

Keeping Churches Alive – a brief history of the Trust

The Founding

By 1951, the state of repair of parish churches in Britain was a serious problem. This was not a new situation, but the culmination of decades of neglect, stemming from the socio-economic changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when tithes were abolished, when the squirearchy began to fade, when the slow move from country to town became a flood, when the boom of the Industrial Revolution had turned to bust and left urban deprivation in its wake. These circumstances were exacerbated to crisis point by the almost total cessation of maintenance and repair during the Second World War. Urged on by The Pilgrim Trust and the Society of Antiquaries, the Church of England Assembly (now the General Synod), set up a Commission to determine what needed to be done to reverse the position. The Commission found that £4,000,000 was needed over the next 10 years to put the ecclesiastical built heritage of the country in order. It was the recommendation of the Commission that a charitable Trust should be set up to raise and distribute funds to churches of architectural and historic significance. So, after discussions in 1952, a trust deed for the Historic Churches Preservation Trust was drawn up in 1953 and grants began.

The People

It can be argued that any charitable enterprise owes its success to three elements: its Trustees, its staff and its supporters. The Trust has been remarkably rich in all three factors. In Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, the ebullient, determined and forthright Conservative politician, the Trust found exactly the right voice it needed to launch and establish it as a serious force in the 1950s. Serving first as both Secretary and Executive Committee Chairman, Bulmer-Thomas was passionately devoted to this cause. His letters show him persuading potential donors to give their support, travelling throughout England visiting the churches who had appealed to the Trust, charming distinguished architects to take time out of their schedules to visit remote parishes and report to the Trust, challenging and spurring on dioceses and parishes who did not believe that the money could be found to retain their local heritage. Bulmer-Thomas' commitment to church buildings is amply demonstrated by the fact that he went on to found The Friends of Friendless Churches, taking the work of the Trust to the next stage for those churches whose congregations and financial resources had dwindled away until closure was inevitable.

The success of the Trust soon proved that combining the roles of Chairman and Secretary was impractical and the role of Secretary was taken on by Hugh Llewellyn-Jones in late 1953. Hugh Llewellyn-Jones served the Trust with great loyalty until his retirement in 1980, steering the Trust through various difficult phases when the Trustees faced tough decisions about the range and scope of their work. Letters on file demonstrate his patience in gently convincing parishes to do the right thing for the church regardless of the cost; in mediating between architects unable to agree how to preserve, or conserve, or 'restore' a church. Churches today continue to benefit, quite literally, from the legacy of Llewellyn-Jones who, on his death, left a generous legacy to the Trust for its continuing work. Since Llewellyn-Jones' retirement, the Trust has had three further Secretaries: Ian Radford (1981-89), Roger Heptinstall (1990-93) and Michael Tippen (1994-2001). In 2002, when James Blott took on the role, the title changed to that of Director. Following James Blott's

departure in 2005, the title changed again, this time to Chief Executive, in line with the decision of the Trustees to move the Trust forward into a new phase of development and Andrew Edwards was appointed as such in 2006.

Following Ivor Bulmer-Thomas as Chairman cannot have been an easy task, but five people have taken up the baton: Viscount Crookshank (1956-60), A W Tuke Esq (1962-1967), the Duke of Grafton (1968-1997) and Lord Nicholas Gordon-Lennox (1997-2002), the Very Reverend Dean Henry Stapleton (Acting Chairman 2002) and Michael Hoare (from 2003) The role of Chairman at the Trust is not a sinecure: it is a practical office requiring time and effort from its holder and the Trust is grateful to all the Chairmen who have supported and developed its work through their work.

The Patron, Presidents and Trustees who have supported and served the Trust so faithfully have together formed another cornerstone in its progress. At its foundation, Her Majesty the Queen graciously agreed to be the Trust's Patron, while the Duke of Edinburgh accepted the Presidency from 1953 to 1965. The Trust is proud that since 1953 each and every Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York has endorsed the work of the Trust by acting as Trustees up to 2006 when their role was redefined as that of Vice Patrons.

The whole roll call of Trustees is a formidable list of leading politicians, churchmen, architects, historians, architectural historians, and business leaders. The appointment of Sir Winston Churchill in 1953 started a tradition of Prime Ministers joining the Trustees which lasted until 1976. The renowned champion of churches, Sir John Betjeman, was a Trustee from 1967 to 1980. The participation of HRH The Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Grafton on the one hand and the Arthur Deakin, Chairman of the Trades Union Congress in the 1950s, on the other show the breadth of the appeal of the Trust. From the architectural world came Sir Edward Maufe and W I Croome; representing architectural historians, Sir John Summerson and Alec Clifton-Taylor, along with the distinguished historian, Sir Arthur Bryant.

