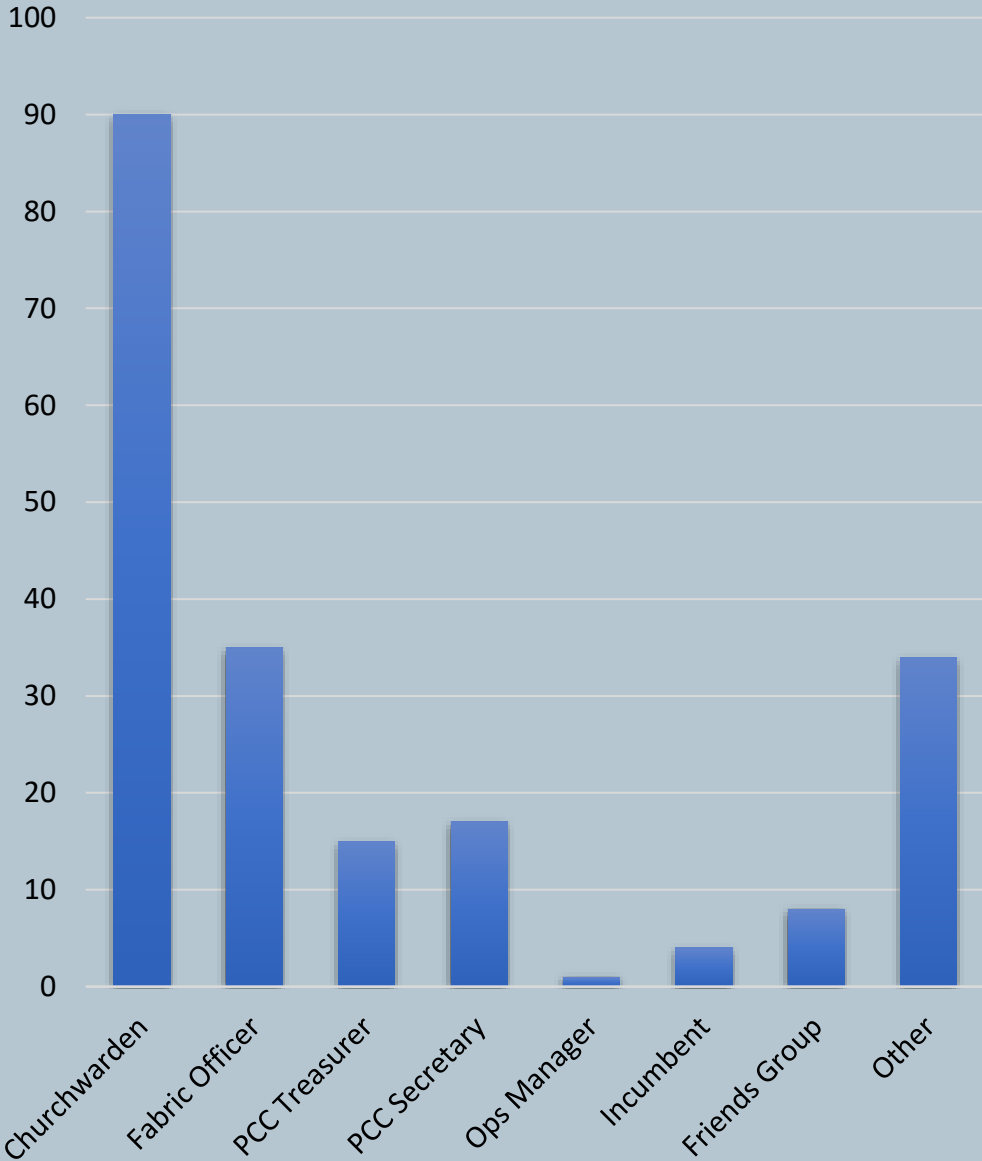
“Thought provoking”

“grateful someone Diocesan is interested in hearing about what might be considered a very unfashionable area of church life. People slave away in this area and their hard work is very rarely acknowledged”

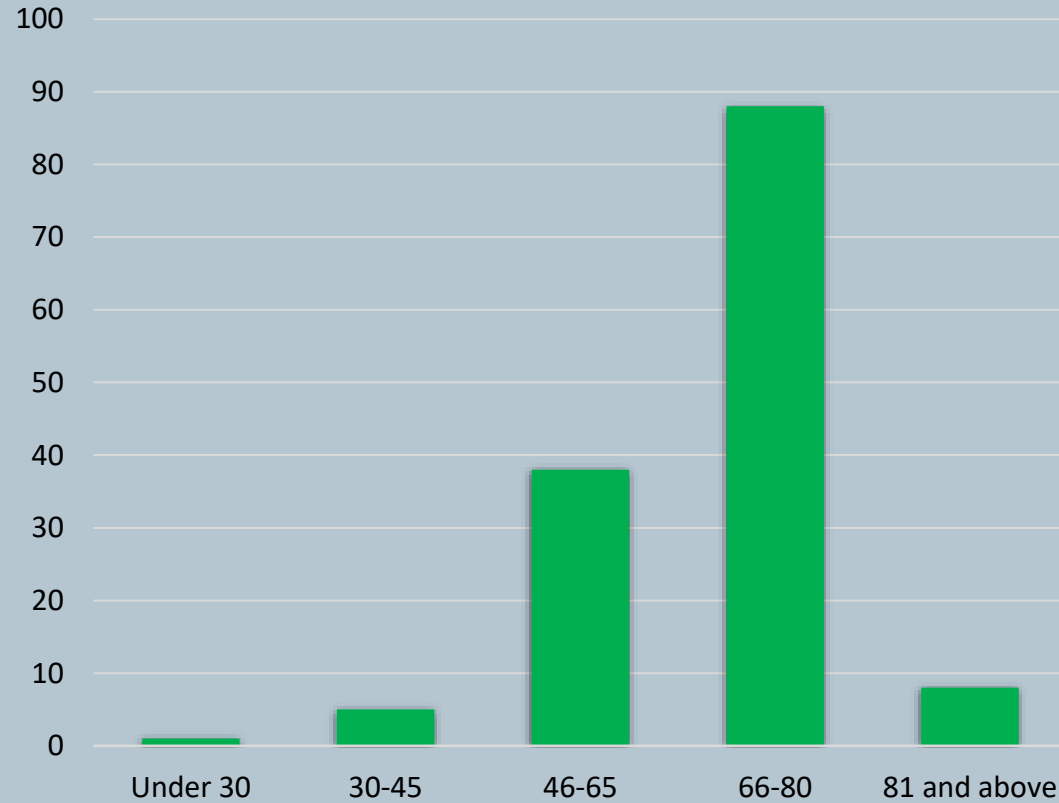
Who takes care of our church buildings?



Role(s) Held at Church



Age



“I have definitely been busier since I retired and my wife would desperately love me to give up (church commitments).”

“Churchwarden
is only part of
what I do at the
church, I have
about 26 other
jobs.”

- Grounds Keeper/maintenance of churchyard
- Safeguarding Officer
- Organist
- ALM Worship Leader
- Cleaning Rota Manager
- Electoral Role Officer
- PCC Member
- General church volunteer
- Odd Job Man
- Tower Captain
- Lead on grant applications
- Gift Aid Officer
- Reader
- Sound Engineer
- Lead on working parties
- Parish Magazine Editor
- Member of Fabric Committee
- Parish Administrator
- Clerk of Works
- Lead on development projects
- Key Holder – open the church up for visitors

Why volunteer?

“I struggle to see the motivation to serve the parish as a volunteer matter. Is the outworking of one's faith in any parish responsibility a volunteer matter?”

“I don't really see it as volunteering though. It is part of my duty as a Christian and as part of the community.”

“Committing on an emotional and religious level. It's more of a service than just volunteering to do a specific role/thing.

“I joined out of community guilt. There weren't any churchwardens (hadn't been for two years). It is clearly difficult to run a church without a churchwarden.”

