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[BY EMAIL](#)

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Dear Robert

Thank you very much indeed for inviting me along to the meeting last week. I have filled in the questionnaire on behalf of the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. However I have to say that I found the questionnaire slightly worrying in that there were only boxes for comments alongside the negative perceptions of Historic England. I worry that overall this will skew the outcome towards an undeserved negative perception.

As I mentioned during our meeting, from the perspective of the Catholic built heritage in England, and the religious buildings sector more broadly, we find Historic England to be extremely supportive and this is in spite of the very severe funding cuts they have had to face in recent years. As an organisation, Historic England understands the enormous challenges facing many Christian denominations in relation to heritage protection. The establishment of their "Inspired!" Campaign for places of worship some years ago and the introduction of funding for Support Officers to help build capacity within the sector illustrated this and has made a huge difference. A full time post of Historic Churches Advisor was created at the Catholic Bishops' Conference under this programme and has been sustained as a post after the three year tapering funded ended. Before that there was no such post and no one in a paid capacity at the Bishops' Conference with responsibility for advising on heritage matters.

The Taking Stock programme, a joint project between Historic England and individual Catholic dioceses has also been extraordinarily successful. It has been known for some time that Catholic churches are under represented in the Statutory Lists of listed buildings. There are a range of reasons for this: Catholic churches tend not to be in such central locations in the way that Anglican ones are; they are nearly all either Victorian or C20th in date and far less has been written about them than about Anglican churches of a similar period. They have been under appreciated for years. The research programme, which is now very nearly complete, has been jointly funded by Historic England and individual dioceses and it has assessed the architectural and historic importance of all Catholic public places of worship. These means that dioceses now have available to them up to date and authoritative information on all of their churches which they can use for forward planning so that heritage issues can be factored into important issues such as pastoral review. Many churches have since been upgraded or listed and this has been welcomed. In Salford Diocese, for example, a large scale pastoral review has been under taken which is seeing the closure of a number of churches (due to declining congregations in places, too many churches in this largely urban area and population shift). Because of Taking Stock, no listed churches have been scheduled for closure.

I should add that all the historical and architectural information generated by Taking Stock has been made publicly available by the Patrimony Committee on the Bishops' Conference website ([www.taking-stock.org](http://www.taking-stock.org)). This is now a really important resource for anyone to use.

Historic England also published the first book in colour about the history and architecture of Catholic churches, *A Glimpse of Heaven*, by Christopher Martin (2006). This has sold remarkably well and has been reprinted several times. This book ties in with Historic England's book on historic synagogues (published around the same time as *Glimpse*) and the more recent publications (last year) on historic nonconformist chapels and on mosques.

As we said at the meeting, the establishment of the Places of Worship Forum (POWF) was another innovation which has proved extremely valuable over the years. The fact that Historic England's current Chair, Laurie Magnus, is a member of POWF and attends meetings regularly illustrates well that Historic England appreciates the importance and contribution religious buildings make to the heritage of this country. We are well served too by the small but dedicated- and highly efficient - team of HE officers who deal with places of worship issues and policy. We are delighted that Historic England has embarked (with funding from government) on the two Pilot programmes being conducted in Manchester and in Suffolk to explore the recommendations of the Taylor Review and we look forward to its findings with interest.

What is so sadly lacking at the moment is any proper funding for the repair of historic churches, particularly churches at risk. Time was when Historic England (then English Heritage) could help churches in need of urgent, unforeseen repairs. The initial grants to the Grade I St Augustine's, Ramsgate (AWN Pugin's great church next to his house, The Grange) to stop the dry rot spreading in the roof enabled the Archdiocese of Southwark (which had then just been handed the building by the monastic order than had formerly been responsible for it) to buy time to put together a local team that could then apply successfully for a HLF Heritage Grant. If the rot had not been addressed it is doubtful whether the Archdiocese would have felt it could take the project on. GPOW saved another important church on the tip of the Wirral, a major landmark overlooking Liverpool (known as the Dome of Home). This was under threat of demolition. Since GPOW closed in 2017 there is no such funding any more and funding for urgent repairs is not available.

The Catholic Church currently has three churches in inner city Preston in need of urgent help. One is St Walburge's, a major Grade I landmark, where dry rot broke out late last year. Another is the church of St Ignatius, Preston, which was taken on by the Syro Malabar Catholics from Southern India only a few years ago. This is a grade II\* church where the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins was a curate. This church is suffering from a major outbreak of dry rot but NHLF is not interested in helping as fabric repairs are no longer a priority for them. The Syro Malabar community, many of whom are first generation immigrants to this country, lack the capacity to provide the kind of wider engagement the NHLF require under their new grant requirements and as a result this magnificent church is simply getting in worse and worse condition. This is exactly the kind of situation (as at St Augustine's Ramsgate) where in the past Historic England was able to provide essential catalyst support to stop the rot and help support getting a repair package together. Churches are such important buildings when it comes to place making and in disadvantaged places like inner city Preston it is jewels like St Walburge's and St Ignatius and the people responsible for them that desperately need help and support. With such support these buildings could readily become beacons of regeneration. These churches, as is the case with many Catholic churches these days, have

increasingly diverse congregations. Were Historic England to have the funds to support them, it would enable HE to promote just the kind of diversity and inclusivity in heritage that government is looking for and in places where there is real need.

So we consider there is a very important role for Historic England in supporting repairs to places of worship through grants. It is worth mentioning in this context that Catholic churches are sacred spaces and cannot be used for the kinds of alternative secular community that are currently being promoted by the CoE. This currently makes it doubly challenging for historic Catholic churches to access funding for urgent repairs.

Supporting the heritage through research is also important as the Taking Stock initiative has demonstrably shown; and supporting the heritage through capacity building is also a hugely valuable initiative.

The problem with Historic England's current KPIs is that they are not able to reflect the range of important work that Historic England does and which is often very hard to quantify. Protection of the country's heritage is complex and challenging but it is enormously important. Given the very tough financial settlement that Historic England currently operates under, we take the view that the organisation is well led by able and committed people who understand the issues. It is shame that the Tailored Review Questionnaire gave no space for those who feel that Historic England does a good job in often difficult circumstances to explain why they believe this to be the case.

Regards

Sophie

Sophie Andreae

Vice Chair

Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales