



Original photo courtesy National Churches Trust

Counting church visitor numbers goes digital

Do churches know the number of visitors that pass through their doors?

That is the question being asked by the National Churches Trust as they launch the Great Church Visitor Count, a research project which will see 40 digital counters installed at parish churches and chapels throughout the country.

Unlike cathedrals, museums and historic houses, there is no reliable data on the number of people who visit churches each year. At the moment the only data gathered is from the entries recorded in visitor books and of people who attend services. These are thought to seriously underestimate the number of visitors and tourists who visit churches and chapels.

The Great Church Visitor Count will analyze the difference between the number of entries recorded in a church visitor book and the actual number of visitors who pass through the door.

The National Churches Trust has already installed ten counters in churches including: St Mary at Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire. Churches and chapels will monitor and record the number of visitors they have over two years, with initial results of the research being released in 2020 and a full report in 2021.

But to increase the range of data available, the National Churches Trust is asking churches to install their own digital counters and to collaborate in the research project. Any churches that already have digital counters are also invited to share their data with the research project.

National Churches Trust Chief Executive Claire Walker says:

“We know that millions of people visit parish churches each year, but although data on the number of people going to church services is available, there is no accurate recording of other visitors.”

“Our Great Church Visitor Count project will help churches in a number of ways. Accurate visitor numbers will help support grant applications from churches for repairs to funders such as the National Heritage Lottery Fund.”

“The project will also help provide hard evidence to local authorities and tourist boards that churches attract many people interested in history and heritage and should be a central part of their tourism offer.”

“We urge all churches that already have digital counters in their building to get in touch with us and join in this initiative and for more to install these devices, which cost less than £200. The more churches that can supply accurate visitor data, the more we can show just how extensively these buildings are being visited and how important they are.”

Any churches wanting to take part in the Great Church Visitor Count project are asked to contact Linda Patrick at linda.patrick@nationalchurchestrust.org

The National Churches Trust is the charity for people who love church buildings, supporting places of worship of historic, architectural and community value used by Christian denominations throughout the UK.