With the bulk of the churches belonging to the Church of England, it is not surprising that there has been a special interest taken by Anglicans. Foremost in support has been the Council for the Care of Churches, providing its Chairman, the Very Reverend Seiriol Evans of Gloucester, and its secretary Miss Judith Scott as trustees. Dean Eric Milner-White of York also played a prominent role in early days.

Other heritage bodies have been generous of their time, expertise and representatives. Sir James Mann, President of the Society of Antiquaries (who also served as Acting Chairman in 1961), Raymond Richards Esq, Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Society, the Rt Hon Viscount Esher, Chairman of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings all gave hands on support and advice. The Trust continues to benefit from its close link with these and other arrivals on the heritage scene: the Churches Conservation Trust, Cadw and English Heritage.

The desire of the Trust to ensure that the grants it gave were for programmes of work that were appropriate to the church resulted in first, local advisory panels of architects and later, the creation of the Committee of Honorary Consultant Architects. Representatives of the Committee scrutinised architectural specifications and, when needed, visited the church and its representatives to check in more detail what work was needed and how it was to be carried out. The fervent enthusiasm of the architects has produced some wonderful correspondence from, among others,

Walter H Godfrey and Alban D R Caroe on all aspects of restoration, down to a detailed description of types of ironstone and how they should be used. It was undoubtedly due to the sharp eyes of these architects – though not always popular – that potentially disastrous repairs were avoided (including a plan by one church to replace a copper roof with three ply wood!) and the Trust gained a name for the integrity of its work. Churches attempting to sell the lead from roofs were automatically refused grants: a fact for which many modern communities must be only too thankful. The Committee was disbanded in 2002: a victim of the prevailing insurance market conditions when it proved impossible to renew the Committee's indemnity policy. The Trust remains grateful to all the architects who worked tirelessly for the good of both the churches and the Trust. The Trust now relies on the recommendations of churches' own architects and local Diocesan Advisory Committees (or equivalent) , complemented as necessary by English Heritage and Cadw.

Trustees and architects together have given their time voluntarily and in this context, two further outstanding volunteers must be mentioned. Until his death in 1991, Lawrence Jones was a tireless campaigner and fundraiser for the Trust. In the 1960s he wrote, filmed and produced for the Trust a short film, *The Beauty of English Churches*, which was regularly lent to local church groups to raise funds for the Trust, while Jones himself gave lectures and slide shows. Since 1991, Robin Millerchip has been the organizer and guide of church tours around the country, the proceeds from which are given to the Trust. The Trust has received tens of thousands of pounds from the work of each of these two industrious, knowledgeable and generous hearted men.

Raising the Funds

The early 1950s was a poor time to try to raise money. It seemed, then as now, that every charity in the country was chasing a diminishing resource of available money. Heritage, especially of the built environment, was not perceived as one of Britain's glories and economic strengths as it is in the 21st century. Added to these difficulties the foundation of the Trust clashed with other national appeals for individual churches, in particular for Westminster Abbey. And besides this, there was a movement within the Church of England that felt that, as an Established church, it was the State who should provide the aid, as was the norm in continental Europe. The estimated required amount of £4,000,000 – roughly equivalent in today's terms to £40,000,000 – was as large a mountain to climb as Mount Everest.

But just as Mount Everest was conquered in 1953, in the first two years of its existence the Trust had begun to chip away at the foothills of its own mountain and had raised £250,000. The variety and scope of fundraising that drove the Trust forward through from the 1950s to the 1970s is astonishing. There were exhibitions of churches and the Trust's work at Charing Cross Underground Station and at Westminster Abbey, of Silver Treasures staged by Christies for the Trust's benefit, TV and radio appeals on the BBC by Viscount Crookshank and Donald Sinden, premieres and performances of secular (*Hello Dolly!*) and spiritual (*A Joyous Pageant of the Holy Nativity*) plays, concerts at St James', Piccadilly, donations by authors of their royalties, by painters of the proceeds from the sale of portraits, a benefit dinner at the Jerusalem Chamber.

