

Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

a group within the Heritage Alliance

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

LOOKING BACK TO 2023

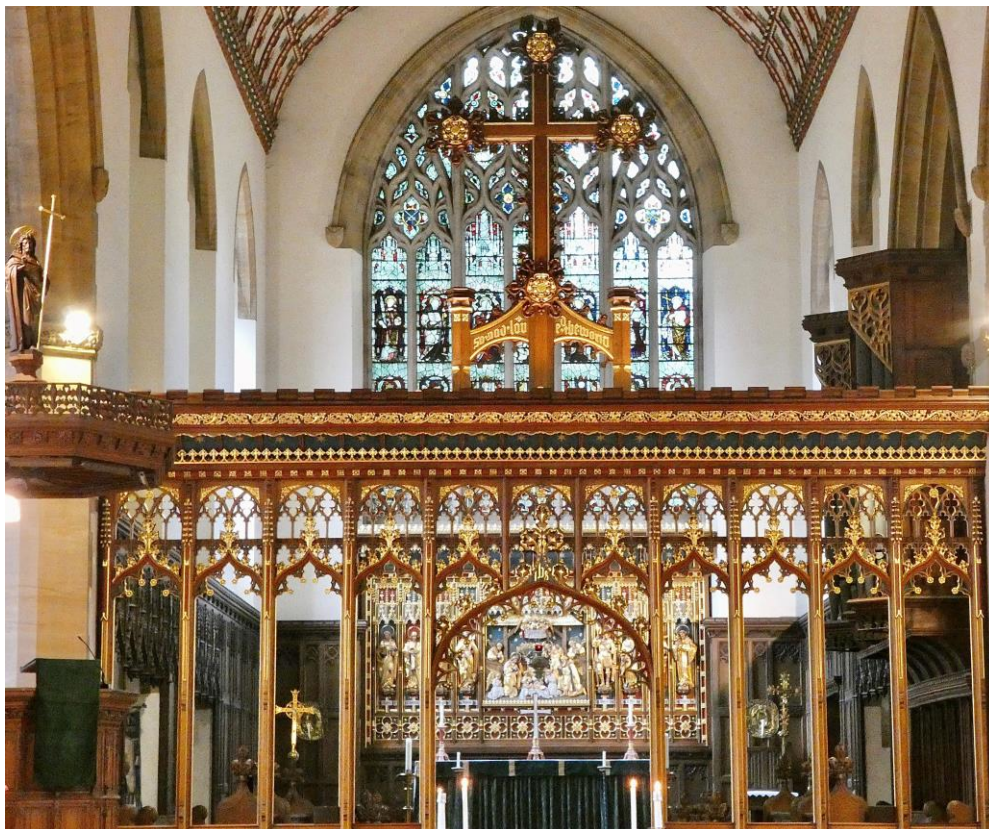
Every year has an abiding memory, and for HRBA in 2023 it was the effort to persuade an initially sceptical government that it should introduce an amendment to the Levelling Up Bill.

We wanted this to clarify a Victorian Act of Parliament which was being interpreted more and more widely as forbidding parish councils from giving grants to 'ecclesiastical property' for community use. So, for example, parish councils were cancelling long-standing grants to maintain churchyards.

A good many organisations and individuals were working front of house or behind the scenes to persuade the government to put forward the amendment, and we're delighted it was eventually introduced and is now law.

HRBA put a lot of effort into gathering evidence. As part of this, we asked the readers of our monthly newsletter for information and examples. This produced some very telling material which was incorporated into our briefing papers, to great effect. We also provided a regularly updated central source of information on our website.

We saw the power of the network again later in the year. Along with the Church of England we are members of the Stakeholder Group for the government's Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (for VAT recovery) across the UK. Towards the end of the year, we prepared for the January 2024 meeting by again asking our newsletter readers for their experiences. Some very rich material emerged, which we incorporated into various background papers for the meeting: there is nothing quite like a real life story to make an issue come to life.



Our monthly e-newsletter is, of course, free, and each month it is sent to about 1,800 people. After more than a decade, Luke Hughes & Company Ltd have decided not to renew their sponsorship of the newsletter, but remain supportive of HRBA and what it is trying to achieve. We are extremely grateful for their long-term support, which began when we were hardly out of nappies – a real act of faith in our future.

