



Newsletter No 13
of
The Friends of Historic Cheshire Churches

Friends of Historic
Cheshire Churches

Newsletter No 13
November 2009

*Merry Xmas to all our
Friends!*



The National Churches Trust

In the last Newsletter I reported on some of the activities of The Churches Conservation Trust. This time I felt it appropriate to make mention of **The National Churches Trust (NCT)**.

The National Churches Trust was established in 2007 (previously called the Historic Churches Preservation Trust which had been founded in 1953) as a national, not for profit, organisation dedicated solely to the preservation and protection of church buildings across the UK. It funds essential repairs, new facilities and encourages long term good maintenance practices.

The mission of the NCT is to promote a culture that recognizes and supports church buildings (Christian places of worship) of historical, architectural and community value; promoting them not only as places of worship, but also as centres of care and support for all, including some of the most vulnerable groups in society. The NCT will encourage their use as venues for social, cultural and educational activities as well as centres for local history and architecture for visitors and tourists.

In this year's Annual Report, the Chairman Michael Hoare writes:

"Churches are complex buildings, often of unique historic importance and architectural value. Their primary function is as spiritual centres, but they also add essential value to communities through their contribution to history, architecture and music as well as to local identity and social services.

Churches also make a significant economic contribution. A study of the economic impact of faith communities in the North West of England estimated a contribution to its local economy of over £100 million per year. A survey across four local authority areas, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, found that over 21,000 people from faith communities were actively working in their community as paid staff or volunteers, the latter contributing a total of 1.3m volunteers hours per year. As a result of their work, 57,000 young people were attending more than 2,000 youth activities - a contribution estimated at over £32million a year in people resources.

The constraints under which church buildings have to be managed are complicated, not easy to understand and in need of change. The financing regime of churches in the UK is one of the least favourable in Europe, and we do not have a national strategy in place to protect these vital heritage and community assets."

If you wish to find out more about the work of NCT and read the full Annual Report which includes an overview of the Trust's work then go to www.nationalchurchestrust.org. There are accounts of some interesting projects carried out in various parts of the Country, including support for rural churches and sustaining community resources through keeping churches open.

It should be noted that County Trusts, like our own here in Cheshire, are independent of the NCT although representatives of the County Trusts and The National Churches Trust meet quarterly as the Historic Churches Liaison Group to coordinate efforts, share good practice and identify opportunities for closer collaboration.

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A Plea for Change and Adaptation

In recent months I have been reading a lot about 'constructive conservation' and 'sustainable conservation' in relation to historic places of worship. Diana Evans of English Heritage questions how historic places of worship, which are integral to our physical and cultural landscape, might be better understood, celebrated and sustained for the future. She suggests that the future of places of worship depends upon people and tapping the energy of the local congregation and the local community. The *Inspired!* campaign set up with the aim of making a case to government for more support for the thousands of volunteers caring for and using historic places of worship, came up with the suggestion of appointing advisers to offer support and practical assistance to congregations in making the most of buildings. English Heritage set about establishing a pilot project, offering a number of Anglican Diocese, 5 in all with Manchester being the nearest to Chester, Support Officer posts, who would help congregations to manage changes to their buildings, and support the local community overwhelmed with the cost of repairs and basic maintenance. The posts would be part funded by English Heritage and run for a three year period. Whilst each of the five posts would be unique to the area, each Support Officer would need to be professional, experienced, aware of conservation issues and sensitive to places of worship, but above, all able to get on with people. Following the initial success of the 'pilots' in 2008 three new posts were established; two in the North West: one in the Carlisle Diocese and one with the North-West Multi Faith Tourism Association. (For more information about Support Officers visit www.english-heritage.org.uk)

Candida L Green, daughter of Sir John Betjeman, writing in the English Heritage Bulletin describes the vital place that churches and chapels have in the landscape of England. "Spires and towers, rising from a cluster of town roofs, soaring into the sky on the horizon or suddenly upon you around the bend of a country lane, lend a feeling of settled stability, of safety. Churches are at the heart of every community and provide a sense of stability." She suggests that they are our history and the story of our way of life and who we are. Through the ceremonies of baptism, marriage and funerals they tell of generations of local people; the grave stones and the memorials add to this story. Each generation adds to the adornment of ecclesiastical heritage and to just abandon churches she suggests would be to destroy the beauty of England. If therefore, this 'story of England', the ecclesiastical heritage, is to be sustained then we need to recognize that historic churches come out of their local community; those very communities of which they tell the story. Therefore, there is a growing consensus that the solutions for the 21st century challenges to save our religious inheritance, lie within the local community. Such solutions will be routed in good and improving communication between those who manage or use the historic environment, conservation professionals and the wider community.

Places of worship are emotive sites; diverse interest groups compete to ensure that their particular perception of the buildings use and their vision of its future, dominates over others. As Thomas Hardy put it: - "To the incumbent the church is a workshop; to the antiquary it is a relic; to the parish it is a utility; to the outsider a luxury. How to unite these incompatibles?"

