

ANNUAL REVIEW

2025-2026



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SAVING PRICELESS HERITAGE

"The importance of helping to repair and preserve our ancient and beautiful churches is obvious: ...churches, many of them rich in association and beauty, form a priceless heritage."

These words, written in 1972 for the Annual Report of the Incorporated Church Building Society, one of our predecessor charities, tell a story as true today as when originally written.

The UK's 20,000 listed parish churches, chapels, meeting houses and cathedrals are our most treasured local buildings. They are the guardians of beautiful and irreplaceable heritage including art, sculpture and stained glass.

Churches provide a spiritual home for many millions of people who attend services or who seek a place for quiet reflection.

Churches are also essential for the future of our high streets, town centres and villages. Community anchors, they provide warm spaces, food banks, youth clubs and a host of other support. As affordable venues, they keep local music and the arts alive.

Keeping churches open

For these reasons and many others, it is such good news that in 2025 we were able to increase the number of grants we made to 326. This has helped keep 253 churches throughout the UK, belonging to many different denominations, open and in good repair.

It is vital that more opinion formers and decision makers are made aware of the importance of church buildings for our national heritage and for their social and economic value. Because of the serious threats they face, in 2025 we prioritised our advocacy and engagement work.

Our flagship event was the Great Expectations conference, held at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

New voices speaking up for church buildings at the conference included Alice Loxton, historian and bestselling author, and Rob Rinder, barrister and broadcaster. We are so grateful for their support.



Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair



Claire Walker, Chief Executive

Financial support

Dependable financial support for church buildings remains key to their future. Throughout the year we continued to campaign for the future of the Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme (LPWGS) which had been given a one year reprieve in January 2025.

Since 2002, this simple to administer scheme had ensured that churches could claim back the VAT they had spent on repairs. However in January 2026, despite a Government commissioned appraisal that convincingly demonstrated its many benefits, the LPWGS was scrapped.

As a result, every listed church carrying out repairs now faces 20% extra costs. This is likely to mean that projects are cancelled or scaled back, leading to more churches being at risk of closure and further damage to historic buildings.

The LPWGS has been replaced with the Places of Worship Renewal Fund. We welcome the commitment to continue state support for church buildings.

But it remains to be seen if the new scheme, which will decline in real terms over the next four years and will help far fewer churches, offers many advantages. As it only covers England, it offers no support at all for churches in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

For the continued expansion of our work in 2025, we must above all thank our funders, including an increasing number of private philanthropists, and our Friends, who helped grow our income to £5.2m in 2025. At a time of economic uncertainty, this is a tremendous achievement.

They all know the great importance of our priceless heritage of church buildings and that we must continue to do everything we can to keep it safe for the future.

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair
Claire Walker, Chief Executive

June 2026



*The Archbishop of Canterbury at
St Mary & All Saints Church at Boxley,
Kent on day four of her pilgrimage from
London to Canterbury in March 2026*

THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF CHURCHES

by **Most Revd Sarah Mullally, Archbishop of Canterbury**
Joint President, the National Churches Trust

Before my installation as the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury, I made a pilgrimage with fellow pilgrims across the ancient Kentish landscape, following in the footsteps of Christians who had walked this way before us.

Together we stepped into parish churches that have opened their doors to welcome people for prayer, worship and shelter across the centuries. These places still speak powerfully of Christ's welcome to all and we must ensure their continuing place in our national life.

Living stones

Our nation's churches, whatever their style or denomination, are formed of what St Peter called 'living stones': people made in the image of God who, in countless ways, have long worshipped and served their communities.

Our spiritual journey has been shaped in one way or another by the unique legacy of historic church buildings that stand as landmarks of our nation's Christian inheritance, in stone, flint, brick and concrete. These earthly materials are imbued with the labour and dedication of generations past. The spires and towers evoke faith, community and belonging and house centuries of prayer and local memory.

Churches are 'buildings with a mission' that embody and enable Christian witness and service in every community and I know that this remarkable architectural inheritance comes with a cost.

I thank God for all those who volunteer, whether by polishing church plates, serving meals, running appeals for repairs or passing on the Christian faith to the next generation – each act a labour of love and a precious gift towards the common good.

The Church of England hugely values collaboration with the National Churches Trust, as well other charities like the Churches Conservation Trust, the Friends of Friendless Churches, the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance, and public agencies such as Historic England. When we work together, across organisations and denominations, we can speak eloquently to His Majesty's Government about the crucial importance of churches within national life.

The Church of England's churches and cathedrals

- There are approximately 16,200 Church of England churches and cathedrals.
- Over 12,000 are listed for their architectural or historic importance by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on the advice of Historic England.
- Around 4,300 are listed at the highest level of Grade I, making the Church of England responsible for about half of the Grade I listed buildings in England.
- Nearly 80% of Church of England church buildings host 31,300 social action projects a year including emergency food provision, warm spaces and parent and toddler drop-ins. (*Statistics for Mission 2022*)
- 927 of the 969 places of worship on the 2025 Heritage At Risk Register are Church of England church buildings.



Temple Church in London,
awarded a £10,000 National
Churches Trust grant in 2026

I understand the pressures brought to church communities by the end of the Government's Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme and offer thanks for the new Places of Worship Renewal Fund. Churches and cathedrals are very grateful indeed for the support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Benefact Trust, the county historic churches trusts and others that help to sustain historic churches as some of our most valuable public places.

Arts, crafts and beauty

While the founding purpose of our churches is Christian worship, many people also come inside to access food banks or warm spaces, to be uplifted by our remarkable church music tradition, or find solace and sanctuary in difficult times.

Increasing numbers are also discovering the amazing treasury of art, craft and sheer beauty that resides in our parish churches and cathedrals.

This is where the story of each neighbourhood has been wrought, carved, glazed and painted into the fabric.

Our national church and cathedral buildings team offers advice and support to local churches, supported by a network of expert volunteer advisers. This support includes a range of grants for church building support officers, stitch-in-time repairs, conservation of precious interior features, sustainability improvements to help us care for God's creation and accessibility works to help make our church buildings welcome to everyone, everywhere.

At my Installation service in Canterbury, our country's oldest cathedral, it was inspiring to reflect on those whose faith and artistry had built such a breathtaking house of prayer. Thank you to the National Churches Trust and all those who work with us to sustain that vision into the future.



Church renovation appeal 'thermometer' at St Mary Magdalene's Church, Clitheroe, Lancashire

© Alamy Stock Photos/ JY Stock Images



© Brendan Foster Photography

Archbishop Sarah is the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. Born in Woking in 1962, she became a Christian at the age of 16. Before being ordained, she worked as a nurse in the National Health Service, specialising in cancer treatment.

In 2001, Archbishop Sarah was ordained and served her curacy in the Diocese of Southwark. In 2012, she was installed as Canon Treasurer at Salisbury Cathedral and three years later took the role as Suffragan Bishop of Crediton in the Diocese of Exeter. In 2018, Archbishop Sarah was installed as the 133rd Bishop of London at St Paul's Cathedral. She is currently the Archbishop of Canterbury, the first woman to hold this role in its 1,400-year history.

HERITAGE SKILLS AT RISK

A wall painting conservator from London's Courtauld Institute of Art assesses murals in the Lady Chapel of St Jude's Church in Hampstead Garden Suburb, north London

by Abigail Frymann Rouch

When roof repairs were completed on St John's Church, Fivemiletown in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, the congregation thought they could stop worrying about their 300-year-old building. After all, they had already had the sandstone cladding and some of the pillars in the windows replaced.

But two years later a leak has emerged around the lead flashing on the roof that has brought down a chunk of ceiling, rendering one room unusable. At stake is the stability of the church's bell tower.

"We're fumbling in the dark trying to find somebody to do the work," says Alywin Barton, chair of the church's Glebes Committee. "It's who knows who, and there is no network, there's no structure to find these people."

The National Churches Trust has supported the church with funding and advice for a number of years. "We often get churches informing us of delays due to the inability to source labour or contractors," says Kerry Rooney MBE, the National Churches Trust's Support Officer for Northern

Ireland. Old buildings may have unexpected quirks, but delays to a project to address them can have knock-on effects such as rising costs and further deterioration to the building.

"Gone are the days when congregations had the resources among themselves to care for their own buildings", says one of the National Churches Trust's Support Officers for Scotland, David Lynch. He says smaller congregations, ageing buildings and stricter building regulations mean outside help is needed.

Finding specialist contractors is a challenge, especially for the church or chapel in the hills or several boat journeys away from city-based firms.

There is no shortage of need: across England, Wales and Scotland in addition to some 35,000 churches, there are around 6.5 million pre-1919 buildings.

Even ruins such as the once-majestic St Andrew's Cathedral in Scotland need regular inspections by experts in heritage stonework to keep visitors safe.

Dangerously short supply

Yet, according to several measures, the people working in the heritage skills that keep older churches safe and sound are in dangerously short supply, and many of the training routes by which the next generation should have entered have closed. A 2024 Historic England report identified shortages in trades such as lime plastering, stonemasonry, heritage carpentry and heritage glasswork, and that the workforce contained “relatively fewer workers aged 35 or under”.

Andrew Wood, a former president of the Ecclesiastical Architects & Surveyors Association, counts more than a dozen skills important for churches on the Red List, a biennial inventory of endangered crafts published by the Heritage Crafts charity.

Among these are bell-founding, organ-building, gauged brickwork and historic stained-glass window making. Rather worryingly, there may soon be a shortage of church architects. “Conservation architects who specialise in church architecture are also declining in numbers as the ‘old guard’ retire,” he says. Those coming on are finding that there is less and less money in it, so junior architects are not encouraged to specialise in churches.

In recent years, financial support for people wanting to enter these areas has been reduced, leaving more of the training costs with employers: grants from the industry body, the Construction Industry Training Board, have been squeezed, and UK Government funding for the NVQ Level 3 in Heritage Construction ended last year.

Training schemes

However, important initiatives have been launched to address these shortages. Historic England’s five-year Heritage Building Skills Programme, which ends this year, has provided placements for 42 trainees at 30 construction firms and employers across the North of England. Historic England’s new strategic plan pledges to “increase the supply of heritage construction skills” but no detail has yet been announced.

Two of the most established training schemes are the Cathedrals Workshop Fellowship’s Foundation Certificates and Foundation degrees, from which 87 students have graduated in the last 17 years and on which 20-25 students are currently enrolled. Students train in heritage crafts at 14 Church of England cathedrals in areas such as architecture and archaeology, conservation and stonemasonry. This benefits “the whole heritage profession,” says



© Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowship

Students studying on the Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowship Foundation degree in Applied Historic Building Conservation and Repair undertaking practical heritage stonemasonry training at Gloucester Cathedral

CWF Executive Director Michael Sheppard, including churches situated near cathedrals.

Northern Ireland's Construction Industry Training Board researched the heritage skills shortage in 2018 and since then has run various projects promoting traditional building skills, including the All Ireland Heritage Skills Programme for eight early career craftspeople in partnership with The King's Foundation, and a collaboration this year led by National Museums NI that will train a further 32 people.

Meanwhile a three-year Stained Glass Craftsperson Apprenticeship is in its second year, which Steve Clare MBE ACR, founder and director of Holy Well Glass studio and a fellow and former chairman of the British Society of Master Glass Painters (BSMGP), has helped to develop. It is a collaboration between, industry professionals, the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Swansea College of Art at University of Wales Trinity St David. The apprenticeship is largely government-funded but the Glaziers, the BSMGP and the Church Buildings Council are helping cover students' additional costs.

Conservation grants

The Church of England is playing its part to support the crafts on which much of its estate depends. Last year its conservation grants team were able to more than double the grants they awarded, thanks to nearly £5 million over the next five years from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

One grant helped pay for students in Wall Painting Conservation at London's Courtauld Institute of Art to assess century-old murals in the Lady Chapel of St Jude's Church in Hampstead Garden Suburb in London.



The Bishop of Edmonton, Anderson Jeremiah, looking at the murals in the Lady Chapel of St Jude's Church in Hampstead Garden Suburb, London.

The Rev Emily Kolltveit, vicar of St Jude's, said: "Wall paintings often suffer from environmental damage, previous restorations, and natural aging. At St Jude's, the teams faced issues like flaking paint and weakened plaster. Instead of rushing repairs, they tested various consolidation methods to find the gentlest and most effective solutions."

"The work at St Jude's is more than a restoration project; it is a commitment to cultural heritage. By preserving these wall paintings, the teams protect a piece of history that tells stories about the community, art, and craftsmanship of the past."



Organ repairs being carried out by volunteers from Pipe Up for Pipe Organs

Organ repairs

Of course, some heritage skills shortages can be addressed with relatively small amounts of training. Organ-building is another Red-Listed craft. The Pipe Up for Pipe Organs charity, trains volunteers in the basics of repairing and dismantling, moving and re-installing organs no longer wanted in their original home. It has also identified that some instruments fall silent for want of minor repairs, so it funds up to three days' repair work by a professional to restore them to use, explains co-founder Martin Renshaw.

Pro-active maintenance

In addition to needing more people with specialist skills to deal with specific issues, keeping a church building in good condition also requires a pro-active approach to more general maintenance.

That a stitch (or a roof tile) in time saves nine is central to the thinking of the Church of Scotland as it addresses several financial crises. Its General Trustees have appointed 12 Presbytery Buildings Officers to carry out Quinquennial Surveys of churches in-house and provide expert advice so congregations can repair their buildings “in a more kind of pragmatic, cost-effective way”.

One Presbytery Buildings Officer, Jamie McNamara, is piloting a proactive maintenance scheme in Perth to help ensure buildings are kept in good condition and that issues are spotted quickly. Jobs such as clearing out gutters are carried out every six months (not once “in a generation,” which McNamara has seen).

“Maintenance is the core of good building husbandry,” he stresses. “If you got your maintenance sorted out, you’re halfway there.”

Any shortage of people with the heritage skills needed to care for the UK’s church buildings puts their future at risk. The new initiatives in promoting tuition and upskilling are a welcome step, and will benefit churches and cathedrals across the UK as well as those to whom they minister, not to mention the nation’s wider heritage sector and all who enjoy it.

