

Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

a group within the Heritage Alliance

ANNUAL REVIEW
for Jan – Dec 2022

Distributed to members
Spring 2023

We bring together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings

OUR YEAR

April 2022 saw our first face to face meeting since Covid, when we held our popular all-day Big Update. Here was a test: with the new emphasis on virtual meetings, *would people turn up?*

In the event, it was extremely successful. Numbers were good, there was a buzz in the air, and the speakers were excellent, including a challenging talk from Sir Laurie Magnus, Chair of Historic England. We celebrated meeting each other for the first time since Covid with bubbles and cake. The day was made particularly special by being held in the magnificent interior of St Peter's, Vauxhall.

At the Big Update, we launched a new report, *Sustaining historic*

churches: what does recent research tell us? This was written by Charlotte Dodgeon, and summarises the most important research over the last decade or so across Great Britain. Members received free copies, and the report was widely distributed and well received.

During 2022 we also trialled our Members Brief Briefings by Zoom, each meeting lasting no more than an hour. These worked well, and in future we will be holding three every year. As part of one of these we interviewed the new Chair of the National Churches Trust. It is astonishing how Zoom can bring people together over a distance, and we intend to make the most of that in future Brief Briefings.

In September there was a face-to-face afternoon Members Briefing, at St Cyprian's Clarence Gate, a masterpiece of the church architect Sir Ninian Comper. This too was very successful, and we now plan to run two face-to-face Members Briefings in the afternoon per year. To make travel worthwhile, we have enriched the content of these afternoon Briefings, and will hold each one in an interesting church.

Our monthly e-newsletter has continued without a break. Each month it is sent to about 1,800 people; we are grateful to Luke Hughes & Company Ltd for their continued sponsorship of the newsletter during the year. Compared with, say, fifteen years ago, it is a constant surprise how much is going on to help sustain our historic religious buildings.

During the year we sent our readership a series of surveys, helping shape the response of various agencies to such issues as the energy crisis, and post-Covid rebuilding. Our readers responded well, and we were able to provide up to date information from the coal face. In addition, we encouraged people to respond to the Heritage Fund's consultation on its strategy, and we also provided a carefully argued response summarising the views of our subscribing members.

During the year we asked our newsletter readers whether Local





Councils in England and Wales were pulling back from funding church property on the grounds they have been advised it is illegal. We received an excellent response, which confirmed that the current muddle in the law is a serious problem. We summarised the evidence in a report sent to the Government.

Subsequently we have worked with the Church of England and other subscribing members to push for clarification of the law via an amendment to the 1894 Local Government Act. At the time of writing (March 2023) we hope that the problem will be solved by an amendment to a Bill passing through the House of Lords. If so, this will be a major step forward on an issue the HRBA has been concerned about for a number of years.

We have continued to work in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York on a project to discover what information places of worship need to sustain their buildings, and maximise their potential. This has now moved on to specify the best way of providing this

information, and find an organisation able to support this service over the longer term.

We are also supporting a project run by the Plunkett Foundation, looking at community businesses in places of worship.

During the year we continued to liaise with what is now the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (for VAT recovery) across the UK. Amongst other things, we advised on some of the features of the new website, due to be launched in Spring 2023.

Our members are vital to all HRBA's work, keeping those of us involved in its day to day activities in touch with what is happening across the country, guiding our thinking, and giving us credibility when we speak to other bodies. We hope too that our members feel that by sharing their experiences and knowledge, they are part of a wider movement to ensure a secure future for historic religious buildings across the UK.

CORPORATE MEMBERS in 2022

Arthur Rank Centre
 Association of English Cathedrals
 ATS Heritage
 Baptist Union
 Benefact Trust
 Berkshire Historic Churches Trust
 Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust
 Cathedral Communications Ltd
 Catholic Church in England and Wales
 Central Council of Church Bellringers
 Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture
 Church Commissioners, Pastoral and Closed Churches
 Church in Wales (Property Services Department)
 Church of England, Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division
 Church of Scotland (General Trustees)
 Church Recording Society
 Churches Conservation Trust
 Churches Trust for Cumbria
 Churches Trusts Forum
 Churches Visitors and Tourism Association
 CLAS (Churches' Legislation Advisory Service)
 Devon Historic Churches Trust
 Diocese of Ely
 Diocese of Hereford
 Diocese of Lichfield
 Diocese of London
 Diocese of Norwich
 Diocese of St Albans
 Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association
 Ecclesiastical Insurance Group
 Ecclesiological Society
 Foundation for Jewish Heritage
 Friends of Friendless Churches
 Historic Churches Scotland
 Jewish Heritage UK
 Maintain our Heritage
 Methodist Church Connexional Team
 National Churches Trust
 Norfolk Churches Trust
 Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust
 Norwich Historic Churches Trust
 Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust
 Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust
 Pugin Society
 Purcell
 Scotland's Churches Trust
 Somerset Churches Trust
 SPAB
 Suffolk Historic Churches Trust
 Twentieth Century Society
 URC (United Reformed Church)
 Victorian Society
 War Memorials Trust
 Yorkshire Synod, URC

