

Visitation records

Visitation is the practice of the Bishop, the Archdeacon, or their officials visiting each parish in the Diocese on a regular basis to enquire into the state of affairs there and to correct any abuses. The Bishop himself generally visited every three years; in addition there were two annual visitations, one by the Archdeacon or his official, but the other by the Bishop's Chancellor between 1630 and 1782.

Visitation created the following records:

Call books from 1630 to 1869, listing the clergy and churchwardens summoned to attend visitation and notes of their appearance.

Churchwardens' presentments from 1784 to 1974. Before the visitor arrived, the churchwardens had to inform him of anything they considered to be wrong in the parish; for the most part they simply stated all was well, though from 1848 they had to answer specifically a printed questionnaire circulated to them.

Clergy answers to a questionnaire circulated to them before the Bishop's visitation; these cover the period 1738 to 1936 at roughly three year intervals, but there are a number of missing sequences in the earlier years. The clergy could be more forthcoming about problems than the churchwardens.

Rural Deans' returns to the Bishop after visiting their deaneries, concerning church fabric, churchyards and glebe; they exist at intervals from 1832 to 1936.

Interesting examples

The clergy answers of John Martin of Heythrop, 1759:

"Lord Shrewsbury with most of his household is reputed to have in his house a Popish Chapel and priest, whose name is said to be Philips. They have drawn over from my congregation to theirs Jane Cox and her husband lately. My clerk, John Cox, gave me intelligence but never had the honesty and courage to witness that old Young of Dunthrop gave me £19 instead of £21 for his yearly tithes due to me. I could never yet get Joseph Cox and his wife to receive the sacrament and I fear I never shall; others going up to the altar, they constantly turn their backs upon it."

Where to find records

The Diocesan records are all with the Oxfordshire History Centre, including those after 1836 relating to Berkshire and those after 1845 relating to Buckinghamshire. The records themselves are not online. The visitation records for 1738 have been printed in Oxfordshire Record Society Vol 38.

Catalogue

The Diocesan catalogue is unfortunately not on the History Centre's Heritage Search online catalogue, but an overview catalogue exists on [A2A](#) . You will need to visit the History Centre to look at the full catalogue in printed form.

[Visiting and contacting the Oxfordshire History Centre.](#)