Fragmented market

However some believe that the crisis in heritage skills may not be all it seems and that the problem lies in a very fragmented market and the fact that many churches are in remote areas. According to Stone carver Alex Wenham: “The people who talk the loudest about skill shortages tend to come from client side,” but he is not short of work and he has recently taken on an apprentice who graduated in fine art before studying at the respected King’s Foundation. “The system is not perfect,” he reflects – jobs in Wales or the Highlands are too far away for him – but he also believes “there’s not very good information exchange.”

Directories, such as the Building Conservation Directory, that produced by ICON, the Institute of Conservation and the National Churches Trust’s Specialist Skills Directory list firms with expertise in many heritage disciplines. However, they cannot make up for a shortage of heritage specialists in more remote areas and especially in parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



Stonemason Tom Francis

© Tom Francis

Training schemes for these areas, and support for existing firms to take on apprentices, are vital if the skills needed to maintain places of worship throughout the UK are to survive.

And this is very much work with a long-term future, which will not easily be supplanted by AI, even if though this new technology is helping to make some aspects of conservation easier. Stonemason Tom Francis, a Cathedrals Workshops alumnus, notes: “Not many people seem to be willing to get dirty for a living,” but he adds: “You’ve got a job for life if you learn the stone industry ... I’m more than willing to teach anybody who really wants to learn.”



Abigail Frymann Rouch is a religious affairs journalist and regularly writes for *The Times*, the *Church Times* and *The Tablet*, where she was foreign editor, then online editor. She has also written for *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Critic*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *Commonweal* and *Deutsche Welle* among others.

MODERNIST CHURCHES OF SCOTLAND

by **Matthew Dransfield**

The New Towns of Scotland's Central Belt were built in the 1950s and 1960s to facilitate a move out of city slums and to meet the housing demands of a growing post-war population. Churches were needed to serve the new communities.

At no time before or since, were so many churches built so quickly. Many are relatively hidden on housing estates or schemes, visible mainly to the congregation and the local community.

It's easy to forget that in this period of growth, the church was an integral and fundamental part of society – a strong cultural and moral force.

As so many churches were needed, rapid construction methods were generally used. For example, steel or reinforced concrete framing and flat or concrete-tiled roofs. Building was under tight timescales and often tighter budgets.

Flat roofs

A priest I spoke to said, and I paraphrase: "When I'm at the pearly gates I want to speak to the architect responsible for my church, as I'll want to give them some feedback. They used rubbish materials and Scotland is not the place for flat roofs."

Today, churches in Scotland, and across the UK, are being consolidated. Congregations are dwindling, buildings are being sold off, and some are facing demolition.

But modernist churches are an important part of Scotland's architectural, religious and social history. There is an urgent need to document, understand and, where possible, sensitively reuse these buildings before more are lost forever.



© Matthew Dransfield

St Francis Xavier Church, Falkirk: 1961 - Grade B Listed

Designed by the Edinburgh-based architect Alexander Ritchie Conlon, the church features a modern block design of exposed concrete. The carved concrete figures at the base of the fins represent the four Evangelists - lion, man, eagle and ox - created by Elisabeth Dempster.

St Mungo's Church, Cumbernauld: 1963 - Grade B Listed

With its pyramid shaped roof, St Mungo's had been an important landmark in the town centre since it was built in the 1960s, designed by notable Scottish architect Alan Reiach. The congregation and residents of Cumbernauld were devastated when it went up in flames in August 2025.

A time capsule was found buried in the rubble of the destroyed North Lanarkshire church containing papers regarding the new building and the congregational roll of the day.



© Matthew Dransfield

Mortonhall Crematorium, Mortonhall, Edinburgh: 1967 - Grade A Listed

Basil Spence created a new multi-denominational crematorium to serve the south of Edinburgh. In 1956, he visited Le Corbusier's chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France and it had a huge influence on him. Mortonhall is finished externally with white concrete blocks that reach to the sky like shards. Light floods into the building dramatically through coloured glass.



© Matthew Dransfield



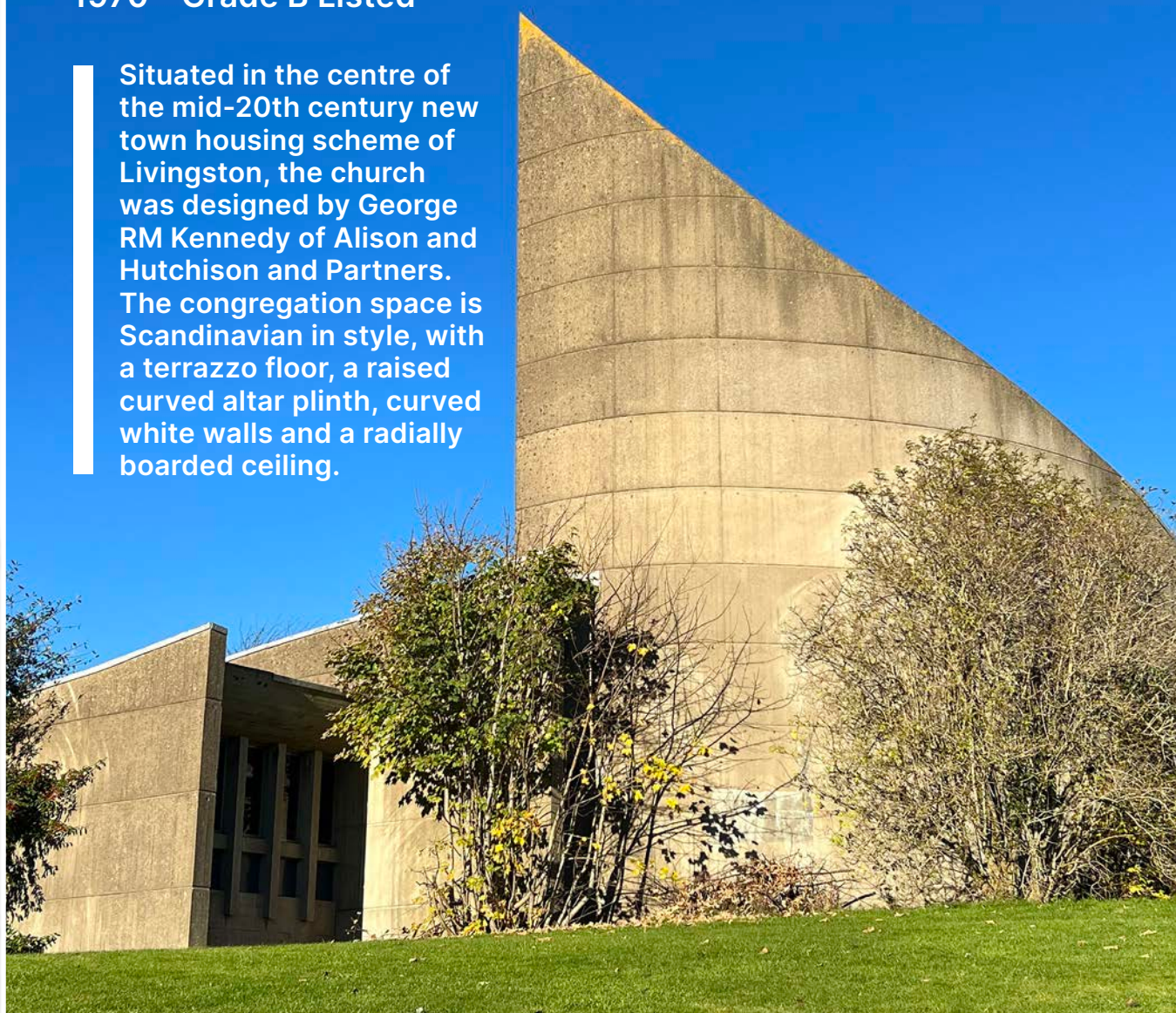
St Bride's Church, East Kilbride: 1964 - Grade A Listed

More akin to a fortress than a place of worship, St Bride's, designed by Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, has been described by *The Guardian* as "an architectural and spiritual outlier, a brooding, brutalist box, with thick brick walls, which aped the heft of medieval Caledonian castles."

© Matthew Dransfield

St Andrew's Church, Livingston: 1970 - Grade B Listed

Situated in the centre of the mid-20th century new town housing scheme of Livingston, the church was designed by George RM Kennedy of Alison and Hutchison and Partners. The congregation space is Scandinavian in style, with a terrazzo floor, a raised curved altar plinth, curved white walls and a radially boarded ceiling.



© Matthew Dransfield



Matthew Dransfield, under the name @BrutalBasil, documents post-war modernist and brutalist architecture, from churches and swimming pools to pubs and housing schemes. His book *Modernist Churches of Scotland* was produced in partnership with The Modernist Society. He has also produced one on Scottish pubs called *Flat Roofs and Frothy Pints*. His work has been published widely, including in *The Guardian*.



Modernist Churches of Scotland is published by The Modernist Society, price £9.00 and can be bought online at <https://the-modernist.org/collections/books>

2025

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW



© Ollie Rosser

A mission for all of us

“Let's value the volunteers who are holding the fabric of our country through our churches together, quite often literally, with string and goodwill. Because when we fight for the churches and sing about the work of our volunteers, we're not just preserving the past, we're protecting the possibility of a future where sacred space still means shared space. And if that's something worth saving, then it's a mission for all of us.”

Rob Rinder, barrister and broadcaster

105,754

Years of church history saved*

326

Grants awarded to churches and chapels throughout the UK

33%

Of grants awarded to churches in the most deprived areas (IMD 1-4)

114

Grants awarded to Grade I and Grade A churches

38%

Churches with roofs at risk or in urgent need of repair

12

Churches removed from the Heritage at Risk Register with the help of our grants

£868K

Average social value of churches, shown by The House of Good: Local calculator

*Combined total age of church buildings supported by our grants in 2025

OUR GREAT EXPECTATIONS CONFERENCE

Great Expectations was the most important event about the future of churches to be held in 2025. Churches, chapels and meeting houses will only endure if we act together; their future depends on collective will, creativity and care.



© Sarah Crossland

Sarah Crossland is our Head of Stakeholder Engagement

In 1975 the exhibition 'Change & Decay: The Future of Our Churches' opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It shone a light on the crumbling condition of churches and chapels across Britain, and asked what could be done to save them.

Fifty years later we convened 'Great Expectations', again at the V&A Museum in London. Together with partners, we explored the challenges and opportunities facing church buildings today. We are grateful to Peter Burman, who helped to organise 'Change & Decay', for his help.

The day long conference brought together people who wouldn't usually find themselves in the same room – heritage experts and planners, parishioners and policymakers, conservationists and creatives.

We also invited fresh faces to Great Expectations to represent the many people who are rallying to the cause. They included Rob Rinder, barrister and broadcaster, Alice Loxton, historian and bestselling author and Luke Sherlock, author of *Forgotten Churches: Exploring England's Hidden Treasures*.

They joined many of our supporters including Hugh Dennis, comedian and actor, and Richard Taylor, author and broadcaster and one of our Vice-Presidents.

Great Expectations included the release of findings from the 2025 National Churches Survey of church buildings (more information on pages 26 and 27).

The conference involved 16 sessions with speakers including:

Victoria Collison,
Director of Historic Churches, Scotland;

The Most Revd Stephen Cottrell,
Archbishop of York;

Oliver Cox,
Head of Academic Partnerships at the V&A;

Alex Glanville,
Director of Property Strategy at the Church in Wales;

Ian Morrison,
Director of Policy & Evidence at Historic England;

Dr Karl Newton,
Deputy Chief Executive,
The National Churches Trust;

Aiden O'Donovan,
Architect, Northern Ireland;

Greg Pickup,
CEO, The Churches Conservation Trust;

Dame Fiona Reynolds,
former Director-General of The National Trust

Great Expectations was organised in partnership with the V&A Museum, The King's Foundation, The Churches Conservation Trust and in consultation with denominations and other church and heritage partners.

The event was generously sponsored by Ecclesiastical Insurance, proudly part of the Benefact Group.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Churches: See them. Save them. Support them.

Sir Philip Rutnam (Chair, the National Churches Trust) (left) with Sarah Robinson (Associate Director, The King's Foundation), Aiden O'Donovan (HLM Architects), Karl Newton (Deputy Chief Executive, the National Churches Trust) and The Rev Dr Scott Rennie (Minister of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh)

CALL TO ACTION

Great Expectations included a three point call to action, setting out what needs to be done to help save the irreplaceable heritage of the UK's church buildings.



1. SEE THEM: Government leadership

There must be national recognition that the future of church buildings is a shared heritage challenge – local communities shouldn't have to struggle by themselves.

We want to see clear policies and strong leadership by the UK Government about how these buildings can be kept open and in use. This will give confidence to local communities.



2. SAVE THEM: Capital funding

Church buildings are crumbling on our watch – local people cannot shoulder the burden of spiralling repair and renovation costs any longer.

We want to see a dedicated capital funding scheme of £50 million a year set up by the UK Government to ensure that, throughout the UK, these buildings can continue to be enjoyed by all.



3. SUPPORT THEM: Help for volunteers

Almost every local church is looked after by volunteers – but they are in increasingly short supply and under pressure; churches are doing more than ever in their communities, but with less and less support.

We want to see existing and new volunteers get the recognition, training, and resources they need from denominations, the local community and the Government, so that these buildings have a sustainable future within their local area.

SUPPORT FOR OUR CHURCHES



Give churches a chance

“Let us not be the generation who let churches crumble. Instead, let us commit to a new, shared contract: to save our wonderful churches for the nation, for our future, and for the countless stories yet to be written.”

Alice Loxton, author of 'Eighteen: A History of Britain in 18 Young Lives'



People, money and time

“Keeping churches open and in good repair and caring for their local collections of cultural treasures takes people, money and time. It is one of the most important heritage challenges we face.”

Sir Tristram Hunt, Director, The Victoria and Albert Museum



This living tradition

“Churches are local as well as universal. They are woven into the fabric of our lives. What would we not do to keep this living tradition alive, and what would it mean for us as human beings and as a nation if it were lost?”