- Making a difference and feeling appreciated
- Knowing the building will be kept in a good condition
- Serving God and the community
- Being part of a team
- Seeing the building being used and kept open and welcoming
- Community and fellowship
- Being in a peaceful, quiet place
- Privilege of working with an historic listed building
- Meeting a range of people
- Sense of purpose and structure (particularly during Covid)
- Continuity – being part of history and continuing the life of the church



“It is like being part of an extended family, you just do it, just help each other”

TOP 5 REASONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

86%	To do my bit to help the church
51%	Social aspect – friendship and sense of community
39%	There was no-one else to do it and someone had to
35%	It makes me feel happier and more fulfilled
34%	I have a long connection with the church and felt it was my turn

“You get into jobs, stumble in and then it’s ‘sticky’, you can’t get out of them”

“when I said I might do this (step back) next year it didn’t go down well...You don’t really leave though, not completely as the church is part of your life/your family.”

“When you leave a role in the church people still have your contact details and you still know and see everyone, so you still end up helping. It is very hard to just give up unless you move away.”



“I do quite a bit, climb the tower and other spiral staircases, no Health and Safety, precarious access, ladders etc... but you can't do much about that.”

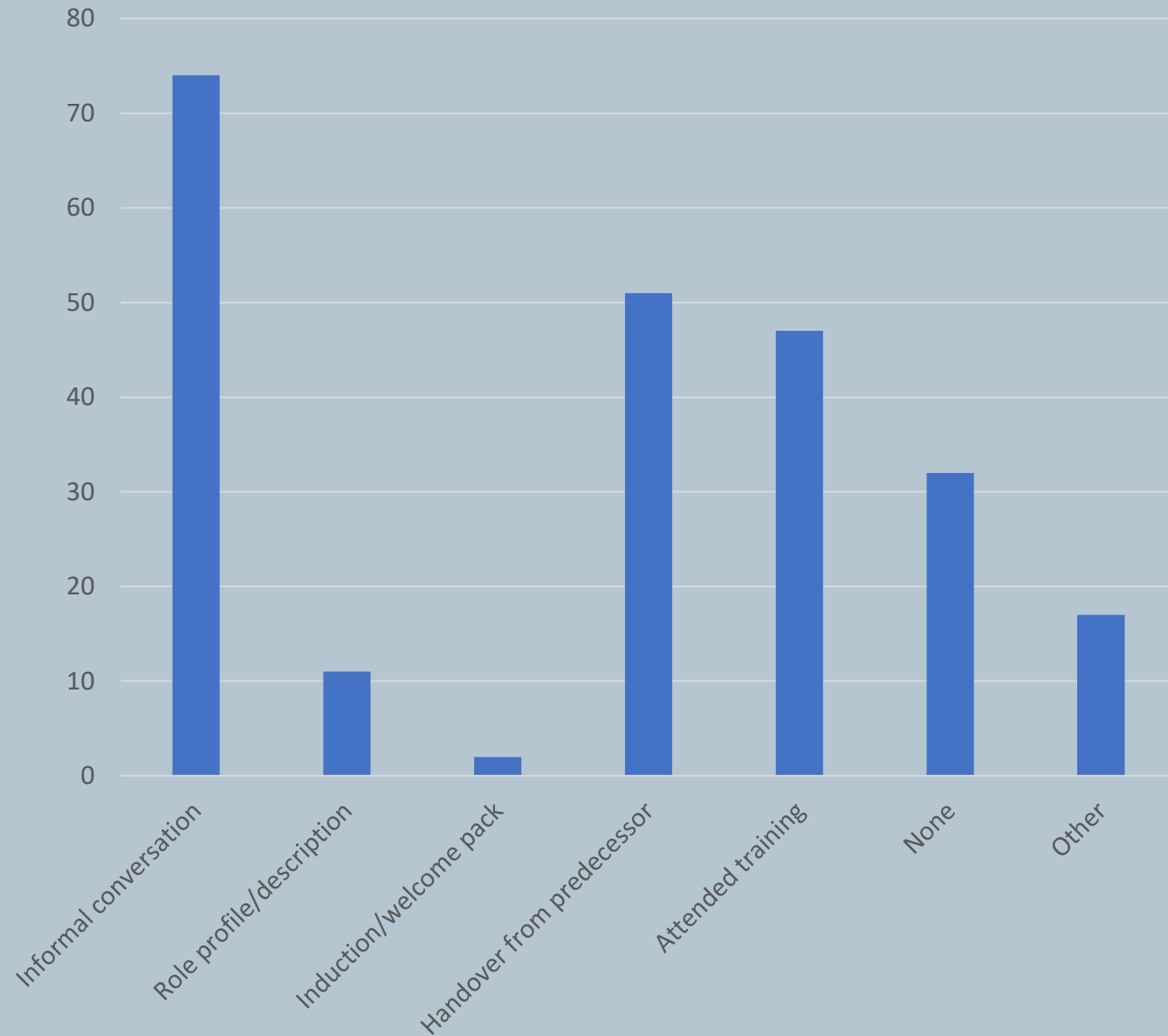
“We are facing an interregnum soon which I know will lead me to taking on more tasks. I was going to retire, but the church can't lose a churchwarden and Vicar at the same time, so I will hang on a bit longer...”