(Memories of Restoration, 1906)

Over the years most churches have been rearranged, altered and extended to serve the thinking and needs of that time. There are also examples of post-medieval changes to old parish churches, being removed again with the idea of 'restoring' them to their correct original medieval layout or style. In recent times there has been a radical review of the way some historic places of worship are used and presented. There is an acceptance that places of worship should, if possible, have comfortable seating, effective heating, toilets, a kitchen and space for a meeting room or children's church. There are examples of broadening the use of church buildings beyond that of just regular worship. It is expected that this will at times cause considerable disquiet and apprehension concerning the enthusiasm for change and the aims of conservation. There is, therefore, the need for effective dialogue to ensure a balance between the needs of the users of the building and the disability of conservation.

In a recent article in the Annual Report of our sister trust for Herefordshire, Sir Roy Strong, historian, whose recent book I discussed in our January 08 Newsletter, says that "If you don't allow a building to change, as it always has done through the centuries, in response to circumstances, in effect, you will have killed it off. The 20th century was a golden age of preservation and conservation But we are now in the 21st century which calls for quite new objectives." He goes on to suggest that every church will have to come to terms with some practical strategy for survival during the 21st century, which has been made even more urgent by the financial plight of the country. Hence he makes the plea for **Change and Adaptation** of our places of worship - in fact he says - 'change or wither'. So how do we face the challenge of **Change** in order for our places of worship to survive? I would welcome any article or contribution describing how a particular church or community has successfully brought about change or adaptation of their church building in order to more creatively use it and widen its appeal in the community.

(Based on some ideas English Heritage Conservation Bulletin Summer 2009 & Roy Strong's article in Herefordshire HCT Annual Report for 2008)



Friends Visits in 2009

During the year The Friends have made 5 visits to churches in Cheshire. These have included churches dating back to the 11th century, up to those built in the middle of the 19th century.

Visits were made to two Grade I listed buildings, St Peter, Prestbury and St John the Baptist, Chester. In all 38 Friends attended these visits with an average attendance on each occasion of 19.

This year we included, in addition to the mid-week visits, at the request of some of the members who work in the week, a Saturday visit. The response was very positive and was highly successful despite the weather (very wet!).

During the year we visited the following Parish Churches:-

St Helen, Tarporley	Grade II Listed
St Peter, Prestbury	Grade I Listed
St Thomas, Stockton Heath	Grade II Listed
St Mary, Sandbach	Grade II* Listed
St John the Baptist, Chester	Grade I Listed



Tarporley



Sandbach

Friends Programme of Visits for 2010

The Friends Visits for 2010 will be announced shortly. Any suggestions for interesting and suitable venues would be most welcome.

We will certainly try to include a Saturday visit in the programme for next year and we also hope to arrange a "Thank you to our Friends" event on a similar basis to the garden party held at the Bishop of Chester's house a few years ago.



Annual Ride & Stride 2009

This year's event was held on **Saturday, 12 September**, another fine day, so numerous churches participated as in previous years and got enormous enjoyment out of their endeavours, whilst helping to support not only their preferred church, but also the Trust.

Now the task is to round up all the promises so, if your church took part, please could you check that the local organizer has sent off their sponsorship collections to the County Coordinator, Graham Clarke (see address on P.4).

Graham has now completed 6 years in this role and wants to hear from anyone who would like to apply for this post and make a major contribution towards saving our heritage. Please get in touch with either Graham or Vincent as soon as possible, because planning for 2010's event starts in January.





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How you can HELP support HCCPT

- (1) Get a Year's FREE membership if you introduce a new FRIEND
- (2) Shop online through our new WEBSHOP @:www.buy.at/cheshirechurches
- (3) Take advantage of a Free Annual Subscription if you switch your Utilities
 Call: 0800 298 5528



Recent Grants - WREN assisted

<u>First & Second Quarters 2009:</u>		£
St John the Evangelist	Alvanley	2,000
Holy Trinity	Mossley, Congleton	8,000
St Mary	Nantwich	7,500
St John	Alvanley	2,000
Brook St Unitarian Chapel	Knutsford	10,000

29,500

<u>Third Quarter 2009:</u>		£
St Michael & All Angels	Runcorn	2,250
St Margaret	Wrenbury	3,000
St John	Over	4,000
All Saints	Saughall	2,750
St Mary	Lymm	7,000
St Paul	Broughton	2,500
St John	Great Sutton	1,750
Christ's Church	Alsager	10,000

33,250

Fourth Quarter 2009: £

Get Your Applications

In NOW!

Meeting 15 December 2009

Recent Grants - from our Unrestricted Fund

St Peter	Plemstall	1,000
United Reformed Church	Seacombe	2,000

3,000