The Most Revd Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York

OUR TRUSTEES

Our trustees play an essential role in the running of the National Churches Trust and bring valuable experience, skills and knowledge. They lead the charity and determine how it is run. In 2025 we were saddened by the death of Shirley Adams, who had served as a trustee for six years. Sir Paul Britton, Dr Stephen Sklaroff and Revd Lucy Winkett stepped down from our Board, and four new trustees were appointed.

Sarah Stewart OBE DL is our Vice-Chair



© Mike Swift

Shirley Adams JP



© Mike Swift

The death of Shirley Adams in August 2025 came as a great shock to us all. Appointed to our Board of Trustees in March 2019, Shirley served as a kind and committed trustee, who got involved with much of our activity.

Shirley was a strong advocate for our Cherish project, which provides support for churches in Scotland, Wales and North West England, regularly joining staff for church visits.

We are hugely grateful for her contribution to the National Churches Trust. Her work – for our charity and others – has made a huge difference to people in need, and her kindness has been deeply valued by the people who worked with her.

Shirley's legacy will live on through the churches and people that she did so much to support.

MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEES



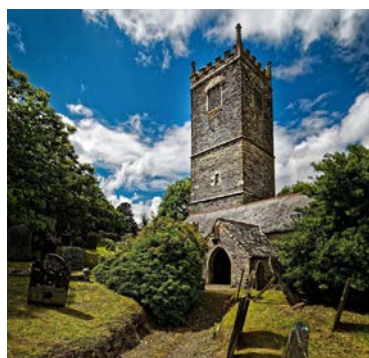
© Oxford Preservation Trust

Debbie Dance OBE

Whether as Chair of the Buildings Fabric Committee at Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral, Church Buildings Council member, former village churchwarden, tourist or simply kneeling to say a prayer or two, I have grown to understand the importance

of church buildings, and the crucial role that volunteers play in looking after them.

One of my favourite churches has to be St Wyllow, Lanteglos, Cornwall. It has extraordinary mid-13th century, curved wooden barrel-vaulted ceilings, rescued by the architect John Sedding in the 19th century. I particularly like the characterful carved 16th century pew ends, added to by the Pinwill sisters in the 19th century.



© Philip Chapman/Alamy Stock Photos

St Wyllow, Lanteglos, Cornwall

It is also where Daphne Du Maurier was married in 1932, having rowed up the creek at 8am to catch the tide and then walking uphill through the woods to the church to say her vows.



© Charles Kwaku-Odoi

Charles Kwaku-Odoi DL MFPH

Church buildings, both historic and modern, are important as they are places where people can gather for worship and community activities and also because of their heritage.

The challenges for the National Churches Trust include continuing to support the maintenance and repair of churches and influencing national and regional policy to support our aims.

I am a Pentecostal minister and the honorary Ecumenical Canon at Manchester Cathedral. Founded by Royal Charter in 1421, it became a cathedral in 1847.



© Lancashire Images/Alamy Stock photos

Manchester Cathedral

The Cathedral is one of my favourite church buildings due to its architecture but also its ongoing commitment to social justice. It was where Thomas Clarkson, who helped found the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, gave an important speech on the evils of slavery in 1787.



© Rev Dr Scott Rennie

The Rev Dr Scott Rennie

I am passionate about the care and sustenance of historic churches, both as places of worship and as community assets.

A key priority is to find new models of ownership which allow churches to stay in

community ownership when a congregation loses the capacity to sustain the church themselves.

In Scotland I campaign for new forms of public support for the care and repair of historic and listed churches from the devolved administration.



© Steve Keiritsu CC-BY-SA 3.0

St Magnus' Cathedral, Kirkwall

I am Minister of St Giles' Cathedral. Apart from St Giles' itself, my favourite church would have to be St Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, the United Kingdom's most northerly cathedral.

The masonry uses red sandstone quarried near Kirkwall and yellow sandstone from the island of Eday, often in alternating courses or in a chequerboard pattern to give a polychrome effect.



© Vivienne Faul

Vivienne Faul

I have recently retired from seven years as Bishop of Bristol where my responsibilities included campaigning nationally in support of the Church of England's parish churches, chapels and cathedrals.

As a history student my specialism was architecture in the aftermath of the Fire of London, including the technical, political and theological debates surrounding the rebuilding of St Paul's.

Perhaps it was this which led me, as a young cleric, into cathedral leadership. For twelve years I was Dean of Leicester, leaving to become Dean of York just as Richard III's grave was found.

I now live on the English/Welsh borders with its diversity of denominations and ancient church buildings. The place which has stolen my heart is Almeley's Friend's Meeting House (pictured below), a contemporary of St Paul's, but such a contrast: domestic in style, egalitarian in furnishing and beautifully extended in the 1980s to enable community use.



© Ktbb CC BY-SA 4.0

From its graveyard, with its uniform memorial stones I can look out towards Hay Bluff and Pen Y Fan and know I am at home.

OUR FUNDRAISING FOR THE FUTURE

Churches contain sculpture, stained glass, and painting to rival those in any museum; they are home to choirs and essential venues for musicians; churches care for the hungry and the homeless. At the heart of the Christian mission they sustain every community in the land. We help churches because of all that they do.

*Ben Sims is our
Head of Policy and Public Affairs and former Head of Fundraising*



© The National Churches Trust

Since 2022, income at the National Churches Trust has grown from £2.9 million to around £5.2 million in 2025. This is wonderful news for churches and the people who use and look after them.

We are very grateful for the continuing generous support from eminent charitable foundations, including amongst others, the Wolfson Foundation and the Headley Trust. For the past two years, the Hodge Foundation, originally founded by the banker Sir Julian Hodge, has been generously supporting our grant programmes, enabling us to help even more churches.

The Moondance Foundation has helped us to fund more projects to provide community facilities including loos, kitchens and serveries, supercharging the social impact of churches and securing their long-term sustainability.

Support in Wales

The Moondance and the Hodge Foundations are both based in Wales. Together with funding provided as part of our National Lottery Heritage Fund supported Cherish project, in 2025 we were able to give more grants in Wales than ever before.

This support to keep places of worship in good repair is so important at a time when it is estimated that as many as a quarter of Welsh churches and chapels could be closed, sold, or demolished in the next few years.

As well as the support of trusts and foundations, private philanthropy is growing in importance. In 2025 many new donors gave to the National Churches Trust with donations ranging from £1 to £1 million. Thank you to everyone who is helping.

Corporate support

In 2025 we were pleased to extend levels of corporate support from companies, large and small, including CCLA Investment Management, DSAV Ltd., Ecclesiastical Insurance, Jupiter Underfloor Heating, and our newest sponsor, Birketts LLP.

During the year we were notified of approximately £1.7 million in gifts that our supporters and Friends left the charity in their Wills. This has been really incredible.

Those who have entrusted us with part of their estate will have a legacy that lives on in the stones of ancient churches. It is truly wonderful that so many people will be remembered in beautiful, living monuments, full of life, music, worship, and charitable good.



© Mike Swift

Bell ringers at the church of St Nicholas of Myra, Worth Matravers, Dorset



© Chris Robbins/Alamy Stock Photos

Stained glass window maker repairing a church window

A LASTING LEGACY

Leaving a gift in a Will makes a lasting difference to the churches, chapels and meeting houses we help. We are very grateful to all those who helped us in this way in 2025.

Shirley Adams, Richard Armstrong, Cynthia Asquith, Marcia Babington, Joanna Chapman, Kay Chapman, John Cook, Alice Corble, Dorothy Ellis, John Farr, June Hamilton, Patricia Hugill, Audrey Jacobs, Joyce Johnson, Sally Kersting, Catharine Kroon, Janet MacGregor, Celia Pearce, Julian Prideaux, John Rattey, Ann Salway, Jane Snowden, Doreen Thomas, Susan Thurlow, William Walford, Beatrice Walker.

If you are considering any size of gift in your Will, we would be very happy to talk through the practicalities. We pride ourselves on speaking to our supporters in person, with no call centres or 'chatbots'. Please call Claire Walker, our Chief Executive, on 020 7222 0605.

OUR FRIENDS

Being a Friend of the National Churches Trust makes a vital difference to our work and helps historic churches remain open and in use for generations to come. In 2025, we were delighted that our Friends scheme continued to grow with over 600 people joining up during the year.

Lydia McCutcheon is our
Head of Fundraising



© Lydia McCutcheon

The number of Life Friends – those who give a one-off £500 donation – increased by 83 in 2025 to a total of 534. We also now have 80 people who are members of our Cornerstone Club.

Our Friends are the first to know about our forthcoming events, which include in-person church tours and online talks and lectures. Our 2025 events included:

Covent Garden Churches

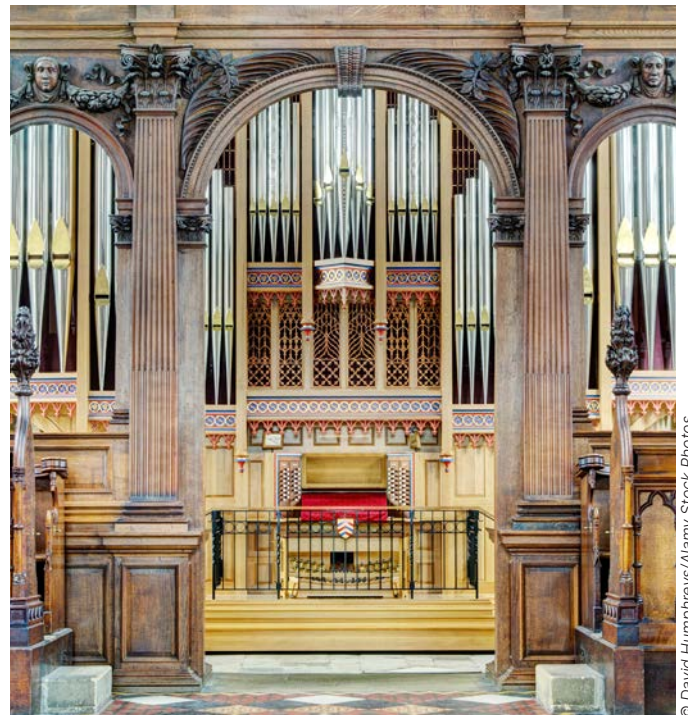
Our walking tour explored the rich history of theatre and music at Covent Garden's historic churches. We visited Corpus Christi Maiden Lane, St Paul's Covent Garden, and St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Herefordshire Wye Valley

In September Friends and supporters had the opportunity to explore three outstanding historic Herefordshire churches in the company of Tim Bridges, one of the country's leading ecclesiastical historians. 30 attendees visited Kilpeck, Hoarwithy and Brockhampton churches, specifically chosen to illustrate a wide range of architectural styles and historical periods and each located in a stunning location.

Oxford Colleges, Chapels and Cathedral

Over 40 Friends and supporters joined us for a guided tour of Christ Church Cathedral, followed by an organ recital and talk at Merton College Chapel. The Dobson Organ is one of the finest mechanical action organs in the UK.



© David Humphreys/Alamy Stock Photos

The organ at Merton College Chapel

The tour of Oxford Colleges, Chapels and Cathedral was generously supported by Universal Stone Ltd.

“My husband and I thoroughly enjoyed the visit yesterday, we thought it was very well organised. Our guide was excellent, and I learnt so much. It was also interesting to meet members of the group who had travelled a good distance to attend.”

Elizabeth Elliot, Friend
of the National Churches Trust



© Maddman Photography

Musicians at Carols by Candlelight



© Maddman Photography

Sir Michael Palin



© Maddman Photography

Tim Vine



© Maddman Photography

Katie Derham



© Maddman Photography

Bill Bryson

Carols by Candlelight

Our 2025 Carols by Candlelight was our biggest yet, with 350 attendees. We returned to the 18th-century Grosvenor Chapel in Mayfair for an evening hosted by Tim Vine, with music and readings from Bill Bryson, Sir Michael Palin, Alice Loxton, Joe Stilgoe and Katie Derham.

Booking is open for our 2026 Carols by Candlelight, returning to the Grosvenor Chapel on 10 December.
nationalchurchestrust.org/carols

We are grateful for the generous support of CCLA Investment Management for this event. The music was kindly sponsored by Birketts LLP and the technical sponsor was DSAV.

Online – Knowledge Drop: Decoding Sacred Symbols

In September Friends and other supporters joined us online for three talks by author and broadcaster Richard Taylor. An expert on understanding the rich world of imagery found in our sacred buildings, his

online events brought to life the sometimes hidden meaning found in stained glass, carvings, wall paintings and other architectural details in churches.

Our events raise money to keep churches and chapels in the UK open and in use.

OUR CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

Our Church Engagement Team, with officers based in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, provides in person and online support to churches throughout the UK. It also manages our two National Lottery Heritage Fund projects, Treasure Ireland and Cherish, as well as our regular grant award programmes.

*Catherine Townsend is
our Director of Church Engagement*



Our team is driven by the desire to support volunteers in the valuable work they do in ensuring the sustainability of church buildings. This means that the many benefits they bring to people, places and heritage can continue to be available to all.

In 2025, our grant programmes were hugely in demand as parishes and congregations continued to do their utmost to secure the funds needed to keep their church buildings open, in good repair and with the community facilities needed by worshippers and the wider local population.

We received 723 grant applications in 2025, up from 713 in 2024. These came from a very wide range of denominations including Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist as well as from the Anglican church.

We made 326 awards, up from 314 in 2024. These supported 252 places of worship. Recognising how difficult it is for some churches to get the money needed for major building projects, our funding total of £2.6 million included nine grants each worth over £40,000.

The largest grant we awarded was £73,000 to Sts Illtyd, Gwynno & Dyfodwg in Llantrisant. This was made possible thanks to an increase in our ring-fenced funding for churches and chapels in Wales. Wales will continue to benefit from this targeted support in 2026, with more than £600,000 in funding likely to be available.