The funds raised by these one-off events have been augmented by the generosity of the charitable, corporate and individual donors who have supported the Trust: some since its foundation. Particular thanks are due to The Pilgrim Trust, which, having been instrumental in the establishment of the Trust, has supported it, year on year, ever since. The Dulverton Trust has likewise supported the Trust from the start and continues to do so. The Trust has attracted donations from other charitable trusts (including the Manifold Trust and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation), from City livery companies such as Goldsmiths, from business and from private individuals. For many years, until economic pressures grew, the Church Commissioners gave annual donations, and a number of individual Diocesan Boards of Finance continue to do so.

The Trust also benefits from a number of 'non-voted' grants. The benefactors of these sources of money have requested that the Trust should allocate funds as an additional helping hand to a church already receiving a grant. Prime among these is the Skaggs Foundation, from the USA, which has given an unexpected welcome extra grant to many struggling rural parishes.

The Friends' scheme, open to individuals, was set up in the early 1990s in response to the growing number of private supporters. This is an area where the Trust has a development schedule, looking to institute a programme of events and activities to encourage Friends to become more involved in the Trust's work. We are delighted that during 2006, the Open Churches Trust recommended to its members that they should transfer their allegiance to us, following the decision to close the OCT. The Trust has also been the recipient of a number of extremely munificent bequests: some for the general work of the Trust, others for churches of a specific type or in a specific region. Surprisingly, and sadly, the Trust does not often know much about the testators, but their enthusiasm for the aims of the Trust is clear from their generosity.

The Grants

By the end of 2005, the total of grants and loans allocated by the Trust since 1953 was £27,076,388. It took a great deal longer than the original 10 years envisaged to raise and allocate the estimated £4,000,000 required: this target was not reached until 1984. In the 1980s, grant amounts shot up, from an annual average of around £100,000 to over £300,000. This rise took into account the inflationary pressures that meant that the pound in everyone's pocket was going less far. Grant amounts have continued to rise since that time, and over the last five years have averaged £1.4 million annually (£1.5 million with loans included). 2000, in keeping with the Millennium, was the Trust's 'best' year with over £2.2 million awarded in grants and loans.

Grant amounts have ranged from £33 4s 4d (Mileham, Norfolk awarded 1957) to £100,000 (Portsea, Hampshire, awarded 2000 and Selby Abbey, awarded 2005). The curious amount of the smaller grant dates from the early days of the Trust when, to prevent, the entire collapse of a building, the Trust undertook to pay all the bills, as at Thurleigh in Bedfordshire and Great Witley in Worcestershire.

The higher grant is a result of the decision taken in 1999 by the Trustees to institute Millennium Grants to assist those churches facing overwhelming deficits. Up to then, the highest level of grant available was £7,500. With parishes facing deficits of up to £250,000, or even substantially higher for a large inner city church, this amount had

become, over the years, a drop in the ocean. The Trust actively seeks to ensure that its grants make a "significant difference" to the progress of a project of works and the new grants were therefore a solution to achieving this aim against the background of rising costs. The Millennium Grant scheme was further developed in 2003, becoming the Cornerstone Grant scheme, for which listed churches with a funding deficit of over £15,000 could be considered. This development of the scheme was made as the Trust gained experience in handling these larger grants and realised that for a rural parish with extremely limited fundraising opportunities, a bill of £25,000 could be just as insurmountable as the million pound repair project.

The basic eligibility criteria for a grant application have remained the same throughout the Trust's history: the award is made for essential fabric repairs to any place of worship (with the exception of cathedrals) over 100 years old which is of a recognized Christian denomination and is open for public worship. The variety of fabric repairs is never ending and, on occasion, both entertaining and alarming: from Ashford Bowdler in Shropshire where the church chancel was in danger of falling into the river without an emergency underpinning project, to wooden roofed churches attacked by flights of belligerent woodpeckers. There is scarcely a Christian denomination in the country which has not been assisted, from the Church of England to Serbian Orthodox, from Unitarians to Congregationalists.

When it comes to discussing the individual churches which the Trust has helped, the range of material is so rich as to make any choice difficult. It is perhaps not surprising that the Trust has helped virtually every church named in Simon Jenkins' *England's Thousand Best Churches*. Whichever way one analyses the grants – by architectural style or importance, historical interest or significance, by geographical area, by rural or urban community, by denomination – the Trust's net has been spread wide.

