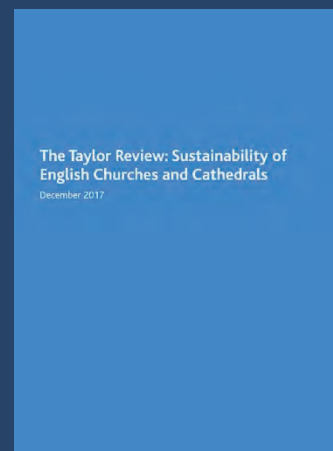
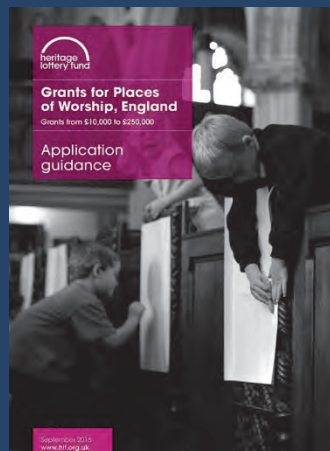
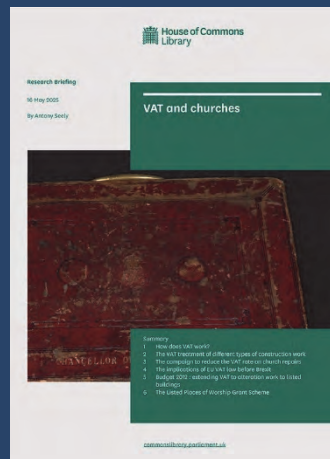
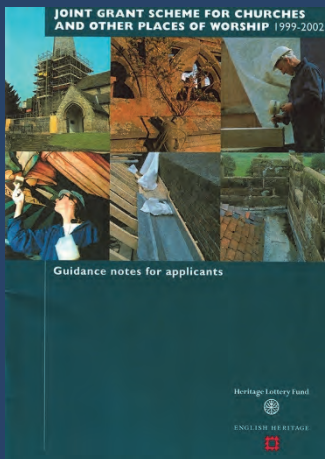
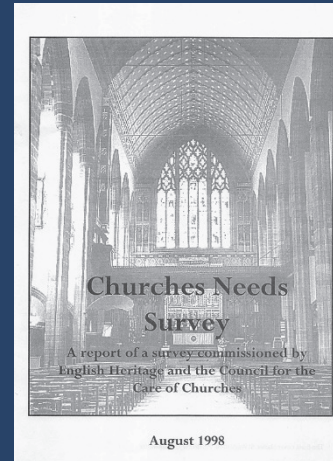
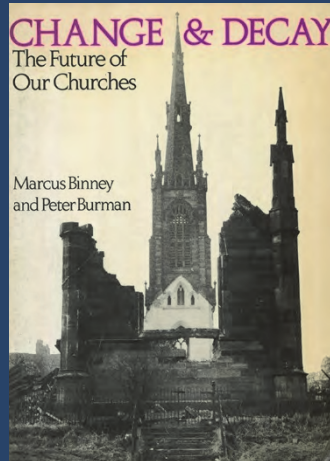
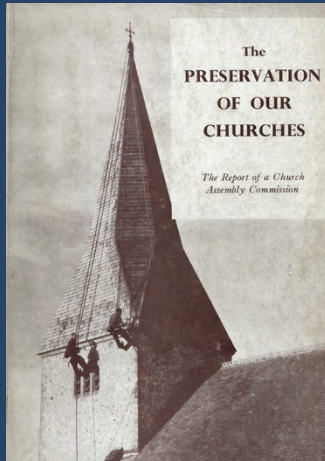


Public funding of historic places of worship in England: a history of targeted grant schemes

Richard Halsey



The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance
2025

Public funding of historic places of worship in England: a history of targeted grant schemes

Richard Halsey

© Copyright 2025 The author and the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance
Version 1.0: 4 June 2025.
Version 1.1: 12 June 2025, with update to table on page 4, and minor
typographical corrections.

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) is an independently-funded part of The Heritage Alliance. The Heritage Alliance is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 4577804 and a registered charity no. 1094793.

tel: 07718 155541
email: hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk
www.hrballiance.org.uk

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

Copies of this publication are freely available to download from the HRBA website. For a printed copy, or for further information about the work of the HRBA, please make contact using the details above.

Views expressed in the publications of the HRBA are those of the author, not of the HRBA or The Heritage Alliance, nor any individual or body associated with them.

The front cover shows some documents associated with targeted public funding of places of worship. Most are available for download on HRBA's website, under 'repository': <https://www.hrballiance.org.uk>

*Top row, left to right. Church Assembly of the Church of England, *The preservation of our churches* (1952); Marcus Binney and Peter Burman, *Change and decay: the future of our churches* (1977); English Heritage and Council for the Care of Churches, *Churches needs survey* (for 1994/5, published 1998)*

*Middle row, left to right: Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, *Guidance notes for Joint Grant Scheme for churches and other places of worship 1999–2002*; House of Commons Library, *Vat and churches* (edition of May 2025); Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, *Guidance Notes for Repair Grants for Places of Worship in England 2002 to 2005**

*Bottom row, left to right: Department for Culture Media and Sport and National Heritage Memorial Fund, *Application guidance for listed places of worship Roof Repair Fund* (2015); Heritage Lottery Fund, *Application guidance for Grants for Places of Worship, England* (2016); DCMS, *The Taylor Review: sustainability of English churches and cathedrals* (2017)*

Contents

1951–1977: The road to public funding	1
1977–1983: Early grants for churches	4
Impacts of the early grants	7
1984–1996: Grants from English Heritage	9
1996–2003: The Joint Schemes	11
2002–2013: The Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme	14
2013–2017: The Grants for Places of Worship Scheme	16
Recent developments	17
Looking back, looking forward	19

Appendices

Appendix 1: Lessons for any future support for major repairs	22
Appendix 2 : Background documents available on HRBA website	24

Table

Public funding of places of worship in England through targeted programmes	4
--	---

Richard Halsey is an architectural historian specialising in English twelfth-century architecture. He started working professionally with parish churches at a national level in 1978 with the first government grant scheme and continued to do so until retiring from English Heritage in 2007. He also ran the Cathedral Repair Grants scheme and has been a member of four cathedral Fabric Advisory Committees. Since 2007 he has been a Trustee of the Friends of Friendless Churches and chaired Ely Diocesan Advisory Committee and the Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust 2009–2016.

Author's note. In 2011 I wrote an article for *Ecclesiology Today* (volume 45), following a talk at the Ecclesiological Society's Annual General Meeting with the title *A beginning not the end for the parish church?* This is an expansion of part of that work, enlarging on the history of grants of public money for repairs to listed places of worship, bringing it up to date with developments since 2011, and offering some thoughts on the lessons that might be learned to help design a future scheme. I am grateful to the Ecclesiological Society for permission to reproduce the earlier material.

By 'public money', I refer to taxpayers' money and funds raised by the National Lottery. I want to emphasise that the scope of this paper is the use of public money set aside for the explicit purpose of preserving and upgrading places of worship, and I pay no attention to other funding streams. I have dealt only with England, where I was closely engaged through my work with the Department of the Environment and English Heritage. It is noteworthy that the first UK-wide grant scheme ring-fenced for major repairs to places of worship was the Grants for Places of Worship Scheme which was introduced as recently as 2013; before that in each country there was from time to time dedicated funding from various sources.

A note on organisations. What was earlier known as the Central Council for the Care of Churches (of the Church of England) later became the Council for the Care of Churches (CCC) and is now the Church Buildings Council. The Church Assembly (of the Church of England) was the forerunner of the General Synod. The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) was formerly the Redundant Churches Fund. The Historic Buildings Council (HBC) for each country had an advisory role to government, later taken over in England by English Heritage (EH), and from 2015 by Historic England (HE). The Historic Churches Preservation Trust (HCPT) is now the National Churches Trust. The present National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was previously known as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Abbreviations

CCC	Council for the Care of Churches (now the Church Buildings Council)
CCCC	Central Council for the Care of Churches (later the CCC)
CCT	Churches Conservation Trust
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport (which sponsors HE)
DoE	Department of the Environment, which used to sponsor the HBC
GPOW	Grants for Places of Worship Scheme (2013–2017)
HBC	Historic Buildings Council, one per country but here used of that for England
HCPT	Historic Churches Preservation Trust (now the National Churches Trust)
EH	English Heritage
HE	Historic England
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund (now the NLHF)
NHMF	National Heritage Memorial Fund
NLHF	National Lottery Heritage Fund
QI(R)	Quinquennial Inspection (Report)
RGPoW	Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme (2002–2013)
SPAB	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

Public funding of historic places of worship in England: a history of targeted grant schemes

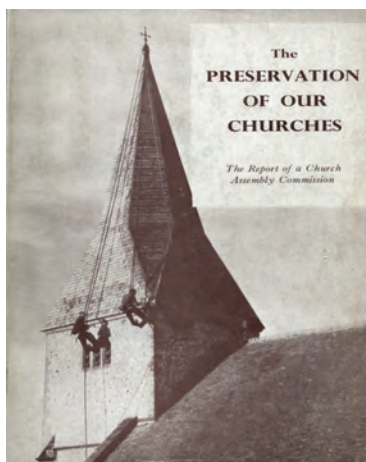
Richard Halsey

1951–1977: The road to public funding

THE URGENCY AND EXTENT of the problem of repairs to parochial churches must not be allowed to obscure the fact that in the last 30 years, the Church has carried through a vast amount of repairs in sounder and on more conservative lines than ever before and that the total of such work is a solid achievement. The primary cause of the present state of disrepair is the enforced postponement of repairs . . . from 1939 onwards.

Not the words from a recent speech, but to be found in the 1952 publication *The Preservation of our Churches*, a report on church repairs commissioned by the Church Assembly of the Church of England the previous year. Based on detailed returns from archdeacons, the Commission estimated that a total of £4 million ‘extra parochial cost’ was needed over the next ten years and that once in good repair, an annual expenditure of £750,000 was required. Any money from the State should be like Arts Council grants, ‘unconditional’ and new county trusts were considered ‘suitable for attracting those who are not habitual churchgoers but are well disposed toward the cause of church fabric’.