Trusted Partners

In 2025 we continued to work with our trusted partners – the Wolfson Foundation, the Headley Trust, the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funders – recommending and distributing grants to churches on their behalf.

Funding from the Pilgrim Trust has in recent years allowed us to help many churches with maintenance projects. Our partnership with them concluded in 2025; we are extremely grateful for their tremendous support over many years.

Maintenance work, so important to prevent damage and decay taking hold of a building, continues to be a priority. This is now funded through our Medium grant programme. We also promote maintenance through our training and by encouraging every church we help to have a regularly updated maintenance plan.



Nigel Mills (Grants Manager), Isidore Hisock (Church Support Officer), Gillian Bull Mott (Church Support Administrator) and Catherine Townsend (Director of Church Engagement)

Support for churches

Grant applications from churches were undoubtedly affected by the changes to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme and the introduction of a maximum claim cap of £25,000 on VAT incurred during works, that came into effect in April 2025. This led to an increase in smaller projects, and also more phasing of schemes.

The Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme has been replaced in 2026 by the Places of Worship Renewal Fund in England. We are supporting churches applying to the new Fund. We are also making the case to the Devolved Parliaments and Assemblies for new funding to be made available to churches in the rest of the UK, and making the case to the Government on why VAT rebates are sorely needed.

In 2026 we will be reviewing our grant programmes, consulting with churches and heritage organisations. Making the application process easy to understand and as simple as possible for applicants and officers will be a priority. We also intend to enhance our work by connecting and signposting struggling and vulnerable churches to the support they need.

New ideas

Our Church Engagement team has a very wide range of expertise, including knowledge gained working with churches, the wider heritage sector, community groups, funding organisations, social enterprises and more. This allows us to bring new ideas and cross sector thinking to the challenges facing church buildings.

Training and advice

In 2025 we continued to run high-quality training and advice to help the volunteers and clergy who look after church buildings. This was in great demand and was delivered online and in person. We held over 80 sessions, run and co-ordinated by Sarah Crossland, our Head of Stakeholder Engagement, with 3,261 attendees.

“ Following a really helpful webinar from the National Churches Trust, we decided to reach out to the community with monthly events and requests for donations. In all, our events raised about £16,000 and kept up the local momentum and enthusiasm for the building. Donations from our congregation and the local community amounted to £56,000. ”

All Saints Church, Weston Green, Esher, Surrey, fundraising for a £1.4 million repair project



© Chris Pancewicz/Alamy Stock Photos

Carrying out church repairs

Where more than one grant is shown, this denotes separate awards from our grant programmes.



St Peter & St Paul, Lavenham, Suffolk

© Bryan Panton

ENGLAND

BEDFORDSHIRE

Aspley Guise: St Botolph **£10,000**

Blunham: St Edmund or St James **£7,500**

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Long Crendon: St Mary the Virgin **£10,000**

Taplow: St Nicolas **£2,000**

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Cambridge: Our Lady and the English Martyrs **£50,000**

Great Paxton: Holy Trinity **£5,000, £3,000, £2,000**

Northborough: St Andrew **£10,000**

Southoe: St Leonard **£3,000**

CHESHIRE

Bredbury: St Barnabas **£7,684**

Grappenhall: St Wilfrid **£6,000, £3,000**

CORNWALL

Forrabury: St Symphorian **£5,000**

Grade: St Grada and Holy Cross **£10,000, £5,000**

Quethiock: St Hugh **£2,907, £93**

South Hill: St Sampson **£9,000, £3,000**

St Just-in-Penwith: St Just **£2,245, £2,000**

Torpoint: Cornerstone URC/Methodist Church **£10,000**

CUMBRIA

Appleby: St Lawrence **£10,000, £5,000**

Barrow-in-Furness: St James **£5,417**

Bolton: All Saints Appleby **£10,000, £5,000, £4,500,**

Kendal: Holy Trinity **£10,000, £2,500**

Kirkby Stephen: St Stephen **£10,000**

Kirkland: Mission Church **£3,385**

Matterdale: Matterdale Church **£25,000, £10,000**

Renwick: All Saints **£10,000**

Woodland: St John the Evangelist **£8,500**

Wreay: St Mary **£10,000, £5,000**

DERBYSHIRE

Whaley Bridge, Taxal: St James **£5,000, £3,000, £2,000**

DEVON

Holsworthy: St Peter & St Paul **£3,000**

Ilfracombe: St Philip & St James **£22,000**

Landscope: St Matthew **£5,000**

Stoke Damerel: St Andrew with St Luke **£10,000, £10,000**

Stoke Rivers: St Bartholomew **£7,000, £3,000, £3,000**

Thurlestone: All Saints **£3,000**

Walkhampton: St Mary the Virgin **£10,000, £4,000, £3,000**

DORSET

Goathill: St Peter **£2,000**

Holdenhurst: St John the Evangelist **£890**

DURHAM

Medomsley: St Mary Magdalene **£10,000, £10,000**

Durham: St Oswald **£7,500**

EAST YORKSHIRE

Hessle: All Saints **£10,000, £1,000**

EAST SUSSEX

Battle: St Mary the Virgin **£2,500**

Ore: Christ Church **£5,000, £1,800, £1,000**

Ore: St Helen **£2,000**

St Leonards-on-Sea: Christ Church **£7,500**

Winchelsea: St Thomas **£5,000**

ESSEX

Debden: St Mary Virgin **£6,054**

Great Horkesley: St John **£8,000**

Wendens Ambo: St Mary the Virgin **£7,000**

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Daglingworth: Holy Rood **£35,000, £5,000**

Down Hatherley: St Mary & Corpus Christi **£7,000, £7,000**

Doynton: Holy Trinity **£5,000**
Kelmscott: St George **£5,000**
Northleach: St Peter & St Paul **£5,000**

GREATER LONDON

Battersea Fields: St Saviour **£10,000**
Croydon: St Michael & All Angels with St James **£2,500**
Hanwell: St Thomas **£7,000**
Kensington, Christchurch **£10,000**
Mile End: East London Tabernacle **£12,000**
Peckham: Rye Lane Baptist Chapel **£4,272**
Pimlico: St James the Less **£5,000**

GREATER MANCHESTER

Manchester: Holy Name of Jesus **£5,000**
Tonge-cum-Alkrington: St Michael & All Angels **£1,180**
Whitefield: Whitefield Methodist Church **£8,131**

HAMPSHIRE

Bitterne Park: The Ascension **£4,000**
Chandler's Ford: St Martin **£500**
Dummer: All Saints **£1,040**
Micheldever: St Mary the Virgin **£5,000, £4,000, £3,000**
Milford-on-Sea: All Saints **£10,000**
Pear Tree: St Mary Extra (Jesus Chapel) **£5,000, £2,000**

HEREFORDSHIRE

Colwall: St James the Great **£13,500**

HERTFORDSHIRE

Abbots Langley: St Lawrence **£3,000**
Kelshall: St Faith **£5,000, £3,000, £2,000**
St Albans: St Michael **£10,000**

KENT

Chatham: St John the Divine **£5,000, £3,383**
Sandhurst: St Nicholas **£2,630**
Sutton-at-Hone: St John the Baptist **£13,000, £10,000**

LANCASHIRE

Baxenden: St John **£7,500**
Blackpool: Layton Methodist Church **£24,000**
Cleveleys: St Andrew **£10,000**
Croston: St Michael & All Angels **£8,500**
Fleetwood: St Nicholas **£30,000**
Ince-in-Makerfield: Christ Church **£10,000**

Lytham St Annes: Lytham Methodist Church **£10,000**

Lytham St Annes, Ansdell: The Well Baptist Church **£2,000**

Padiham: St Leonard **£10,000**

Penwortham: St Leonard **£540**

Standish: St Wilfrid **£50,000, £5,000**

LEICESTERSHIRE

Coalville: Marlborough Square Methodist Church **£3,000**

Horninghold: St Peter **£7,500**

LINCOLNSHIRE

Great Grimsby: St Mark **£3,000**

Revesby: St Lawrence **£4,000**

Threkingham: St Peter ad Vincula **£5,000**

MERSEYSIDE

Bebington: Wirral Cornerstone Church **£7,000**

Southport: Holy Family **£3,000**

NORFOLK

Hemsby: St Mary **£3,000**

Hethel: All Saints **£4,546**

Little Melton: All Saints **£5,000, £3,000, £2,000**

Ludham: St Catherine **£10,000**

Tattersett: All Saints & St Andrew **£4,842**

Toftrees: All Saints **£6,000**

West Barsham: The Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary **£3,000, £3,000**

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Long Buckby: St Lawrence **£5,000**

Moulton: St Peter & St Paul **£6,265**

NORTHUMBERLAND

Heddon-on-the-wall: St Andrew **£3,000**

Hexham: Priory church of St Andrew **£3,000**

Warden: St Michael & All Angels **£10,000, £2,000**

Whalton: St Mary Magdalene **£6,000, £2,000**

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Aldborough: St Andrew **£3,700**

Brafferton: St Peter **£3,000, £3,000**

Dunsforth: St Mary **£4,000**

Edstone: St Michael **£2,000**

Kildale: St Cuthbert **£5,000**

Kildwick: St Andrew **£40,000, £5,000, £5,000**

Langton-on-Swale: St Wilfrid **£3,000, £2,000, £2,000**

Skipwith: St Helen **£5,000, £3,000**

Stillingfleet: St Helen **£20,000, £8,681**

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Barnby-in-the-Willows: All Saints **£2,000**

Bilthorpe: St Margaret **£5,000, £3,000**

Kinoulton: St Luke **£6,500**

Nottingham: Church of the Good Shepherd **£25,000, £10,000**

Nottingham: St Nicholas **£10,000, £4,458**

OXFORDSHIRE

Barford: St Michael **£35,000**

Kingham: St Andrew **£10,000**

Littleworth: Holy Ascension **£5,000**

Steeple Aston: St Peter & St Paul **£5,000, £5,000**

SHROPSHIRE

Ashley: Our Blessed Lady & St John the Baptist **£3,000**

Buildwas: Holy Trinity **£2,000**

Prees: St Chad **£3,000**

SOMERSET

Axbridge: St John the Baptist **£5,295, £5,000**

North Curry: North Curry & Curland Methodist Church **£2,370**

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Penistone: St John the Baptist **£10,000**

Whiston: St Mary Magdalene **£5,000, £2,000**

STAFFORDSHIRE

Brereton: St Michael **£3,000**

SUFFOLK

Crowfield: All Saints **£5,000, £3,755, £2,000**

Henley: St Peter **£5,000, £2,000**

Ipswich: St Mary le Tower **£2,000**

Lavenham: St Peter & St Paul **£20,000, £10,000**

Layham: St Andrew **£3,000**

Newbourne: St Mary the Virgin **£3,000**

Polstead: St Mary **£3,000, £1,864**

TYNE AND WEAR

Sunderland: St John's Methodist Church **£10,000, £2,000**

WARWICKSHIRE

Leamington Spa: Radford Road Church **£10,000**

WEST MIDLANDS

Coventry: Central England Area Quaker Meeting House **£25,000**

Coventry: St Anne & All Saints **£3,000**

WEST SUSSEX

Ifield: St Margaret **£5,000**

South Stoke: St Leonard **£7,500, £2,500**

Upper Beeding: St Peter **£712**

WEST YORKSHIRE

Elland: Elland Christian Centre **£15,000**

South Kirkby: All Saints **£4,000**

Upper Armley: Christ Church **£20,000**

WILTSHIRE

Bratton: St James the Great **£5,000**

Bremhill: St Martin **£3,000**

Castle Combe: St Andrew **£10,000, £10,000**

Ogbourne: St Andrew **£19,000**

WORCESTERSHIRE

Great Malvern: St Mary and St Michael **£5,000**

Kidderminster: Grace Church **£3,000**

Worcester: St Stephen **£3,000**



Seymour Street Methodist Church, Lisburn, County Antrim

NORTHERN IRELAND

ANTRIM

Ballintoy: Ballintoy Church **£1,500**

Belfast: Belmont Presbyterian Church **£9,650**

Belfast: Frederick Street Quaker Meeting House **£1,200**

Belfast: Mount Merrion Parish Church **£650**

Belfast: Redeemer Central **£5,000**

Belfast: St Aidan **£1,300**

Belfast: St Bartholomew **£1,200**

Belfast: St John's Malone **£450**

Belfast: St Mary Magdalene **£600**

Belfast: St Simon **£1,500**

Belfast: St Vincent de Paul **£1,500**

Belfast: The Exchange Church **£700**

Dundonald: St Elizabeth's Church **£1,500**

Lisburn: Hillhall Presbyterian Church **£30,000, £10,000**

Lisburn: Seymour Street Methodist Church **£20,000**

Portrush: Dr Adam Clark Memorial Methodist Church **£2,000**

ARMAGH

Aghacommon: St Patrick **£10,000, £10,000**

Armagh: St Patrick's Cathedral (Church of Ireland) **£1,000**

Kilmore: St Aidan **£10,000**

Lurgan: St Paul **£1,650**

DOWN

Bangor: St Columbanus Ballyholme **£450**

Gargory: St Patrick **£500**

Gilford: St Paul **£10,000**

Grange: Our Lady of Lourdes **£1,500**

Killinchy: Killinchy Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church **£2,715**