HRBA'S ROLE

We bring together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings, regardless of faith group or denomination.

We are the only group doing this across the UK.

Aims

Our aims are:

- To share information and best practice regarding historic religious buildings.
- Where appropriate, to act as a channel for communication with government.
- To act as midwife to projects involving more than one faith group or denomination.

Scope

Our scope is all listed places of worship in GB and NI, of whatever faith group or denomination.

In GB there are approximately 20,000 listed places of worship, of which about 60% belong to the Church of England (CofE). The CofE is supportive of the HRBA and is an active member.

Most other listed places of worship are churches belonging to the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church and the United Reformed Church. The Churches Conservation Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches also look after a substantial number. Other listed places of worship are looked after by other faith groups or smaller Christian denominations, or by dedicated Trusts.

Structure & Governance

HRBA is a self-financing part of the Heritage Alliance, reporting to the Chief Executive, Lizzie Glithero-West and through her to the Trustees.



HRBA HISTORY

The HRBA began life as an informal group meeting from time to time for discussion and update. Its existence was formalised in 2008/9 when it became part of what is now known as the Heritage Alliance.

At that time it started a quarterly newsletter to a small number of recipients.

Further changes came in 2011 when it set up a formal membership scheme for organisations and began a free monthly e-newsletter available to all.

Further structural change came in 2012 when individual membership was made available. Since then it has developed and expanded its activities in various ways.

ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

Free monthly e-newsletter and

Roving Reporter: The newsletter provides an important service to those engaged with historic religious buildings; sponsored by Luke Hughes & Co., it is now sent to about 1800 recipients.

Social media: Our Twitter account alerts people to a very wide range of news.

Ad hoc briefings etc: On an ad hoc basis we produce briefings and publications and circulate our members with updates on emerging topics.

Partnership projects: We partner with other organisations on specific projects, providing seedcorn funding, access to people, publicity, and our expertise.

Members Briefings and Brief

Briefings: We regularly organise meetings for members, with speakers, both by Zoom and face to face. These bring people up to date and encourage sharing of best practice.

Big Update: Once a year we organise an all-day meeting, the Big Update, with a range of speakers, that is open to members and non-members.

Consultations: We respond from time to time to government initiatives where appropriate. We are members of the LPWGS stakeholders' group.



VOLUNTEERS

HRBA is run entirely by volunteers, some regular, some intermittent – ten of us at the moment, plus Trevor Cooper as Chair.

Keri Dearmer, joint newsletter editor

Charlotte Dodgeon, policy

Janice Gooch, social media

Lucy Jacob, joint newsletter editor

Johanna Louw, marketing

Donna McDonald, membership

Susan Miller, *Roving Reporter*

Becky Payne, development and operations

Eleanor Scott, one-off projects

Katherine Wallis, copy editing

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations were kindly provided by our member, the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The illustrations focus on recent repair and conservation work carried out under Historic England's Grants for Programmes of Major Works (part of the Government's Culture Recovery Fund).

Page 1: St Mary, Great Yarmouth, in 2023, with the north nave roof structure revealed prior to reslating

Page 2: The parish priest of St Walbuge, Preston, on the scaffolding during roof and stonework repairs in 2022

Page 3: A steeple-jack at work on the tower at St Mary Magdalene, Tavistock, in 2022

Page 4: Stained glass from the large east window of Shrewsbury Cathedral undergoing repair in a conservation workshop

COSTS

As we are run entirely by volunteers, there are no employment costs. Subscriptions help to pay for travel expenses, general running costs, special projects, and accommodation and infrastructure services (kindly provided by The Heritage Alliance).

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

HRBA, The Heritage Alliance, St Martin's Church,
40 Ludgate Hill, London, EC4M 7DE.

Email: hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk

Twitter: [@hrballiance](https://twitter.com/hrballiance) Web: hrballiance.org.uk