This followed the 1950 Gowers Report on ‘Houses of Outstanding Historic and Architectural Interest’ in England, triggered by the large number of derelict buildings after war-time use. It recommended tax payers money should be given for essential repairs to ‘outstanding’ historic buildings and in 1953, the Historic Buildings Council for England (HBC) was set up to advise ministers on the first historic building grants. However, the Church of England declined to become involved, fearing State control over their buildings (especially at local authority level) affecting their freedom of worship. In their minds was the 1913 Ancient Monuments Bill which had proposed scheduling all mediaeval churches and cathedrals as ancient monuments. The lawyers were also concerned for the legal (and financial) consequences for parishes in accepting any grant conditions if their breach required the money to be returned.



1952: *The Preservation of our Churches*, a report which estimated that £4 million of ‘extra parochial cost’ was needed over the next ten years by Church of England churches.

Public funding of places of worship in England through targeted programmes (£m, money of the time)

Scheme	Years	Scope of funding	Funding body	Administrator	Total £m over period (England)
MULTI-YEAR SCHEMES					
Church grants ('State aid for places of worship in use')	1977–1983	Repairs to outstanding places of worship	Government	DoE advised by HBC	8
Church grants	1984–1997	Repairs to outstanding places of worship including some contents	EH	EH	105
Joint Places of Worship Scheme	1997–2003	Repairs to places of worship, including some contents; new facilities	EH and HLF	EH	111
Repair Grants for Places of Worship	2002–2013	Repairs to places of worship	EH and HLF; latterly HLF alone	EH	254
Grants for Places of Worship*	2013–2017	Repairs to places of worship including opportunity to fund new facilities/staff/activities. Technical advice from HE.	HLF	HLF	116
Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme*	2001–	VAT incurred in repairs and maintenance and (later) alterations of places of worship. Includes cathedrals (though many are VAT registered, and can reclaim input VAT in the normal way) and closed places of worship managed by trusts. For situation from April 2025, see text.	Government	DCMS (using contractors)	350** (UK-wide)
ONE-OFF SCHEMES					
LPOW Roof Repair Fund	2015–2016	Repairs to roofs and rainwater disposal systems (excluding cathedrals)	Government	NHMF	55
Heritage Stimulus Fund	2021–2022	Urgent repairs and maintenance (in response to the Covid-19 pandemic)	Government	EH	38***

* Apply/ied across UK.

**'Nearly £350m . . . to date' (DCMS press release, 22 January 2025).

***Total of £37.78m (pers. comm., Historic England, 5 June 2025).

Scope

The table only includes programmes targeted at buildings etc, not more general grant programmes. It shows expenditure in money of the time (that is, has not been corrected for inflation). It is limited to 'public money', i.e. monies provided directly by the Government or its agencies, or from the National Lottery (the NLHF describes itself as dealing with public money). It does not include annual core funding of the Churches Conservation Trust, which cares for churches no longer in routine use for worship. Except where stated, it excludes cathedrals. Not included is the NLHF's Covid-related Heritage Emergency Fund, some of which was distributed to places of worship.

Sources

The table is adapted from that in *The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals* (DCMS, 2017), p. 25. Other sources are shown in the table.

Relationship to the text of this publication

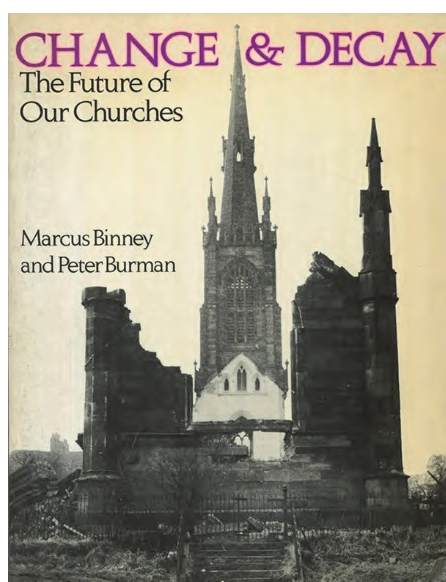
Much of this table is based on one in an earlier document. It has been corrected, but may still not agree in every detail with the text of this publication.

The problem didn't go away of course, though the 1968 Pastoral Measure brought some relief as dioceses were now able to shed their worst (and sometimes, their most lucratively sited) buildings. More positively, repairs to religious buildings no longer in use for worship could be grant-aided by the HBC and churches like St George in Great Yarmouth (theatre use) and Holy Trinity in Richmond, Yorkshire (museum) were supported as they were repurposed.

In 1971 the General Synod created a Working Party on State Aid, chaired by David Say, Bishop of Rochester, to examine the possibilities for state aid for 'places of worship in use' as it embraced those denominations represented by the Churches Main Committee. The Government wanted facts and archdeaconries in Lincoln and Norwich diocese were examined in a survey of needs run by Peter Burman at the Council for the Care of Churches (CCC) of the Church of England. The Conservative minister, Lord Sandford then asked that it be extended to include urban areas, so Newcastle and Cheltenham were also investigated. The result of this 'Needs Survey' was that '£1m at 1973 prices' was considered the annual 'additional resource' needed to repair historic churches in England and Wales.

In January 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, the Labour minister John Silkin 'accepted in principle the case for some measure of State aid for historic churches and other ecclesiastical buildings in use', but not cathedrals, subject to agreement being reached on 'conditions, methods of repair and other matters'. Aid was 'not expected to exceed £1 million at 1973 prices'. However, 'in the present economic circumstances' no specific date for the start of a scheme could be given. Vivien Lipman, the distinguished historian and Director of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings at the Department of the Environment (DoE) personally chaired a group of his officers, the General Synod's Working Party and the Churches Main Committee to work out the detail. His interest and determination were vital in bringing Church and State together.

An exhibition called *Change and Decay: the Future of our Churches*, organised by Marcus Binney and Peter Burman, was held at the V&A from July 1977, on the problems faced by churches of all denominations. It attracted 20,000 visitors. Although this was not as many as its 1974 predecessor, *The Destruction of the Country House, 1875–1975*, and certainly not a large number in comparison with the overlapping and hugely popular Fabergé exhibition, Sir Roy Strong (director of the V&A) commented some years later that it was 'instrumental in Government at last coming through with grants . . . a major achievement'.



1977: *Change and Decay: the Future of our Churches*, a book published to accompany the exhibition of the same name at the V&A. The exhibition drew attention to the problems faced by churches.

1977–1983: Early grants for churches

It was on 4 August 1977 that Peter Shore, Labour Secretary of State for the Environment, announced the start of a five-year trial scheme as a small element in a package of works designed to stimulate the building industry. The sum of £350,000 was immediately available, with £750,000 for 1978–9 and £2 million the following year. This applied only to buildings in England: in the other home countries, there were some grants for churches and chapels, but no scheme or ring-fenced budgets.

In fact, in the remaining eight months of 1977–8, 450 applications were received, 65 offers made and just over £312,000 paid out. It was always said that on 5 August, someone from Long Melford (Suffolk) turned up at the office in Savile Row for an application form and that Long Melford got the first grant. Another early recipient, Chesterfield (Derbyshire) was chosen for the front cover of the 1977/78 HBC England report and all its illustrations were of churches (including Long Melford) despite that year's grants including Exeter Synagogue and three chapels.

There were three main criteria:

- the place of worship had to be of 'outstanding architectural and/or historic interest' as required by section 3A of the 1953 Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act;
- the fabric works urgent; and
- the financial need proven

As the 1968 Listing Resurvey (published in green covers, hence 'greenbacks') had barely covered more than major towns and cities, the new Churches sub-Committee of the HBC determined 'outstandingness' on the basis of submitted photographs and a report from an Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. First chaired by the architect John Brandon-Jones, the Committee included church historian the Very Revd Robert Milburn, Master of the Temple (who had an almost photographic memory for even the most obscure country churches) and the Duke of Grafton, chairman of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). The required standard was determined as 'mid-way in grade II*' and given that some meetings had to judge over 100 buildings, this precise point could wander. The then new ABC grading of ecclesiastical buildings was found particularly unreliable for making this judgement, as it had little relationship to the normal listing grades. The ABC system, subsequently abandoned in England and Wales, had been introduced for churches because the standard listing criteria were based on assessing residential structures, and thus placed great weight on medieval fabric. The consequent grade I and II* listing of numerous essentially medieval churches was then thought to unbalance the lists.

The works were determined by a visit from a commissioned architect, that is someone in private practice overseen by the principal in-house Department of the Environment architect – for many years Miss Stella Eley, a URC lay reader.

Grants were initially offered at 50%, 'pound for pound' as the national Historic Churches Preservation Trust (HCPT) liked to say. But demand rapidly outstripped supply. The author joined Richard Gem as the second churches inspector at the Department in Spring 1978, and found huge piles of applications awaiting attention. No less than 367 of the 1977/8 applications were carried forward to 1978/9, to join the 625 new applications received in that year. With another 746 arriving in 1979–80, the scheme was suspended in November 1980. Repairs were graded into two lists of urgency. The A list was worked through but the B list only used to help forecast future financial and staffing needs until the A list had been exhausted.

Reference Number HB/CG1

HISTORIC BUILDINGS COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND
25 Savile Row, London, W1X 2BT
01-734 6010 Ext. 405/700
STATE AID FOR HISTORIC CHURCHES IN USE
APPLICATION FOR A GRANT
FORM FOR CHURCH OF ENGLAND CHURCHES 1977/78

If you wish to apply for a grant for work to be carried out in the year ending 31 March, 1978, please complete the form and return it to your archdeacon, who will forward it to the Historic Buildings Council. The form must be accompanied by a copy of:

- (i) the latest Quinquennial Inspection Report, and
- (ii) the parish architect's drawings and costed specification;
and by clear unmounted photographs to show the exterior of the church as a whole and the principal interior features.
Close-ups of damaged portions are not required, but booklets or brochures may be helpful.

Grants are not made if the parish is able to meet the whole cost of repair from its own resources or if any work of alteration, repair or conversion is carried out without prior approval by the Department of the Environment. No grants can be made retrospectively for works already carried out.

This form should normally be completed by the incumbent or priest-in-charge. If, however, the parish is without an incumbent or priest-in-charge it should be completed by one of the churchwardens or by the secretary to the parochial church council.

1977: Conditions attached to the application form for the 1977 grant scheme. The form was issued by the Historic Buildings Council for England. It has been simply reproduced from typewritten copy, a reminder that there was little need to promote the scheme, as it was addressed to a limited audience (archdeacons and equivalent). Note that grants were not available if the parish could afford repairs from its own resources. A modified version of the form was used for other denominations.

By December 1981, 1400 grants for £8 million had been offered and £5.6 million spent. On resumption in April 1982, the normal offer was reduced to 40% and priority given to increases needed to complete works already in hand. The scheme was extended to April 1986.

The HBC's 1979/80 report to Parliament drew attention to the fact that the 'need had been underestimated. The legitimate demands for help can be met fully only by a substantial increase in real terms in the funds provided for some years to come'. Part of the problem was that so many more churches were being declared outstanding than had been predicted in 1973. The 1981/82 Report drew attention to the 'tiny proportion' of grants going to non-Anglican buildings, just 17 out of 410 and only one non-Christian. The distribution of Church

of England grants was also unbalanced, with East Anglia consistently awarded more grants than any other region by a long way; in 1981/2 the four counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire had 36% of the offers, but the whole Northern Province just 11%. This is partly explained by the distribution of medieval churches and the then low number of highly-listed nineteenth century churches, but it also reflects the strong local churches trusts in the east (and in Kent) who coaxed and coached parishes to apply.

Applications had to be countersigned by the archdeacon – initially, only they and their equivalents in other denominations and faiths were sent application forms – to confirm that the church would remain in use for the foreseeable future and that the parish was in need of financial help. It was eventually agreed that ‘use’ constituted at least six services a year and ‘the foreseeable future’ at least four years. More difficult was the Treasury requirement for taxpayers’ money to meet a demonstrated need, as most churches had no existing reserves and relied on fund-raising to match any grant. The ‘normal’ 50% initial offer frequently proved to be inadequate and another reason for the hiatus in new offers was the need to make so many increases on that initial 50%. Eventually a ‘needs assessment’ process was devised that used a multiple of annual giving, recent local fund raising success and the deprivation index to suggest an initial percentage. This was very rough and ready and really only useful to ensure churches with reserves made use of them.

In 1981, at the second Archdeacons’ Conference hosted by the General Synod’s Working Party on State Aid, the HBC chairman, Jennifer Jenkins announced the introduction of grants in 1982 for the conservation of monuments and wall paintings. This scheme collaborated with the Council for the Care of Churches’ own conservation grants for almost twelve years, during which time it came to cover stained glass and painted woodwork too. Once identified, parishes had to formally apply to DoE which made a separate offer.

From the five Archdeacons’ conferences, two issues were constantly raised by the Church: the Department’s insistence on using expensive traditional materials; and the control the State had over future alterations through grant conditions, particularly reordering for worship. The latter was partly resolved by the so-called ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ of 1978, a grant condition that ran:

No works of addition, alteration or redecoration or works not eligible for grant aid will be carried out at any time from the date of this letter, except for maintenance and minor repair works and works required for liturgical purposes which are compatible with the historic character and appearance of the building and which are reversible, without the prior written consent of the Department. This is in order that the Department may be satisfied that the works will not damage the fabric and fittings or impair the historic and architectural fabric of the building, for the maintenance of which the grant has been offered.

This recognised that with ecclesiastical exemption from listed building controls there was no legal protection of the State’s investment as there was with secular building grants. The Church of England agreed to review the Faculty Jurisdiction to accommodate grant conditions by setting up a Commission chaired by the Bishop of Chichester. It only reported in 1984 and the subsequent legislation in 1987 finally gave the Department, and from 1984, English Heritage (EH), the right to comment on faculties and appear at a Consistory Court. Of course,

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND MONUMENT COMMISSION
 23 Savile Row, London W1X 2BT
 Telephone: 973 3000

APPLICATION FOR GRANT FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP IN USE
 If you wish to apply for grant please complete the form and return it to this office

Grants may be made towards the cost of repairs provided:

- (1) the building is of outstanding historic or architectural interest;
- (2) it is in regular use for public worship;
- (3) the parish or congregation cannot reasonably be expected to meet the whole of the cost out of their own resources;
- (4) the proposed works are major structural repairs.

Grants are not made:

- (1) retrospectively for works carried out or started before the application has been approved.
- (2) for works of alteration, conversion, addition and improvement (eg, new heating system, insulating, redecoration etc);
- (3) for works of normal maintenance - (eg, cleaning gutters, replacing windows, broken slates or tiles, painting etc);
- (4) unless an assurance is given that proposals for future works (except for maintenance and minor repairs and works required for liturgical purposes which are compatible with the historic character and appearance of the building and are reversible) will be submitted to the Commission for approval before they are carried out. This is in order that the Commission may be satisfied that the works will not damage the fabric and fittings and impair the historic and architectural character of the building, the maintenance of which is the object of grant.
- (5) if the church is likely to be declared redundant under the Pastoral Measure 1968 or if, in the case of denominations other than the Church of England, the building is likely to go out of use as a place of worship.

For completion by Archdeacon:

I confirm that:

- (1) the whole cost of the proposed works of repair cannot be found by the parish;
- (2) the church will remain in regular use for public worship for the foreseeable future.

Please add any other comments you may wish:

.....

.....

Signed Date

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Address

Archdeacon of

.....

1984: Extracts from the application form for a grant in 1984, issued by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission the legal entity created in 1983 which operated under the name 'English Heritage'. The building must be expected to remain in regular use for public worship for the foreseeable future, and, in line with the 'Gentleman's Agreement' of 1978, assurances are required about the nature of future works.

despite this there was no effective financial redress for the Department/EH, as it could never realistically claim the grant back if conditions were not adhered to, though could (and very occasionally did) refuse to accept another application.