Mullaglass: St Luke **£1,500**

Newtownards: St Mark **£1,200**

Rathfriland: St John **£1,000**

FERMANAGH

Enniskillen: Enniskillen Methodist Church **£1,000**

LONDONDERRY/DERRY

Belmont: St Peter **£1,500**

Desertmartin: Desertmartin Parish Church (St Comgall) **£1,500**

Limavady: Limavady Methodist Church **£1,720**

TYRONE

Aughnacloy: St James **£1,500**

Castlederg: St John **£1,300**

Castlederg: St Patrick **£25,000**

Coalisland: Brackaville Holy Trinity **£10,000**

Donemana: St James **£1,500**

Kildress: St Patrick **£10,000**

Strabane: Urney Christ Church **£10,000, £10,000**

ANGUS

Arbroath: Arbroath Town Mission **£10,000**

Dundee: St Andrew's Cathedral **£5,500, £3,500**

Dundee: St Mary Our Lady of Victories **£4,865**

Dundee, Lochee: St Mary the Immaculate Conception **£30,000**

ARGYLL AND BUTE

Dunoon: Holy Trinity Episcopal Church **£2,258**

BANFFSHIRE

Macduff: Macduff Parish Church **£9,990**

CLACKMANNANSHIRE

Alva: Alva Parish Church **£8,995**

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

Kirkcudbright: Kirkcudbright Parish Church **£10,000**

EAST LoTHIAN

Musselburgh: Musselburgh Congregational Church **£2,760**

EAST RENFREWSHIRE

Barrhead: St Andrew **£25,000**

Barrhead: St John the Evangelist **£10,000**

EDINBURGH

Edinburgh: St Margaret's Cathedral **£10,000**

Edinburgh: St Margaret's Chapel **£10,000**

Edinburgh: St Patrick **£37,500**

Edinburgh: St Peter **£8,500, £3,000**

Edinburgh, Portobello: St Mark **£10,000**

FIFE

Cupar: Ceres, Kemback & Springfield Church **£1,773**

Elie: Elie Kirk **£6,620**

Markinch: St Drostan's Church **£1,773**

St Andrews: Holy Trinity Church **£3,030**

GLASGOW

Glasgow: Carntyne and Cranhill Parish Church **£20,000**

HIGHLANDS

Fort William: Duncansburgh Church Kilmallie **£10,000**

Isle of Canna: Canna Mission Church (Isle of Canna Community Development Trust) **£10,000**

LANARKSHIRE

Hamilton: St Mary the Virgin **£8,280, £5,000**

PERTH AND KINROSS

Aberfeldy: Aberfeldy Parish Church **£8,455**

Perth: Trinity Church of the Nazarene **£19,000**

SELKIRKSHIRE

Selkirk: Selkirk & Ashkirk Parish Church **£15,000**



St Margaret's Chapel, Edinburgh

© Sergio Azenha/Alamy Stock Photos

SCOTLAND

ABERDEENSHIRE

Aberdeen: St Andrew's Church (formerly Cathedral) **£10,000**

Fraserburgh: St Drostan **£3,650**

SHETLAND ISLANDS

Fetlar: Fetlar Kirk **£8,700**

Lerwick: Adam Clarke Memorial Methodist Church **£9,450**

STIRLINGSHIRE

Bridge of Allan: Bridge of Allan Parish Church **£36,130**

Denny: Dunipace Parish Church **£865**



St Nicholas Church, St Nicholas, Glamorgan

WALES/CYMRU

CAERPHILLY/CAERFFILI

New Tredegar: Bethania Pentecostal Church **£8,387**

CARDIFF/ CAERDYDD

Cardiff: Eglwys Dewi Sant **£9,943**

Pentyrch: St Catwg **£6,374**

CARMARTHENSHIRE/GAERFYRDDIN

Llanwinio: St Gwinio **£10,000**

CONWAY

Conwy: St Mary **£50,000, £10,000, £5,000**

Gyffin: St Benedict **£60,000**

Hafan Ifan: St John **£10,000**

Llandudno: St John's Methodist **£50,000, £8,143**

Llanrhychwyn: St Rychwyn **£10,000, £10,000, £10,000**

Trefriw: St Mary **£2,000**

DENBIGHSHIRE/DDINBYCH

Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd: St Peter **£7,500, £2,000**

FLINTSHIRE/FFLINT

Rhosesmor: St Paul **£9,400**

GWYNEDD

Llanddeiniolen: St Deiniol's Church **£9,872**

Llanegryn: Ss Mary & Egryn **£10,000, £8,480, £7,788**

Nefyn: St David **£10,000**

Pentir: St Cedol **£10,000**

MONMOUTHSHIRE/FYNWY

Mitchel Troy: St Michael & All Angels **£10,000**

NEATH PORT TALBOT

Cwmafan: St Michaels **£10,000**

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Llantrisant: Sts Illtyd, Gwynno & Dyfodwg **£73,000**

SWANSEA/ABERTAWE

Penllergaer: St David **£50,000**

TORFAEN

Pontypool: Sharon Full Gospel Church **£4,700**

VALE OF GLAMORGAN/MORGANNWG

Llantwit Major: St Illtud **£2,011**

St Nicholas: St Nicholas **£50,000**

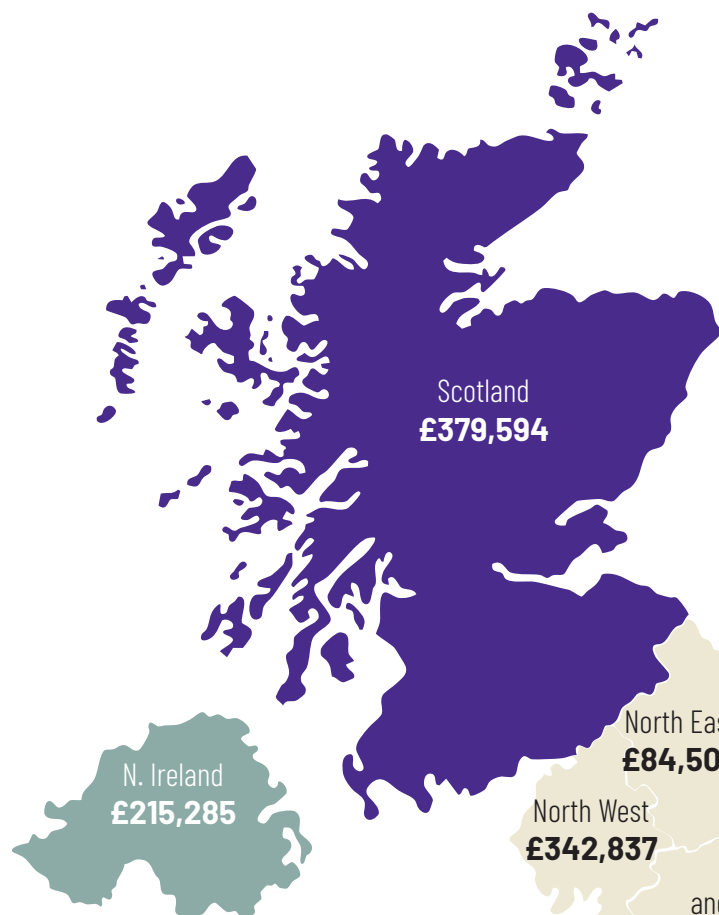
WREXHAM/WRESCAM

Wreccsam: Capel y Groes **£10,000**

2025 GRANTS AWARDED OR RECOMMENDED

Scheme	Total Awards	£
• Cherish	64	486,899
• Cecil King	6	45,000
• Headley	24	108,000
• Large	48	1,131,000
• Medium	62	202,090
• Small	31	176,161
• Treasure Ireland	32	90,920
• Wolfson	59	407,546
Totals	326	£2,647,616

OUR GRANT FUNDING IN 2025



Number of grants in 2025

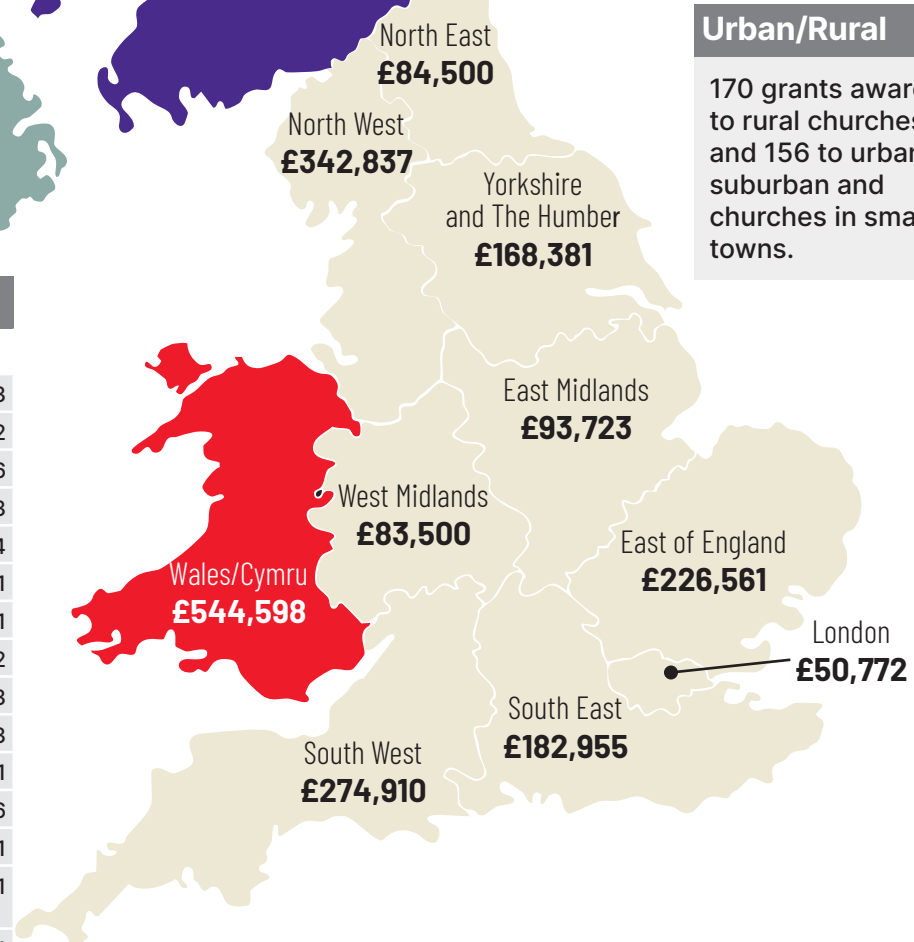
Area	Number
East Midlands	14
East of England	36
London	7
North East	13
North West	36
Northern Ireland	42
Scotland	36
South East	32
South West	41
Wales/Cymru	32
West Midlands	14
Yorkshire and The Humber	23
Total	326

Urban/Rural

170 grants awarded to rural churches and 156 to urban, suburban and churches in small towns.

Grants by denomination

	Number
Baptist	3
Catholic	22
Church in Wales	26
Church of England	193
Church of Ireland	24
Church of Scotland	1
Church of the Nazarene	1
Congregational	2
Evangelical	3
Independent	3
Independent Pentecostal	1
Methodist	16
Methodist/URC	1
Non subscribing Presbyterian	1
Pentecostal	1
Presbyterian	19
Quakers	2
Scottish Episcopal Church	7
Total	326



Total of grants awarded in 2025 - £2,647,616

We give particular thanks to The Wolfson Foundation, The Headley Trust and The National Lottery Heritage Fund for their continuing support of our work.

OUR TREASURE IRELAND PROJECT

2025 was the last full year for our Treasure Ireland project which has been supporting church buildings in Northern Ireland since 2020, thanks to our partnerships with the Department for Communities, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Pilgrim Trust.



© Kerry Rooney

Kerry Rooney MBE is our Northern Ireland Church Support Officer

Training

2025 saw the completion of a full programme of training events involving volunteers, clergy and heritage professionals from across Northern Ireland.

Our training focused on practical issues such as building maintenance, heritage skills, tourism development and interpretation, whilst also creating opportunities for peer learning and collaboration across denominations. Bringing people who look after church buildings together to share knowledge is key to their future.

Grant funding

The Treasure Ireland grants programme has helped to improve the condition of church buildings. By November 2025, 55 churches in Northern Ireland had received Treasure Ireland grants.

The Treasure Ireland grants have supported essential repairs such as works to roofs, rainwater goods, masonry and windows, and have helped prevent further deterioration. This reduces long-term repair costs and safeguards buildings that are so important to their communities.

Tourism and engagement

We have worked with ten churches to develop bookable tours and visitor experiences. These offer people a chance to engage with the history and architecture of churches, both urban and rural, and from a range of denominations. To allow them to gather data on visitor numbers, each church has a digital visitor counter.

Churches that have benefited include: Christ Church, Derry/Londonderry (Church of Ireland); St Macartan's, (Forth Chapel) Augher (Catholic); and the First Armagh Presbyterian Church, Armagh (Presbyterian).

Online, a suite of themed trails and digital content on the National Churches Trust's website allows new audiences to discover the best of Northern Ireland's church heritage.

nationalchurchestrust.org/explore/northern-ireland



© Nina McNeary



Participants taking part in a tour of churches in Derry/Londonderry, outside St Columba's Cathedral

The Treasure Ireland project concluded in April 2026. Its legacy is clear:

- better-maintained church buildings
- more confident and skilled volunteers
- a growing recognition of churches as vital heritage assets for all
- 80 churches have been supported with repair grants across Northern Ireland with funding totalling £422,879
- 38 training sessions have taken place with more than 1,220 attendees, averaging 30 attendees per session.
- 10 churches supported to develop bookable visitor experiences



© Nina McNeary

Central to the success of Treasure Ireland has been the role of the Support Officer, who from 2020 to 2025 was Nina McNeary.

Through site visits, one-to-one advice and ongoing encouragement, her work has helped build confidence amongst volunteers and

fostered a culture of proactive maintenance and openness.

Crucially, this support has extended beyond grant recipients, ensuring that the benefits of the programme have been felt across the wider church sector in Northern Ireland.

Winter Ready Small Grants Programme

In 2025 the need for small-scale, preventative repairs to church buildings in Northern Ireland remained exceptionally high. To help, we developed a special Winter Ready Small Grants Programme focused on essential works to help churches prepare their buildings for the winter months and prevent further deterioration.

78 churches applied to the programme with 26 churches awarded grants; just over £30,000 of funding was distributed. The grants had a significant impact, enabling churches to address immediate risks, protect historic fabric, and enter the winter period with greater confidence.

Find out more about Treasure Ireland: nationalchurchestrust.org/treasure-ireland

OUR CHERISH PROJECT

In 2025, our Cherish project, made possible thanks to a £1.9 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, continued to help places of worship in Scotland, Wales/Cymru and North West England through the work of its four locally based Support Officers and dedicated grant funding.