Geographically, all four corners of England and Wales have been covered by grants from St Levan in Cornwall to Walkergate Methodist Church, Berwick upon Tweed, from St Peter, Great Yarmouth in Norfolk to St John the Evangelist, Pembroke, South Wales. Wales is the 'newcomer' to the grants system, as the Trust's remit was only extended to the Principality in 1987. Since then, £893,288 has been given in grants and loans to 238 churches and chapels. Thanks to the generosity of the Esme Mitchell Trust, since 1984 a small number of churches in Northern Ireland have been helped.

Architecturally, the churches range from the Saxon gem of Earls Barton in Northamptonshire, through the Norman splendour of New Shoreham, Sussex, the Early English of Uffington, Berkshire and Decorated of Patrington, East Yorkshire. Then into the flowering of the Perpendicular movement and the great wool churches such as Lavenham, Suffolk, and the exquisite angel roof of March, Cambridgeshire. The explosion of the Neo-Classical and Baroque is reflected in the grants to Ingestre, Staffordshire, St Paul's, Covent Garden, London and many of the other great London churches built by Wren and his contemporaries. Extremely rare English rococo is shown at Great Witley in Worcestershire. The nineteenth century with its plethora of styles from Pugin's Gothic throwback at Cheadle to the Arts and Crafts of Holbeton in Devon is well represented in the grants list. Nor must the heritage of the Independent churches be overlooked, from the seventeenth century domesticity of the Quaker Meeting Houses, as at Claverham near Bristol, to the stolid splendour of

the nineteenth century Welsh Baptist foundations, typified by the China Street Chapel at Llanidloes.

Historically, all churches hold a significance for their surrounding community, and some have connections with national figures. Elstow in Bedfordshire was home to John Bunyan in his youth and became, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the starting point for Christian's journey. John Wycliffe, translator of the Bible into English, was rector of Lutterworth before his death in 1384. Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk has strong links with Nelson where his father was rector and flags from a number of Nelson's ships hang on the walls. The villages of Bredwardine and Clyro were home to the Victorian diarist, the Reverend Francis Kilvert. The Trust has also assisted many churches where the great, the good and sometimes the infamous are buried: the philosopher Thomas Hobbes at Ault Hucknall, Derbyshire; the founders of the Industrial Revolution Richard Arkwright and Abraham Darby at Cromford, Derbyshire and Broseley, Shropshire respectively; the composer Edward Elgar at Little Malvern in Worcestershire; the writer Elizabeth Gaskell at Brook Street Unitarian Chapel at Knutsford in Cheshire; the spy Guy Burgess at West Meon in Hampshire. Guidebooks give entertaining accounts of local worthies, as this example from Thakeham parish church on their rector who was appointed in 1834: "it seems it was not unusual for Mr Hurst to stop in the middle of a service and request the clerk to go to the local inn to see how many customers the landlord had. If the number exceeded that of his congregation, he would abruptly close the service and suggest that they had all better adjourn to the inn."

Looking through the list of the early grants, it is noticeable that a number of churches are now closed. Closed, but not demolished. Kedleston in Derbyshire, Skelton in Cleveland, Whitcombe in Dorset and Higham in Kent are just four churches now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust (formerly the Redundant Churches Fund) which were helped before their closure by the Historic Churches Preservation Trust. Without this initial assistance, many churches would have been beyond the aid of the Churches Conservation Trust. In a number of cases, grants have also been made to repair a church so that it is in a state for the National Trust to take on the role of guardian, as at Loughwood Baptist Church in Devon.

In this section, the work of the Grants Committee must finally be mentioned. Although there is evidence from the earlier days of the Trust that many grants were agreed over a good lunch, latter day Grants Committee members give many hours to the reading of applications, visiting churches and writing reports, meeting to discuss and agree the amount of a grant or loan. The Grants Committee has drawn its members from an array of backgrounds: from its own Trustees, from local County Trusts, from other heritage organizations, from architects and surveyors. The comprehensive range of knowledge that is thus at the command of the Trust has ensured that every aspect of an application is thoroughly checked and considered.

Developing the role

The allocation and payment of grants and loans is, necessarily, the lion's share of the Trust's work, but not all of it. The Trust was active in its early years in ensuring not just the integrity of the church but the historic integrity of the parish, for example refusing grants to parishes which tried to raise funds by selling the church silver. In one case, where the church applied to sell the silver after the grant was given, the

local Archdeacon cunningly made the parish rethink its decision by informing the PCC it would have to repay the Trust's grant if it did so! The Trust no longer makes such conditions to its grants, but it does much to persuade communities to look at the priorities of their maintenance programme. The demands of the Disability Discrimination Act have caused some church congregations to defer essential repairs while they try to pay for access and other alterations. Where possible, the Trust continues to urge communities to put these matters into perspective and safeguard the future of the church itself before turning its attention to these necessary considerations.