Impacts of the early grants

In the early 1980s, the conservation lobby drew attention to two worrying impacts of the scheme, which if anything were aspirations being realised by both the Church and the building industry.

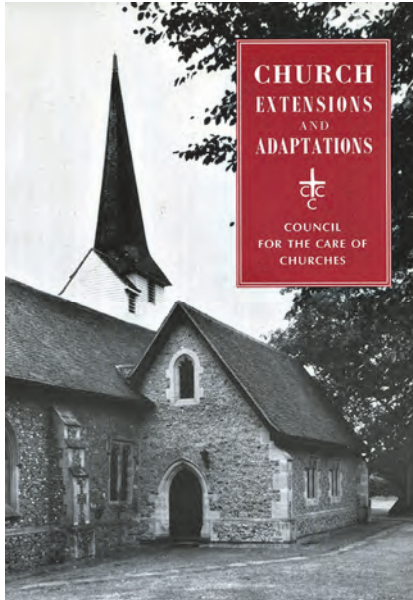
The first worry was *over restoration* and especially excessive stone replacement. Early casualties were the mid-C12th top stage of Iffley church in Oxford and the C14th roof of Great Livermere in Suffolk, the timber of which was apparently completely rotten – though not rotten enough to stop complete trusses being lifted off with a huge mobile crane. SPAB and the Council for British Archaeology led the charge, the latter (quite rightly) bemoaning the lack of properly funded archaeological recording. Some money was diverted specifically to fund record making, but it was a cumbersome process using different legislative powers and there was real difficulty finding people capable of recording buildings, especially at short notice. Parishes complained of delays caused by such grant conditions, conveniently ignoring their own dilatoriness in pursuing QI recommendations for urgent work. Inflation was of course a major issue around the early 1980s (interest rates were at 15%) and costs were rising very rapidly, especially for lead which the Russians were reportedly hoarding for nefarious purposes.

Large scale stonework replacement on big churches like Sherborne Abbey and Bridlington Priory was probably necessary, because little had been done – especially at high level – since before the First World War. It was more questionable with smaller projects, where thorough stone replacement remained the norm. The decline in the stone industry meant that some stones were hard to match – stones like clunch and Reigate sandstone, the ironstones of Northamptonshire and any colour of red sandstone than mottled pink. Much French limestone and German sandstone was imported and some inappropriate stones were used in default of the real thing, clunch often being replaced by oolitic limestone. Pressure from the grant scheme did encourage a few small quarries to expand and even to reopen and some bigger roadstone quarries were persuaded to provide the occasional blocks for building.

It is also clear that the State Aid grant scheme played a big part in encouraging craft and conservation skills. It revitalised many small traditional builders (especially in rural areas) and it promoted professional training for what we now call conservation accredited architects, surveyors and conservators. It did, therefore, achieve the original aims of Government to help the ailing building industry but in these ways incidentally also promoted conservation over restoration.

The second fear expressed could now be seen as the unexpected bonus of the scheme. By removing the fabric threats and relieving the apparently impossible financial burden of fabric repair, congregations could concentrate on their core business of mission and worship. Parishes, pulled together by fund raising for repairs to match the ‘pound for pound’ offer from Government, began to want to use the building more and to improve the context of their worship. Both involved changes and alterations that some found inimical to the qualities for which the State’s money was given. Nave altars began to be introduced, with or without an electric band and early in the 21st century, projectors started to be attached to capitals throwing their images on to drop-down screens usually suspended in the chancel arch. I think it was Gavin Stamp who coined the phrase ‘the rite of coffee’ in his *Piloti* articles in *Private Eye*, but such post-service fellowship is now of course the norm, operating from ‘tea-cupboards’, with toilets often under the tower or in free-standing pods.

Larger social areas were provided throughout the 1980s within new additions, too often inappropriate octagons. The first EH guidance on ‘New Works’ in 1991 highlighted the issues raised by such extensions, as did the CCC’s booklet *Church Extensions and Adaptations* that followed in 1996. But it was Norman St John Stevas and his Royal Fine Art Commission that railed against them and with the SPAB, vowed to stop them. They have succeeded by and



1996: *Church Extensions and Adaptations*. This booklet, issued by the Council for the Care of Churches, discussed the need and design possibilities for appropriate extensions to Church of England churches, arguing against the briefly-fashionable octagonal design.

large, though the ubiquity of today's pew clearance to provide community space inside is not perhaps what they intended.

So accelerated the move away from the sanctity of the worship space championed by the Cambridge Camden Society (and still maintained by the Roman Catholic Church). In 1843, they commanded churchwardens

Take care also to hinder parish meetings from being held in the vestry or in the church itself. The ways in which holy buildings are sometimes profaned by those who never go into them at other times is enough to make the very stones cry out.

With the launch of its *Building Faith in our Future* initiative in 2003, congregations were positively encouraged by the Church of England to engage with their wider 'community' and incorporate all sorts of uses and users to give their repaired historic building extended uses beyond worship.

This only follows one mantra of government guidance issued since the 1970s; historic buildings have to earn their living and they can be adapted to accommodate new functions without losing too much of the intrinsic character and significance that makes them worth keeping in the first place. That former bastion of the use-less, the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), now actively seeks a community use for its closed churches and even the Friends of Friendless Churches (of which I am a trustee) can be more disposed to take on a building if it does have at least a couple of friends willing to engage with it and promote an occasional community event or service.

1984–1996: Grants from English Heritage

By the time English Heritage took over the grant scheme in 1984, over £4 million was being spent per year on repair grants for places of worship, the great majority on Church of England churches. A major boost came in 1990 with a £3 million increase by Government as some recompense (albeit a surprising one) for the Community Charge (Poll tax) now levied on clergy, but applications surged amid raging building industry inflation. Another moratorium on applications came in August 1990 when the 1990/91 offer budget of £9 million was reached.

English#Heritage

APPLICATION FOR A

CHURCH GRANT

Please read the accompanying Notes for Applicants before completing this form

SECTION 1: CHURCH FOR WHICH GRANT IS SOUGHT

1.1 Name/dedication of the church for which grant is sought:

1.2 Full address:

1.3 Name of the Local Planning Authority (District, City or Borough Council):

1.4 Is the church within a National Park or Urban Development Corporation? YES/NO
If yes, please name Park or Corporation:

1.5 Is the church a Listed Building? YES/NO
If yes, please state grade ie I, II*, II (or A, B, C in some lists):

1.6 Is the site of the church or any adjoining structure wholly or partly a Scheduled Ancient Monument? YES/NO
If yes, please give County or National Monument Number:

1.7 Is the church in a Conservation Area? YES/NO
If yes, please give name of Conservation Area:

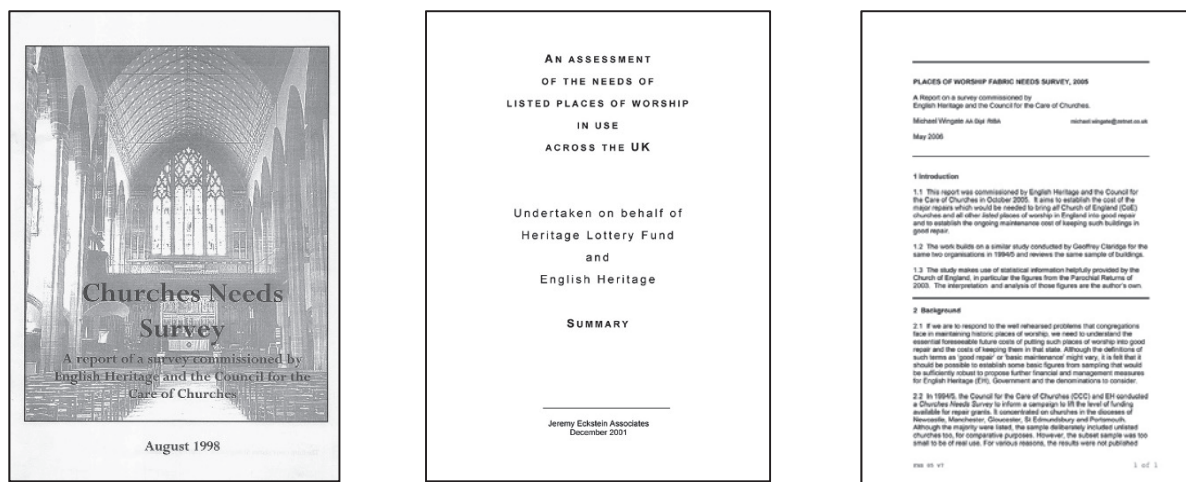
1.8 Is the church within, or adjoining, a park or garden included in the Register of Historic Parks or Gardens? YES/NO
If yes, please give the name of the park or garden, and its grade ie I, II*, II:

If you are uncertain of the answers to any of these questions, your local authority planning department should be able to advise you

1990: First page of the 1990 grant application form, now branded as from English Heritage.

A system was devised to make grant commitments that would become formal offers in the following financial year. This at least gave congregations time to fund raise and book builders before starting work once the offer was received. Predictably perhaps, another halt in offers came in September 1991, partly because the 1991/2 financial year had started with almost £3.5 million of these 'future commitments' becoming offers on 1 April 1991.

On resumption in April 1992, the offer budget had reached £10 million and there was sufficient confidence in the listing system that all grade I and II* places of worship qualified as outstanding and so were considered eligible in principle. Buildings in the ecclesiastical ABC grades still required Churches Committee scrutiny. Offers of over £100,000 would be contained within 10% of the budget, so a maximum of ten per year. It was also decided to



1994/5 (published 1998), 2001, and 2005: Three surveys of repair needs, the first of listed churches in England, the others UK-wide and including other listed places of worship. Funders and others were understandably concerned to assess the cost of bringing listed buildings up to a good state of repair.