Jon Hodges is
our Cherish Project Manager



© Karim Stoddart

We made 64 grants totalling £486,899 to churches, chapels and meeting houses for essential repairs to roofs, rainwater goods and stonework. The funding also pump-primed investigative and development work to help prepare the way for larger projects.

Grants were made to churches in locations as varied as the Vale of Glamorgan, the Lake District and as far north as the Shetland Islands. For the first time we funded, as a pilot, community-owned churches no longer owned by a denomination. By the end of the year, 86% of the total £900,000 grant budget for 2023 – 2026 had been allocated.

In 2025 our Cherish Support Officers visited over 150 places of worship providing support and guidance on maintenance, repairs, project planning and funding applications, as well as discussing ideas for community engagement, enterprise and income generation. Training is also a key focus and in 2025 Cherish delivered in person and online training to over 700 people.

Energy efficiency

Good maintenance of church buildings plays a significant role in both mitigating the effects of climate change and preventing further emissions through increased energy efficiency.



Thanks to
National
Lottery
players

Recent years have seen increased rainfall. This means that church gutters, drains and downpipes need regular clearing so that they can work to their full capacity and prevent damage to the building.

In 2025 our Cherish Support Officers in Scotland, Anne-Marie O'Hara and David Lynch, spoke at the Scottish Episcopal Church's Net Zero Roadshow events about the crucial contribution maintenance makes to achieving net zero.

Ensuring that buildings are windproof and watertight is the biggest step that places of worship can take towards an efficient heating system.



David Lynch, one of our Cherish Scotland Support Officers, at the 2025 Scottish Episcopal Church Net Zero Roadshow

Cherish in Scotland

Community Ownership

“ With the closure of an increasing number of churches in Scotland, a key focus of our work has been to ensure church buildings going into community ownership – and which continue to provide worship – remain open and well-maintained.



Fetlar Kirk

On this, we worked with organisations including the Development Trusts Association Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund and the Scottish Land Fund.

In 2025 we were able to award a Cherish grant of £8,700 to Fetlar Kirk, on Fetlar, one of the Shetland Islands. This was the first Cherish grant to a community-owned church in Scotland, and a pilot scheme. It continues to hold weekly worship services and is open for visitors throughout the week, with displays about local history and wildlife.”

Anne Marie O'Hara and David Lynch,
Support Officers, Cherish Scotland

Cherish in Wales/Cymru

Walking and Pilgrimage

“ In 2025 I continued to champion walking and pilgrimage in Wales as a way of increasing the number of people using and visiting places of worship.



St Rhychwyn Church, Llanrhychwyn

This included delivering a training session for the Diocese of Bangor on 'Walking as Community Engagement', examining issues including how to increase the appeal of and interest in church heritage and how churches can support local economies.

One of our grantees was St Rhychwyn's Church in Llanrhychwyn. This is purportedly the oldest surviving church building in Wales, dating from the 12th Century and having been a site of Christian worship since the sixth Century.

The church received three grants of £10,000, each tackling different projects involving lead work, repairing the torching – a layer of mortar under the roof that keeps the weather out – and the replacement of cement pointing with lime mortar.”

Gareth Simpson,
Support Officer, Cherish Wales/Cymru

Cherish in North West England (Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester)

Heritage at Risk



Holy Trinity Church, Kendal, Cumbria

“ Finding ways to keep churches open for the long term is vitally important and this includes sharing best practice and new ideas. In 2025 we ran a 'Resilient and Sustainable Church Buildings' day in each of the three counties covered by Cherish.

This allowed churches to meet funders and share their experiences with one another. Feedback from the events was highly positive, with 100% of attendees who completed our survey saying they learned something new.

We were delighted to have awarded Cherish grants to four churches on Historic England's Heritage At Risk Register: St Andrew's in Cleveleys, Kirkby Stephen Parish Church, St Michael & All Angels in Croston and Holy Trinity in Kendal. The funding helped to safeguard locally significant historic churches for the future and will enable them to move off the list.”

Matthew Maries, *Support Officer, Cherish North West*

OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS

We speak up for all 38,500 churches across the UK – independent of government and denominations – so that every church in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland knows it has a voice and can get practical support.



© Ellen Hawes

Karl Newton is our Deputy Chief Executive



© Rachael Adams

Rachael Adams is our Head of Communications



© National Churches Trust

Ben Sims (Head of Public Affairs), Karl Newton (Deputy Chief Executive), Claire Walker (Chief Executive) and Sir Philip Rutnam (Chair) outside 10 Downing Street

At the start of 2025 we stepped up our campaign in support of the future of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS), which refunded VAT on repairs. We worked with politicians, the media and UK Government, and called on our Friends and supporters to lobby their MPs.

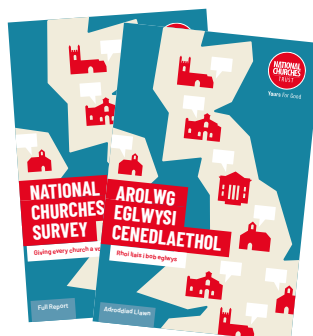
This pressure helped to secure a Westminster Hall debate in January 2025 at which Chris Bryant MP, then the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, announced that the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme would continue for one year from March 2025. However, the scheme's budget was reduced to £23 million, with a new limit of £25,000 on VAT refunds. That change penalised the many churches and cathedrals with larger repair projects.

We continued to make the case for the benefits of the LPWGS throughout 2025 and ensured the issue stayed visible in national and local media with coverage by the BBC, ITV, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Country Life*, and *The Spectator*, amongst many others.

2026 UPDATE

On 22 January 2026, the UK Government announced that the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme would be scrapped and replaced by a new Places of Worship Renewal Fund, but for England only. The Fund is to run for four years from 2026/2027, managed by Historic England. With a total pot of £92 million, the new Renewal Fund will average £23 million a year, and have a focus on repair and conservation work.

We welcomed the announcement of the new funding scheme. However, we are very concerned that listed places of worship will now have to bear the full cost of VAT on repairs. Museums and galleries offering free admission do not have to pay VAT on repairs, but in future churches will. Taking into account inflation, the value of the new scheme, which covers only England, will decline over time.



The National Churches Survey: giving every church a voice

To speak up for churches effectively we need evidence, and the best comes from the people who look after them.

(Continues on page 27)

Working with over 70 denominations, faith, and heritage groups, alongside an experienced survey firm, Whitestone Insight, in 2025 we carried out the National Churches Survey. 3,628 churches took part, broadly representative of the UK in terms of denomination, attendance, building age and location.

The findings make clear the growing problems facing churches in the UK. Buildings are deteriorating with over a third of church roofs at risk or in urgent need of repair, the volunteers needed to run churches are in short supply and, for many, money is running out.

The survey also revealed much that is positive. The majority of churches provide vital support for local people and most now have accessible entrances and loos and kitchens, making them user-friendly places of worship and community hubs.

Our survey found that 49% of churches have stained glass of artistic merit, and 35% of churches have monuments and memorials that are historically significant.

Other key findings included:

- there are over 830,000 regular church volunteers across the UK
- the average congregation relies on 265 hours of unpaid service every month
- 80% of churches hold services at least weekly, confirming their ongoing role as spiritual centres.

Full details: nationalchurchestrust.org/survey



A service at Kirkcudbright Parish Church, supported by the National Churches Trust in 2025

The House of Good: Local calculator

Many of us know how much good churches do for people. They keep the social fabric of communities strong, while providing a safety net for those in need. In 2020-21, we published The House of Good, our pioneering research study that quantified the social good of all the UK's churches at a staggering £55 billion.



In March 2025 we went one step further and launched The House of Good: Local. This online calculator enables any church to estimate the social value that it provides to the community.

By the end of 2025, The House of Good: Local had been used by over 240 churches from more than a dozen denominations, and in every part of the UK. Collectively they calculated their social value at £215,312,790, which works out at an average of £868,196 per church.



A volunteer serves curry in a soup kitchen at a church hall in Bradford

The calculator was developed with funding from the Benefact Trust, and in partnership with State of Life.

If you are interested in learning more about the tool, or in joining the hundreds of churches who have already used it, visit nationalchurchestrust.org/houseofgood-local.

Oliver Lack,
Communications and Public Affairs Officer



© Andy Sillett

“ The future of our amazing church buildings is one of the greatest heritage challenges we face as a nation. They must remain at the heart of our heritage and at the centre of local communities. ”

Hugh Dennis,
Comedian and actor, Ambassador for the National Churches Trust

WALL PAINTINGS, MURALS AND MOSAICS

by Catherine Pepinster

Two very different issues have caused the extraordinary heritage of wall decorations in British churches to be in jeopardy: damp and the Reformation.

The climate has caused damage to umpteen wall paintings, with damp causing paint to flake and decay. A dryer, warmer climate helped preserve them in other parts of Europe. But that was not the only issue that damaged decoration in England, Wales and Scotland; the Reformation put paid to many of them too. Some were destroyed while

others were painted over. And even when they were rediscovered, previous early twentieth century efforts at restoration sometimes did more harm than good, with substances used to restore them actually causing paint to flake even more.

But now across Britain, there are some remarkable efforts being made by church congregations to try and save their church's wall decorations. Some of them date from medieval times, others are more recent installations. The rescue attempts include securing grants, sometimes from unexpected quarters, getting involved with education projects, and turning parishioners into tour guides.



Some of the 12th century wall paintings at St Botolph's Church, Hardham, West Sussex

© Michael Coppins CC BY-SA 4.0



© Catherine Pepinster

Mosaic of St Catherine of Alexandria in the church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria, Droitwich Spa

Different techniques have been used to decorate churches over the centuries. A wall painting is a generic term for a piece of work often carried out by a non-specialist artist, and a term for any work applied to a wall. Then there are murals, large-scale works of art, often a hand-painted scene, commissioned by the church that contains them, and integrated with the surrounding building. Over the centuries they have been used to tell stories, often from the Bible, and were particularly important at a time when few people could read.

Not all murals are frescoes. A fresco is a special method of wall-painting where water-based paint is put onto wet plaster – and frescoes can all be described as murals.

Byzantine heritage

Then, finally, there are mosaics: an image created by setting pieces of glass and ceramic, known as tesserae, into plaster or mortar, to form intricate patterns, or in churches, images, often taken from Scripture or the lives of the saints. Mosaics, more commonly associated with places like Ravenna and Byzantine heritage rather than Britain, are sometimes found in 20th century churches in this country, particularly Catholic ones.

Around Britain there are decorative artworks of a quality that is as good as anything to be found Europe – but are in jeopardy because of our climate.

One such set of twelfth century frescoes are those found in Sussex, thought to be painted by a group of itinerant monks, now called the Lewes Group. At St Botolph's, in Hardham, there are frescoes once whitewashed over and now revealed in all their jaunty glory, with Adam and Eve, and St George beside a wheel.

Architect Julian Vallis, part of the team looking after St Botolph's church said: "The deteriorating condition coupled with the significant challenge of responding to the impact of previous intervention lead to the building's inclusion on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2024. Age alone means that the paintings are incredibly fragile, but their conservation in this state is complicated by environmental factors such as relative humidity, and the consequence of past conservation treatments that were undertaken during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries that used non-original coatings ranging from waxes and varnishes to soluble nylons."

At St John the Baptist in Clayton, the monks, from the Cluniac order based in Burgundy, painted Christ surrounded by disciples in Roman robes while paradise is an Italian walled city.

At St Michael and All Angels in Plumpton, East Sussex there are more Lewes Group paintings uncovered around 70 years ago, showing Christ in the heavenly city handing over the keys of the kingdom to Peter and a book to Paul, the epistle writer. Historic England describes the Grade I listed church as in poor condition and highly vulnerable. An assessment of the wall paintings commissioned by the church itself shows a variety of problems, including damp and humidity and even algae growth linked to the presence of bats.

Its story is all too familiar: a small congregation, trying its best to maintain a church of great significance – particularly so because of its historic wall paintings – and struggling to do so.

But St Michael and All Angels might have found a solution that others are considering too: finding a connection with education. This is an obvious solution for this church as Plumpton College, a further and higher education college, has been built around it. The college specialises in courses for land-linked subjects, from animal care to agriculture and from forestry to wine-growing and making.

St Michael's vicar, the Rev Anne Dunlop, said: "There is an ongoing project to use the nave as an adult teaching area and we are in consultation with the Diocese and college to bring this about. Crucial to this work going ahead is the church [addressing] the damp". Given the damp affects the wall where the murals are sited, this is essential and while the church has to fund these repairs, it will lead to future revenue towards the upkeep of the church via the college using the building.

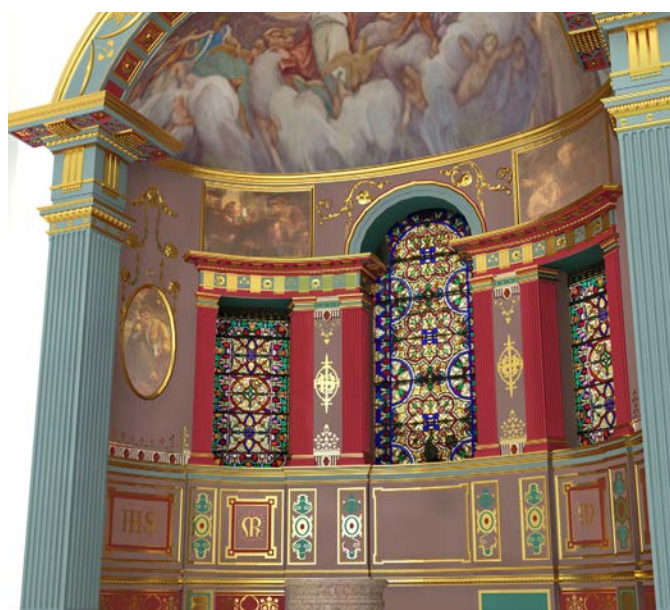
Climate and the Reformation

In Scotland, the climate and the Reformation put paid to many wall decorations. But in Edinburgh there are two outstanding installations which congregations are seeking to save, one dating from the 18th and the other from the 19th century.