The Incorporated Church Building Society

The Incorporated Church Building Society was a close associate of the Trust in its early years. Founded in 1818, the Society came into being with the flourish of church building that followed the French Revolution. It has similar aims to the Trust, though restricted to Anglican churches. In 1983, the Trust was invited to take over the management of the Society and since then, applications have been automatically considered for an award by each organizations. The ICBS' grant criteria are slightly different to those of the Trust: it assists only Anglican churches, but of any age. It can also assist with loans and grants for the building of new Anglican churches, and it is encouraging that requests for such help continue to arrive year on year.

The County Trusts

Spreading awareness of the needs of churches and encouraging participation in their restoration and revival at both national and local level has also always been an important part of the Trust's remit. Six local County Trusts – in Cheshire, Essex, Kent, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire and Wiltshire – were active in 1953. Since then, most of England has been covered. The Trust has often helped with the first essential tranche of money to get things under way, but the County Trusts are all individual and independent. Representatives from the local Trusts have always been members of the Trust's Grants Committee and their ground level knowledge is essential in understanding the situation and pressures facing the local area. At the time of writing, only Wales, Lancashire, Cumbria and the metropolitan districts of London, Greater Manchester, Birmingham and Merseyside have no local Trust, though moves are afoot to set up trusts in Wales, Greater Manchester and Cumbria.

Into the 21st Century

A history such as this has a tendency to dwell nostalgically in the past, especially when the organization itself has its main focus on the past. However, to look back permanently is to miss the opportunities of the future.

Heritage has become the new buzz word for increasing numbers of people in the country. In 2002 the National Trust recruited its three millionth member: confirmation of the increasing importance to a significant proportion of the population of saving and preserving the legacy of past generations for everyone to enjoy. Churches go beyond being places of static preservation: they are often the crucial epicentre of their community, providing a home for local groups and activities, from play groups to concerts, from discussion arenas to places of safety for the vulnerable, reaching out to all ages, races and faiths – or no faith. In doing so, the churches continue a thread from the time when churches were the hub of all local

activity, when Old St Paul's Cathedral in London provided a venue for hiring servants, finding a scrivener, or simply being a meeting place for discussion.

What does it cost to keep this thread from being broken, to ensure it is woven into the future? The Trust estimates that in 2005 the gap between need and funds available from other sources for repair projects which were considered by the Trust for grant aid was over £6 million. The Trust covered £1.5 million of this deficit but it is obvious that much more needs to be done and the Trust must find new sources of funding to close the gap.

During 2005, the Trust undertook a major review of its strategy, involving representatives from every stakeholder grouping within the Trust and the church sector as a whole. The decision from these discussions was that the way to develop the Trust is to focus its efforts in four ways:

- **Helping needy churches with financial support:** our grant giving procedures will be reviewed and means of improving efficiency – to the benefit of both churches and Trust – found. Ways to work more closely with the County Trusts to achieve this aim are already being explored.
- **Campaigning actively in the national debate on the future of church buildings:** the Trust has a wealth of experience and knowledge in the sector and further research to give solid facts from an independent source is planned. Combined with the Trust's complete commitment to the cause, these assets will be used to drive the debate forward towards long term solutions.
- **Providing practical help and advice to churches;** again, drawing on its experience and understanding, the Trust will develop its role beyond grant giving to demonstrate to churches how to go beyond the current situation of fire-fighting to move into proactive fundraising and maintenance programmes.
- **Telling the story and raising public awareness:** the level of ignorance amongst the general public of the challenges facing church communities is often staggering. The role that churches play in acting as a focal point which bring churches together is also often overlooked. However, coupled with this lack of knowledge is a very real interest among the public in local churches and the awareness that to lose a church is to lose one of the greatest assets a community has for its survival. The Trust aims to build on this deeply held sense of place.

This is indeed an ambitious programme of development and work which will involve many people beyond the Trust but as the anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Historic Churches Preservation Trust
31 Newbury Street
London
EC1A 7HU
Tel 020 7600 6090 Fax 020 7796 2442
Website: www.historicchurches.org.uk