During 2023 we attempted the first full year of a new pattern of meetings for our subscribing members – we have more than fifty corporate members (listed below) and a number of personal members.

As part of this, as planned, we held three one hour Brief Briefings by Zoom. Two of the meetings had speakers followed by discussion, and for the last – a successful innovation – we held a Christmas Miscellany where seven members reflected on the year and described one aim their organisation had for 2024.

But we're here not only to communicate information, but also to encourage personal networking and trust, and the stimulation which comes from unplanned interactions during the course of meetings and discussion.

So we also planned two face to face full-afternoon Briefings, with a number of speakers and informal discussion, enriched both by cake and by meeting in a historic church building. Alas, the train strikes put paid to one of these, which had to migrate to Zoom.

The second Briefing went ahead in the church of St Martin's, Ludgate Hill, an atmospheric Wren interior, above which are

the offices of The Heritage Alliance, our parent organisation, where we have a desk. The value of in person meetings in a relaxed environment was shown when a presentation scheduled for 20 minutes developed into a vigorous and productive discussion lasting nearly an hour.

Our annual Big Update is a different type of event, open to everyone, packed with different sessions, buzzy and fun. The 2023 event held in the splendidly refurbished St John's Waterloo, was as successful as ever: the day cracked along. We used the event to launch our latest publication, research into church volunteering by Holly Isted, which has some challenging results.

We also engaged in two major projects during the year. In one, we continued to work in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York on a project to identify what information places of worship need to sustain their buildings and maximise their potential.

We also supported an initiative run by the Plunkett Foundation to encourage the use of active places of worship to be premises for community businesses. The resources and access to Plunkett advisers are available on that organisation's website.

It should be clear that our network, and particularly our members, are vital to all HRBA's work. They keep us in touch with what is happening, guide our thinking, and give us credibility when we speak to other bodies. By sharing our knowledge and experience, we can all be part of a wider movement to ensure a secure future for historic religious buildings across the UK.

CORPORATE MEMBERS (2023)

Arthur Rank Centre
 Association of English Cathedrals
 ATS Heritage
 Baptist Union
 Benefact Trust
 Berkshire Historic Churches Trust
 Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust
 Cathedral Architects Association
 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 Department
 Church of Scotland (General Trustees)
 Church Recording Society
 Churches Conservation Trust
 Churches Trust for Cumbria
 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
 Pipe up for Pipe Organs
 Pugin Society
 Purcell
 Scotland's Churches Trust
 Somerset Churches Trust
 SPAB
 Suffolk Historic Churches Trust
 Twentieth Century Society
 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: The newsletter provides an important service to those engaged with historic religious buildings; it is now sent to about 1800 recipients.

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 Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme stakeholders' group.



VOLUNTEERS

HRBA is run by volunteers. Routinely involved in our day to day work are:

Trevor Cooper, Chair

Keri Dearmer, Joint newsletter editor

Charlotte Dodgeon, Events

Lucy Jacob, Joint newsletter editor

Donna McDonald, Membership

Becky Payne, Development and operations

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, accommodation and infrastructure services (kindly provided by The Heritage Alliance).

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations were kindly provided by our members.

Page 1: St Paul's Church, Wimbledon Parkside, showing the reredos (1908) and screen (1896) by Kempe. These beautiful fittings were restored in 2023 at a cost of £82,000, by public appeal, legacies and a grant from the Kempe Trust.

Page 3: Shrewsbury Cathedral (Catholic), opened 1856, initially designed by A. W. Pugin, and executed by his son, Edward Welby Pugin. The sanctuary was reordered in the 1980s (left picture), but has recently been restored near to its original state (right). This is a good example of the kind of restoration that a number of historic Catholic churches are contemplating – undoing the damage done in the 1970s and 1980s when much good Victorian work was destroyed in the wake of Vatican II.

Photos: James Crowley / Alex Ramsay.

Page 4: Glaisdale Head Methodist Church, North Yorkshire, with attached manse. Built in 1821, extended in 1850. Grade II listed. The small congregation engages with its local community, and is now working towards a schedule of roof repairs to remove their building from the Heritage at Risk Register.

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