The older of the two has survived in part because of the changing fortunes of the church where it is located. More than 250 years ago the Edinburgh church that is now called St Patrick's was the Cowgate Chapel, an Episcopalian church just off the Royal Mile. Installed in it was a mural painted on the ceiling, The Ascension of the Lord, by the Scottish artist Alexander Runciman, and like the building, the gift of the third Duke of Buccleuch and his wife, Lady Elizabeth Montagu.

The Runciman Ascension

But as Edinburgh New Town developed, so the Episcopalian congregation migrated there, and the church was bought in 1818 by United Presbyterians. They considered such an image idolatrous and had Runciman's work painted over. By the 1870s the church was in the hands of Roman Catholics and became St Patrick's, a church that served a growing Irish population in that part of Edinburgh and who did not know about the Runciman work at the time. The Runciman Ascension was eventually rediscovered this century, hidden beneath five coats of paint, and the third duke's successor, the 10th Duke of Buccleuch, visited the church to support the mural restoration.

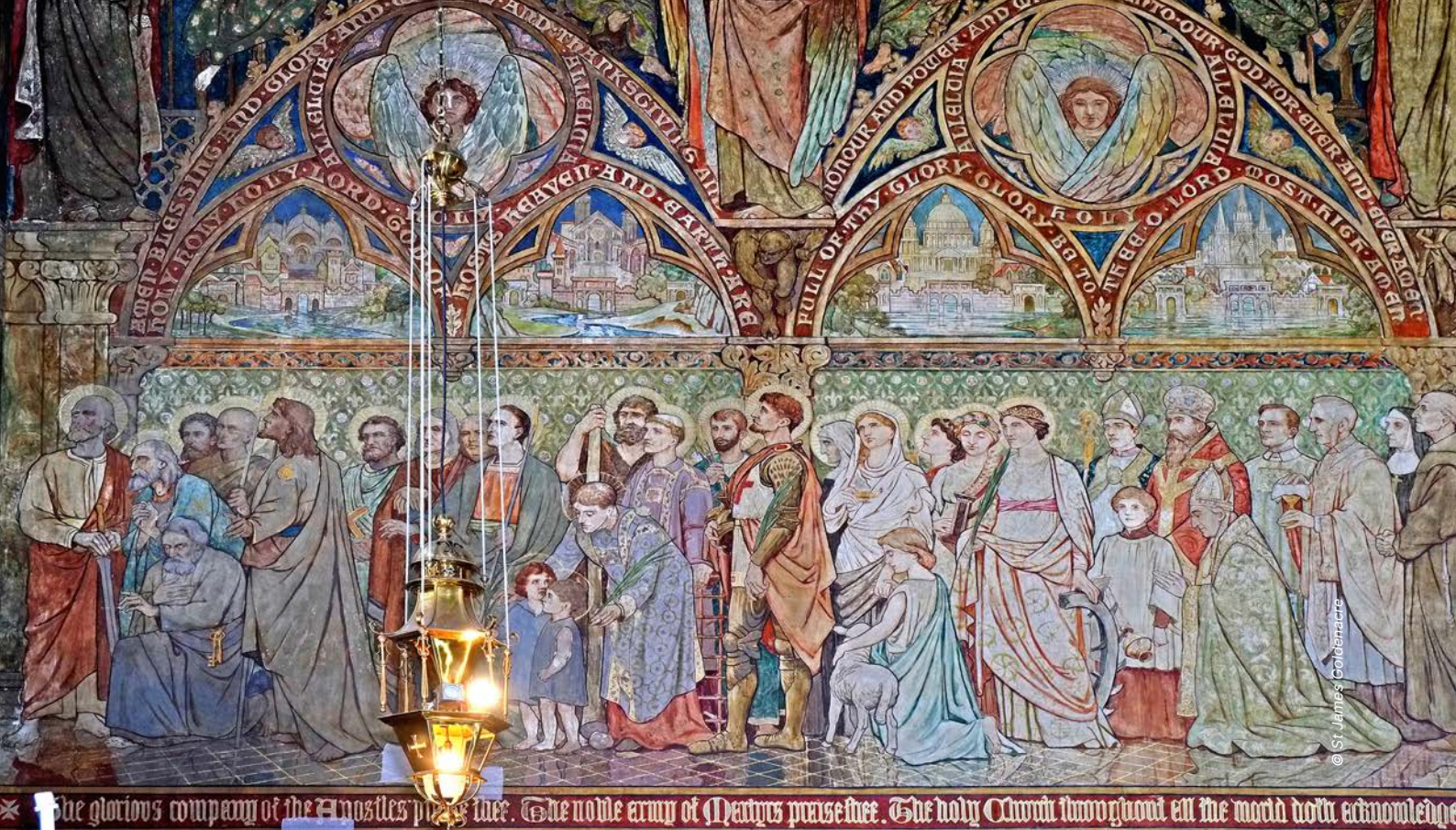


Artists impression of the restored apse chapel and the Runciman Ascension ceiling painting

Four pendants in the Apse have already been restored. However, following extensive research into the technical elements of the painting in the ceiling of the Apse, it is not currently possible to remove the outer layers of paint as it cannot withstand the vigours of currently available solutions. Conservators are waiting patiently for the emergence of a new product to provide a safe and durable means to remove the outer layer of the overpaint.

The Runciman Apse Trust, formed to restore, reinstate and preserve the work, is raising funds to restore the Ascension ceiling painting.

Meanwhile in the north of Edinburgh, at St James' Goldenacre Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church congregation has worked to preserve a series of murals painted by the prominent Victorian Scottish artist William Hole in the 1890s. The murals include depictions of "The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee", "The noble army of Martyrs praise thee", and "The holy Church throughout the



Chancel murals at St James' Goldenacre, by William Hole

world doth acknowledge thee to be the Lord", as well as illustrations of the ancient Christian hymn, the Te Deum, while a continuous dado frieze features peacocks and vines which symbolise immortality.

William Hole lived from 1846 to 1917, and was an English artist, illustrator, etcher and engraver, known for his industrial, historical and biblical scenes. The murals at St James' Goldenacre were so admired that Hole was commissioned to paint the frieze at the National Portrait Gallery in Queen Street, Edinburgh.

A century of dust, water damage, and fading put the murals at risk but the community raised enough money to clean and stabilize the murals, bringing Hole's original vibrant colours back to life. Further work is needed to complete the restoration.

The mosaics of Droitwich Spa

Willingness to engage with others outside your traditional congregation was the winning factor for the Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria, the Roman Catholic parish church in Droitwich Spa in the Midlands, in securing a substantial grant from The National Heritage Lottery Fund.

Inspired by the mosaics of churches in Ravenna, the Sacred Heart was opened in 1921. Decoration of the church took 12 years, with thousands upon thousands of tesserae applied to create stunning wall decorations throughout the church. One series

depicts stories from scripture, and another the life of the Virgin Mary. Other mosaics depict the life of St Richard of Chichester, who was born in Droitwich, with one image showing him blessing the salt springs for which the town was once famous.

But although the church was Grade II listed, the condition of the mosaics had declined. Now work to clean and restore them, thanks to a £190,000 National Heritage Lottery Fund grant, means that they are brighter than ever. Gold leaf shines, deep blues and green dazzle, with Christ resurrected shimmering above the altar.

Designed by the artist Gabriel Pippet, installed by the experienced mosaicist Maurice Josey and his assistant, a local lad called Fred Oates, the mosaics contain two million pieces of Venetian glass, weighing eight and a half tons. The decoration was funded by the church's benefactors, wealthy Catholic converts.

One of the stipulations of the grant was for the church to offer tours for the public to see the mosaics. The parish responded with enthusiasm, and several parishioners have now trained as volunteer guides.

The church, which has around 300 people attending Mass on a Sunday, is now on course to have 5,000 visitors this year, travelling to Droitwich Spa to see what is arguably the most complete scheme of mosaics in the country.



Visitors in the church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria, Droitwich Spa

Parishioner Peter Vella, who was one of the team of parishioners who successfully applied for the grant, said: "The congregation takes a lot of pride that we now have so many visitors here. They find it a truly inspirational place, and become really absorbed in the mosaics."

"Until a few years ago, hardly anyone knew about the mosaics outside our congregation. Now we have eight guides who are kept very busy with tours."

While the mosaics' installation and design had serious intent – the Sacred Heart opened in 1921, the first Catholic Church built in Droitwich since the Reformation and the mosaics were a 'shout out' that suppression had ended, Pippet couldn't resist some humour. A sleeping tabby cat can be found in the scene of the Annunciation, while a priest who criticised his work is depicted as a villain – the executioner of St Catherine of Alexandria.

A national campaign

A congregation's enthusiasm for the art within their church's walls is essential to its survival – but sometimes, if numbers decline, they – and the art – face a diocese's decision for closure.

This happened to another Catholic church, that of the Holy Rosary in Oldham, when the Diocese of Salford decided that the church was no longer sustainable. It closed its doors in 2017 despite large protests and a national campaign to save its unusual mosaic cum wall-painting by the Jewish émigré artist George Mayer-Martón.

But while the campaign could not persuade the diocese to reverse its closure plan, it did save the art. Mayer-Martón's great-nephew Nick Braithwaite and parishioners publicised the threat to the artist's unusual depiction of Christ in tiles of gold against a dark blue cross, flanked by Mary and the apostle John. The fresco part of the image was painted over in the 1980s while the rest suffered some vandalism after the church closed in 2017.

Historic England said that the work is a "striking aesthetic combination of Neo-Byzantine mosaic and modernist Cubist-influenced fresco inventively applied to traditional Christian iconography in a deeply personal evocation of suffering and redemption", while it was in part listed so that it would be saved to remind people of the artist's flight from Nazi persecution.

According to Braithwaite, securing the survival of Mayer-Martón's work – there is now a campaign to re-open the former church as a cultural centre – was down to several factors. One was securing the support of heritage organisations such as Save Britain's Heritage; another was the voices of art historians speaking up for the significance of the work. Parishioners were vital, as was securing listing of the artwork – and the fact that a colour photo was available. It meant even people who had never visited the Holy Rosary could recognise its importance.



The Crucifixion by George Mayer-Martón

If there is one lesson that Braithwaite has learnt about wall decorations during his years of campaigning, it is that we can all too easily believe they are secure and will last.

"They have the appearance of being permanent," he said, "but they are only as permanent as the building. They can so easily be lost".

St James' Goldenacre will feature in the Edinburgh Festival of the Sacred Arts to be held in August, with two tours of church on Sunday 16 and Monday 17 August. For further details see www.edinburghsacredartsfestival.org



Catherine Pepinster is a journalist, broadcaster and author. She is a Trustee of the National Churches Trust.

She was the first woman editor of the *Catholic weekly, The Tablet*, where she worked from 2003 to 2016. She now writes for a variety of publications including *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Times*, mostly on religion, and commentates regularly on TV and radio. She is also a regular contributor to Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*.

THE BEAUTY OF CHURCHES

by Fr Patrick van der Vorst

Church buildings matter. Deeply. Even in our increasingly secular world, most people instinctively feel this. Whether someone is a practising Christian, someone of another faith, or someone who claims not to believe at all, there is often a noticeable change that happens when they enter a sacred space.

Their voices soften. Their pace slows. Their eyes begin to wander upward. Something shifts within them.

I see this every day at Westminster Cathedral. Outside, on Victoria Street, there is noise: buses roaring past, phones ringing, conversations, traffic, people rushing from one place to another.

Yet the moment visitors cross the threshold into the Cathedral, a silence often descends, almost instinctively. It is as though the building itself gently asks for quietness. And most people accept that invitation without anyone telling them to do so.

Why? Because the beauty of Westminster Cathedral speaks to something deeply embedded within the human soul.



Westminster Cathedral

© Diocese of Westminster



© The National Churches Trust

St Tanwg, Llandanwg, Gwynedd

And beauty, in its many manifestations, is present in all church buildings, no matter how humble they may appear to be.

That is especially so in the 20,000 that are listed for their special architectural or historic interest in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This beauty can include, as in Westminster Cathedral, the sheer scale of a church building, its height, its arches, and also the play of light, the candles, the marble, the mosaics, the scent of incense, the sound of distant prayer or chant; all these things together awaken something ancient within us.

Sacred architecture reminds us that we are small... but loved. It reminds us that there is something greater than ourselves.

And perhaps this should not surprise us. I would argue that the reason sacred spaces move us so profoundly is because God Himself first designed the outline of a sacred space.

Architectural instructions

Some of the most fascinating chapters in the whole of Scripture are found in the Book of Exodus, chapters 25 to 31. These chapters are not dramatic

miracle stories. They are detailed architectural and artistic instructions. God speaks to Moses not only about laws and commandments, but about beauty, craftsmanship, proportion, precious materials, lamp-stands, vestments, incense, altars and... how to design a sacred space.

God says: "They shall make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst." (Exodus 25:8). And then follows page after page of astonishing detail. The Ark is carefully described. The curtains are to be embroidered. Exact measurements are given for a sanctuary table.

The colours are specified: "blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen." The lampstand itself is to resemble a flowering almond tree: "its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it." (Exodus 25:36). Even the oil for the lamps and the fragrance of the incense are prescribed.



The font at St Gwenog's Church, Llanwenog, Ceredigion

Why such detail? Because beauty matters to God. The Tabernacle was not simply functional. It was meant to reveal something of Heaven itself. Sacred beauty was not an optional extra added later by artists and architects. It was woven into worship from the very beginning. All of these works of art God instructs to be designed and built, are still used in our churches today: a tabernacle, a lamp, priestly vestments.

Drawn to beauty

And if, as I do, we truly believe that God created us in His image, then something of His creative Spirit must live within us too.

Human beings are naturally drawn to beauty because we come from the God who is Beauty itself. Perhaps this is why sacred architecture affects believers and non-believers alike. A church building points beyond itself. It whispers that life is not merely material. It reminds us that there is mystery, transcendence and eternity.



St Peter's Church, Huddersfield, Yorkshire



© Salford Cathedral

The recently restored interior of Salford Cathedral

It is therefore no surprise that architects and craftsmen and women through the centuries have given of their best to church buildings in our cities, towns and villages and that today they are buildings that we value so highly.

The churches and cathedrals in the United Kingdom are not merely large meeting halls. They are theological statements in stone. Their height draws our eyes upward toward Heaven. Their silence invites contemplation. Their beauty creates space for God.

And that silence is perhaps one of the greatest gifts a church can offer today. Modern life is extraordinarily noisy. Yet when people enter a sacred space, they often rediscover silence almost instinctively.

Space for silence

That space for silence is something that Sir Michael Palin found important during a court hearing in London. The case was a particularly unpleasant spat between the Monty Python team and one of the producers on the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

During the lunch break he walked down to Fleet Street and found himself at the doorway of a church he'd never noticed before: St Dunstan's-in-the-West: "After the grilling of the morning, and the rushing of the lunchtime crowds, never was a church interior more welcome and more comforting. And I've done the same thing in New York and Paris and wherever else there has been a tumult to escape from."

Of course for some people, once they settle into that silence, something even deeper begins to happen: silence slowly becomes prayer. I see this constantly in Westminster Cathedral. Visitors wander in simply

as tourists. They look around. They sit down for a moment. Gradually their breathing slows. Their faces soften. And then often they make their way quietly towards the candle stand. Often people say to me:

"Father, I don't really practise," or: "I'm not sure I believe anymore." And then, almost in the same breath: "But I did light a candle for my mother," or "I said a prayer for my brother who died."

That is deeply moving. Because it reveals that beneath all the layers of modern life, something within the human heart still reaches instinctively towards God. Beauty helps awaken that longing. A church building can therefore do far more than impress us aesthetically. Its beauty should lead us somewhere. True sacred beauty is never self-indulgent or merely decorative. It exists to draw us into silence, into contemplation, into prayer, and ultimately into the presence of God.

Long before people understand theology, they can experience beauty. Long before they know how to pray, they can encounter silence. All things our churches offer. The doors of our churches open the doors of our souls!

Caring for beauty

That is why keeping church buildings in good repair, and caring for and maintaining the beauty within them, such as stained glass and monuments, remains a vital task for us all.

In recent years, caring for this heritage of beauty has become a key priority for the Catholic church in England and Wales.

In 2020, the Taking Stock project published online an architectural and historical assessment of churches to help make clear the heritage significance of these buildings, some 750 of which are listed.

Many churches have been helped by financial support from Historic England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the National Churches Trust. From 2020 – 2022 repairs at 39

outstanding historic Catholic buildings in England were supported with funding provided by the government as part of the Culture Recovery Fund.

Churches helped included St Augustine's church in Ramsgate, designed by AW Pugin and which expresses all his ideas about what a Catholic church should be.

This summer, Salford Cathedral will complete a major project to restore its original glory, creating a richly decorated and atmospheric space, returning some of the original design features that have been lost over the years. This work will help Salford Cathedral with perhaps one of the great missions of our churches today: to remain places where the human heart can still encounter transcendence. Places where exhausted people can rediscover hope.

A church building at its best becomes a threshold between earth and Heaven. And perhaps that is why, even now, in our noisy and distracted world, people still walk into churches... fall silent... light a candle... and pray.



Lighting a candle in a church

© Alamy Stock Photos/franky242



Fr Patrick van der Vorst is a Roman Catholic priest for the Diocese of Westminster, London.

Patrick was born and raised in Bruges, Belgium. Before being ordained to the priesthood in June 2023, Patrick was a director of Sotheby's Europe and worked for 25 years in the art world. Father Patrick is currently serving as Precentor and Prefect of the Sacristy at Westminster Cathedral. He is the founder of the Christian Art website: <https://christian.art/>

2025

FINANCIAL SUMMARY



In 2025 we were pleased to award and recommend 326 grants to churches, chapels and meeting houses, totalling over £2.6 million, while continuing to promote the value of church buildings and provide advice.

The National Churches Trust recorded a surplus for the year of £757,000, which exceeded expectations. This resulted primarily from exceptional levels of legacy notifications and major donor income, which together contributed £3,277,000 and helped lift total income to £5,222,000, £1,388,000 more than in 2024. Income from trusts and foundations totalled £972,000, while friends and other individuals contributed £639,000 (including Gift Aid).

Legacy income recognised amounted to £1,697,000, with 26 new notifications, reflecting the continued confidence supporters place in our work (2024: £566,000, 15 notifications). These legacy gifts will make an important contribution to the long-term sustainability of our support for

churches, chapels and meeting houses across the UK, helping to ensure that these buildings can be maintained and cared for in the years ahead.

Net income before losses on investments amounted to £1,015,000 (2024: net expenditure of £683,000 before investment gains). The £757,000 surplus after investment losses compared to a deficit after investment gains of £540,000 in 2024. Unrestricted funds recorded a significant surplus of £1,576,000. Restricted funds decreased by £806,000, reflecting the planned expenditure of funds received in prior years. Endowment funds reported a modest deficit of £12,000, with income offset by unrealised investment losses.

Total funds of the Group at 31 December 2025 were £8,298,000, comprising £2,951,000 endowment funds, £1,995,000 restricted reserves and £3,352,000 unrestricted reserves.

**Henry Stanford ACA,
Treasurer**

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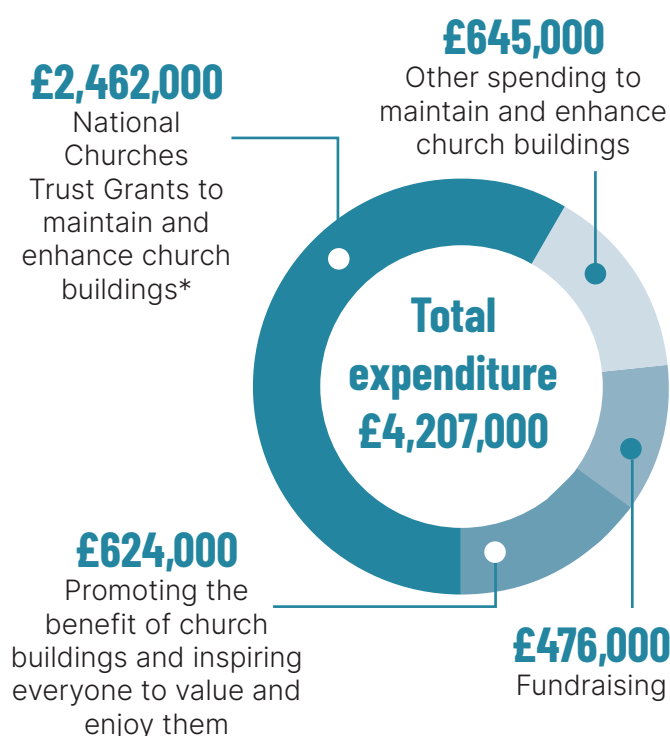
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2025

EXPENDITURE AND INCOME

Expenditure

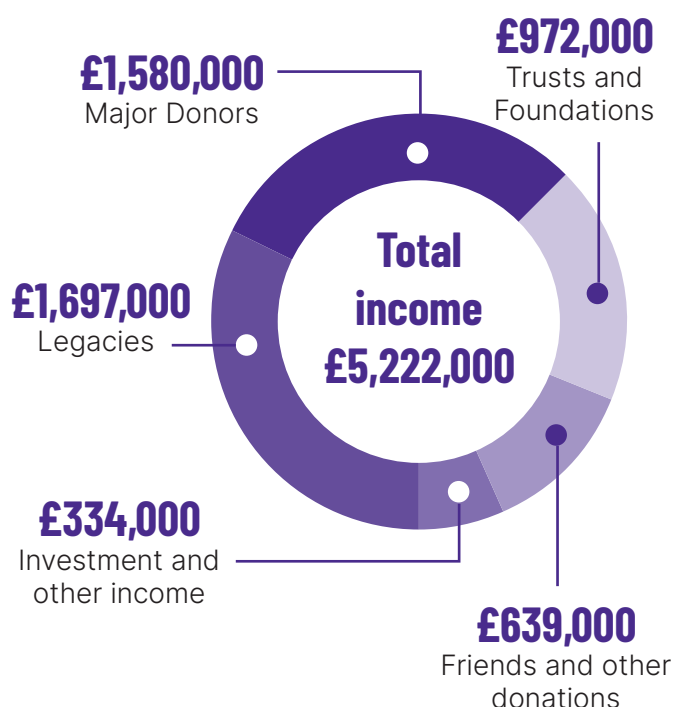
The National Churches Trust awarded over £2.6 million in grants in 2025. Non-grant expenditure decreased by £65,000.



*Grants awarded during 2025 less previous awards not claimed of £141,000. In addition the Trust recommended grants of £45,000 awarded by other charities.

Where the money came from

Total income before changes in the value of investments in 2025 largely came from Legacies and major donors, with Trusts and Foundations and Friends and other donations also providing significant contributions.



Unrealised losses on investments amounted to £258,000.

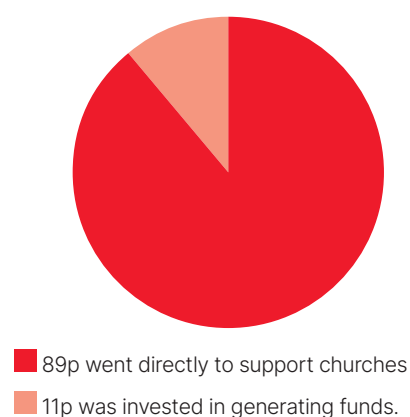
Financial resources

Excluding endowments, the funds of the National Churches Trust amounted to £5.3 million at the end of 2025. Of this, £3.3 million can be used without restriction on any of the Trust's activities and objectives.

Unrestricted reserves are important as they provide flexibility to maintain activities in the event of fluctuations in income.

The restricted funds of the Trust, totalling £2.0 million, are to be used for the purposes given, for example for churches in specified regions or for particular types of grants.

For every £1 donated



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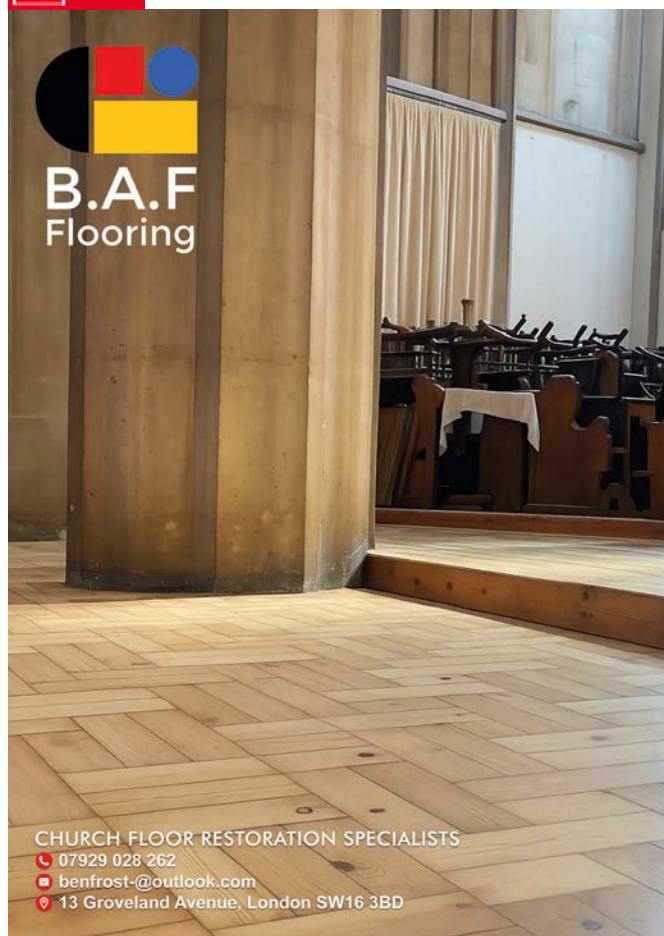
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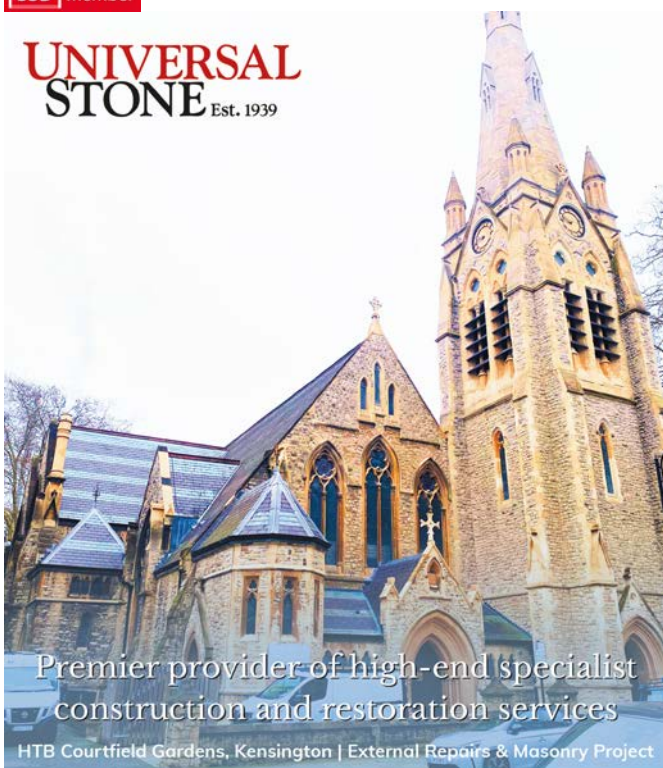
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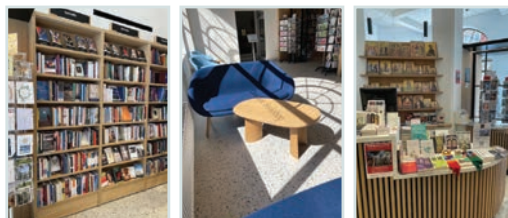
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Eddie Tulasiewicz – Editor

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