

## Guide to Filming in Churches

### Introduction

Churches are popular film locations. Hosting a film shoot by a movie or TV company can be very beneficial to a church. It can bring the church into the public eye and encourage the public to come and visit. It can also be a useful source of additional income.

However, there are potential pitfalls to avoid, including the risk of inappropriate content, unfavourable publicity, damage to the fabric and furnishings, and other risks such as copyright violation.

To maximise the benefits of filming in a church, and to avoid the risks, careful forethought and planning are essential. Church permission in the form of a faculty may also be needed before going ahead. These guidelines are to assist incumbents, PCCs and churchwardens to decide whether to agree to filming, and then in planning and managing the shoot.

### Points to consider before agreeing to filming proposals:

**Format** - Is this for a feature film or for a television programme? Will the Church be used for just a small clip in a larger production, or is the Church itself the main feature?

**Audience** - Which television channel is this intended for and who is the target audience? For example, Channel 4 with its brief to be innovative and experimental is broadly speaking more likely to transmit more challenging material than say BBC1.

**Category** - If filming is for TV, will the programme be a drama, a news programme, documentary, a soap opera or sitcom. Or will it be used for advertising, either on the TV or in the cinema? The scale of fees you charge will be determined to some extent by the category. The potential for damaging or insensitive material will also vary across different genres.

**Content** - Any television company must abide by programme codes which are laid down concerning content. Even so, this leaves possibilities for material to be transmitted which may show the parish and therefore the Diocese and indeed the Church of England in a poor light.

Knowing who is involved will also give a clue to the type of treatment that is going to be used. Programme makers are not in the business of deceiving you and will be only too happy to share their intentions since this enables them too, to get the best out of what is a collaborative exercise.

**Story** - Ask for a synopsis of the story-line in any drama or sitcom for example. This will give you an overview of the finished programme and allow you to judge whether it is beneficial or harmful to the Church.

**Script** - If filming is likely to be lengthy, with a lot of action in or around the Church, you may also want to see the actual scripts. It is important for you to see what is going to be said and in what context. For example, double entendres may flag up the kind of programme for which the material is being used. If there are last-minute changes to the script to which you object, then you should have the right to withdraw from the deal and negotiate a sum for your trouble and inconvenience. Make sure the contract states this clearly.

**Advertising** The name and nature of the product or item to be advertised should be obtained, with a copy of the script or advertising copy.

**Location** - Will filming be inside or outside the Church? If on church premises (in the Church or churchyard or other curtilage), the Church's permission is needed for anything to be done. Filming of a church or any other building from outside the site boundaries requires no permission. Pictures of buildings are not subject to copyright either.

**Animals** - If any animals are to be used, think through the implications very thoroughly. Very considerable precautions would be needed before letting any non-housetrained animal inside the Church itself.

**Time** - Ask how long the church is required for. Broadly speaking, a news item where the subject is a Church of England matter, and the editor simply wants to use the Church as background would not take more than half an hour. However, a feature film or drama will need to light and possibly rig the church before filming could start, and it could need de-rigging. The word 'day' is often used. You should be clear about what constitutes a day, so you can charge if the company overruns its time. An over-run of, say half an hour might be acceptable, longer than that should be charged.

**Church services** - It often happens that news crews or documentary-makers wish to film a service, for example a baptism or marriage, for a package they are putting together. They will probably only use it for background. In the case of a baptism or marriage you clearly need the permission of those involved. A film crew will often offer copies of the film in lieu of fees for the couple. The PCC is still entitled to a fee. For any service, you need to agree what is to be filmed and the camera positions, so that the congregation is not distracted. Make sure the above points are covered in the contract.

**Facilities** - Bear in mind the difference between a small documentary which may only require 2 or 3 people and limited hand-held equipment, compared to a major film job which could involve scores of actors and technicians even to make a clip of a few seconds! Does the production company need to use other facilities such as the Hall or car park? Do they wish to film in the churchyard? If filming is likely to be lengthy or for drama discuss toilets, dressing room areas etc. Use of your hall or car park for such things can be used as bargaining tools when you negotiate the fee.

Do ask the production company what they have organised for parking. If it is on a street with restrictions they will need to have gained local authority traffic department approval.

**Layout** - What changes are proposed to the way the church is laid out? Does the film company, for example, wish to move some historical piece, such as the altar?

**Fabric and furnishings** - If fixed items need to be moved you are likely to need a faculty from the DAC. Minor temporary changes may be able to be authorised by your Archdeacon. See permission, below.

**Contract** - Always insist on a contract! This will spare a lot of trouble later. Make sure the contracting parties are clearly named and even spelt correctly, as a simple error may even void the agreement. The filming company is likely to be an ad hoc project subsidiary, not any broadcaster or film studio. The contracting party for the Church should be the PCC. Make sure copyrights are clearly defined. Avoid handing over the right to images of church property (but see location above)! If you are looking at a substantial amount of filming it would be prudent to ask the Diocesan Registrar to look over the contract.