“Being a churchwarden is not a cheap job, you give a lot to the church...”

“I have a large house, but I couldn't downsize because of all the stuff I store for the church...”

“It is the same people all the time giving that time and money. We are happy to do it, but it does give a false perspective of the situation of the church and makes it seem we are better off/coping better than we are, we keep bailing it out.”

Information/training received prior to/when starting voluntary role.



“No. We don’t train all our volunteers, unlike other organisations where there is some sort of training for almost every role.”

“We know each other so well, we know what we all do and can step in to help each other and cover when people are away.”

“it is not fair for PCCs to do it all. It’s very sophisticated stuff.”

“...the hierarchy, or rather the approvals etc... it is unnecessarily complex...”

“...there is so much more personal accountability now, it worries people. Expectations are much higher and there is too much paperwork. “

“The challenge of being an Anglican today is that you also have to be a listed buildings property expert.”

“We are volunteers but many of us are amateurs as well. We are dealing with contractors etc... but we aren’t experts. Nor do I want to be”



“You can’t just pluck people out of the community to help if they are not interested in religion.”

“A Churchwarden has to be a communicant of the church...You could split the role up and have a Fabric Officer, but that person does need to have some understanding of Church. People are surprised that things cost so much more than they do in secular buildings, and the time things take and the lack of specialist support (without paying fees).”

“I am not a member of the church and had no knowledge of the church when I started, so it is possible for a Fabric Officer to be someone who is not part of the worshipping community. You do still have to attend PCC meetings; you also have to get used to the language.”

“(People) don’t want the commitment though that comes with church, or the religious element of PCC meetings (prayers throughout).”



“I am thanked by PCC and from the pulpit - that’s enough embarrassment”.

“we are not experts, but we’re expected to do expert roles”

“There is an assumption that all volunteers are likely to be vandals...Volunteers are what they are and should be given a degree of respect rather than a condescending pat on the head when one of too many Bishops appears very rarely.”

Recommendations

- Support and training that meets the needs of the audience rather than the 'trainer'.
- Concise guides on key areas, with a limit on the number of links to further information.
- Review key leadership roles and their relevance to modern attitudes to volunteering.
- Financial and practical support to ensure routine maintenance can be carried out.
- Free or subsidised professional support in key areas such as project management, bid writing, conservation and heritage interpretation and tourism.
- Funding tailored to the needs of church buildings and volunteers.



“Churchwardens are some of the most valuable volunteers in a church, bearing much of the responsibility for its upkeep and day-to-day running.”

Ecclesiastical, 2020

“Churchwardens are vital to the health and wellbeing of our church communities.”

Diocese of Ely, 2021

Full Report can be downloaded from the
Diocese of Ely's website:

[https://www.elydiocese.org/parish-
support/church-buildings/](https://www.elydiocese.org/parish-support/church-buildings/)

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