**Risk** - Make sure the Regulatory Reform (Fire Precautions) Order is followed (see In Depth Advice). Both the Church and the film company will have a 'Responsible Person' and must carry out their own fire risk assessment. It is desirable anyway to have a written risk assessment taking account of all equipment, sets, facilities, special effects etc. The last thing you want is the parish to be sued, the second last thing is to have to sue someone else.

**Insurance** - You must insist that the PCC is indemnified and insured against damage or accident. The church insurance policy may not cover such matters. Ascertain whether the permanent film or TV company will underwrite any risk. If not, either make sure you are covered by the Church's own insurance, or else write into the contract that the film company take on its own special insurance for the job. Inform the Church's insurers anyway.

**Fees** - Time and type of programme are the two main factors determining a location fee. Drama attracts the largest budgets. You should aim for around £800-1500 a day for drama, perhaps £500 - £1000 per day for an advertisement. With documentaries or current affairs, budgets are much smaller, and the time involved is likely to be comparatively short, a matter of hours. Try for £50-£100 an hour. Where news is concerned and all that is required is to use the church as background for a package, the time is usually short, and a fee would not normally be offered. However, it does much for goodwill and the quid pro quo is that the parish church frequently gets onto the news in a positive way. Consider an up-front returnable deposit, in addition to up to 50% pre-payment of the fee.

**Permission** - Permission for filming so far as the parish is concerned is a matter for the Incumbent and PCC, or in an interregnum the PCC and churchwardens. Diocesan permission will be needed for any works to a church, usually a faculty from the DAC.

Minor works may not need a faculty. If loose furnishings are to be moved, permission may be gained from your Archdeacon.

**Rules** - Contrary to what might be expected, film makers welcome working to clear site rules. They appreciate knowing where they stand. If they like the location, they will do what they have to, to get it, and will not be put off. They will not resent it if a church enforces its rules. Bear in mind it is always the first time this crew has worked together. They are all freelancers and are hired on a single project basis. Copy the rules to every crew member. Crews are quite used to a smoking ban and will observe it. From 1 July 2007, smoking is banned in all internal public places, including churches. Drink is the main issue.

It is essential to have a liquids policy, as crews get very hot and need to rehydrate constantly. A vast supply of bottled water with filter caps is best to avoid a lot of casual spillages.

**Planning the film shoot** - The main pressure on crews is the time to get in and out. Therefore, pre-planning is essential. They will happily attend recce meetings with key personnel including Director, Location Manager, Set Designer, Production Supervisor, Photo Director etc. Then the shoot can proceed quickly and smoothly.

**Equipment** - Lighting is usually the main item of equipment. Fittings are improving and getting smaller; wiring routes and the size and spread of tripods etc are the key thing. Lighting may be mounted outside, pointing in through windows, in order to simulate daylight, but any effect on the glazing and metal bars must be appraised in advance. Be prepared to insist on spreaders etc, tennis balls on equipment feet over valuable or fragile floors. Insist on protection to fittings and furnishings

in the Church which are not actually being filmed. Avoid taping of polythene, cables etc. Be prepared to ban gaffer tape and avoid blak-tak like the plague! (Blak-tak is used by film crews, it resembles blu-tak but leaves a much more stubborn residue).

**Special effects** - Trial any special effects on a small scale first, especially if fog machines etc are involved. Naked flames should be banned. Some alternative is always possible to achieve a desired cinematographic effect, so long as you identify what is the underlying requirement.

#### On and after the shoot:

**Supervision** - It is advisable to ensure someone is present during the filming. If it is a day-long shoot, or longer, two people may be needed. They need to know what agreements - the contract and the rules - you have made with those filming. Inspections Carry out a walk-round inspection of condition with say the Assistant Director before starting. Take lots of digital photos. Inspect for any damage again immediately on conclusion and report any issues within hours not days.

The company actually filming may disband very quickly after delivering to whomever commissioned it! Check carefully for any pilfering and take action quickly, if need be, but make sure it's really gone and not misplaced (or innocently packed up with props) - before telling the police

**Records** - Make detailed notes afterwards for future reference. Film companies are likely to return to a good site, and past experience will be invaluable.

#### In Summary

- Permission from the Archdeacon will *almost always* be needed, and you should consult your Archdeacon and the diocesan Communications Manager at an early stage.
- Permission from the Chancellor *may* be required if the filming proposes physical changes to the church. For example, the moving of some historical piece, such as the altar.
- Filming of a church or any other building from outside the site boundaries requires no permission. Pictures of buildings are not subject to copyright either.
- Always insist on a contract. The contracting party for the church will be the PCC.
- If the church is considering a substantial amount of filming, it would be prudent to ask the diocesan Registrar to look over the contract.

You should also give consideration to consent and GDPR – advice from the Church of England can be found [here](#).

These guidelines are not comprehensive and may not fit all occasions. If in doubt consult with your Archdeacon and the diocesan Communications Manager.