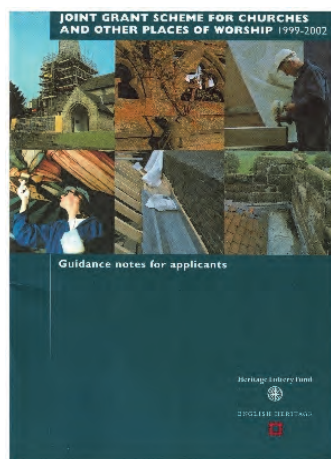
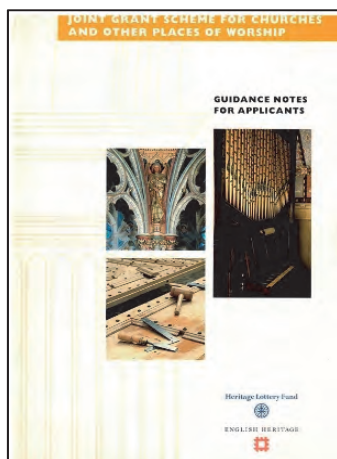
rerun the 1973 Needs Survey to help predict future repair needs, assessing the same churches, but this time including non-Church of England places of worship. (The survey was carried out in 1994/5, though not published until 1998.) Efforts were made to increase the number of applications from Victorian and non-Church of England places of worship, as both categories remained under-represented in the lists and, therefore, grant offers.

1996–2003: The Joint Schemes

In 1994/5, EH offered its largest ever sum for repairs to places of worship; a total of £14.1 million (£29 million at 2025 prices; rather more if building cost inflation is allowed for) was offered to 520 congregations, 86% of applications, which suggests the scheme was finally getting close to meeting legitimate need, but it was not to last as Government budget cuts were coming. More especially, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) opened for business in January 1995 and had received 150 applications from places of worship by September, many for projects already being considered by EH, some even asking HLF to match EH grants.

A key issue was ‘additionality’, namely the requirement that Lottery funding should be additional to public expenditure and not become a substitute. From the start, Government Directions required the Lottery to improve public access to, and enjoyment of, the heritage by the wider community as well as to repair it. All EH had really required was for the church to be regularly open to the public and maintained, neither of which were properly monitored. Defining the overlap between EH and HLF and guiding congregations on what to apply for and from whom became chaotic. HLF Trustees did not want to confine themselves to non-outstanding buildings (so just grade II or unlisted structures) or funding conservation projects in leaking buildings. EH didn’t want essential repairs left unfunded whilst the HLF (generously) funded the conservation of bells and organs, better lighting or ‘new facilities’ (toilets, cafés) that supported the sustainability of the congregation and so the building.

The situation was resolved by the introduction of the Joint Grant Scheme for Churches and other Places of Worship launched in October 1996 with an annual budget of £20 million (£10 million from each organisation). A single application was administered by EH, who also provided all professional advice and identified the appropriate funder(s). EH also reserved a budget for those congregations with a moral objection to receiving money derived from gambling. For a while, the Methodist church was the largest group, but their 1999 Conference



1996 and 1999: Front cover of the application form for different versions of the Joint Scheme, so-called because jointly funded by EH and HLF. Variants of the Joint Scheme ran from 1996 to 2003.

HLF was experienced in marketing grant schemes, and no doubt it influenced the move to a more consumer-friendly cover design.

agreed that individual congregations could apply. EH legal powers were limited to repairs so new facilities could not be assisted. The Minister, Virginia Bottomley had just redefined additionality to allow ‘funding projects where Government funds were insufficient’, which meant HLF could fund buildings of any grade (and none) if EH funding had been exhausted. One sticking point was the lack of officer delegation at HLF, meaning all their offers had to go before their Trustees for endorsement and only HLF lawyers could issue their grant contracts and officers make their payments. Those contracts were queried by church lawyers as being incompatible with the legal status of PCCs, HLF lawyers having rejected the Gentleman’s Agreement arrangement which EH buried in 1998, following resolution of the issues surrounding Ecclesiastical Exemption in 1994.

In parallel with this, HLF continued to fund places of worship which applied through their other grant programmes for repairs to non-outstanding buildings and projects such as new facilities or interpretation, or smaller conservation or repair projects to fittings and furnishings such as monuments and organs. These considerable funds are outside my focus, which is the successive schemes using public money set aside for essential repairs to nationally important places of worship.

As regards Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, although HLF liaised with the relevant government heritage departments in these countries, these bodies did not always offer grants for churches. There was never any joint scheme in these countries, or indeed, any HLF grant scheme in these countries specifically for places of worship until the GPOW scheme, discussed later, which operated across the UK.

By far the biggest problem with the Joint Scheme was the quantity of applications, of which 400–500 a year were expected. By December 1997 over 1000 had arrived requesting help towards project costs of at least £170 million, sixty of them for project costs of more than £500,000. New criteria were devised concentrating effort on works ‘urgently necessary in the next two years’ and giving new facilities a ‘low priority’, but the damage was done. By April 1998 offers for £15.19 million had been made (EH £6.37 million, HLF £8.82 million) but over 800 applications remained unresolved.

The Joint Scheme was closed to new applications in May 1998 and ever stricter criteria applied; only ‘high level’ work, that is roofs, gutters, drains and stonework at risk of loss were eligible. Even so, 398 applications were identified costing £30.37 million. Interestingly that was not far off the £36 million per annum total of grants required at 40% identified by the 1994/5 Needs Survey. The budget for 1998/99 was ‘exceptionally’ increased to £26 million (£4 million extra from HLF, £2 million from EH). Despite the disruption caused by English Heritage

regionalising its offices out of London, all but 194 of the 1420 applications had been resolved by January 1999.

The lessons were learnt. Define the criteria for grants clearly and stick to them, do not consider everything that a building and its contents might need, but make the applicant confine their wish-list to eligible repairs that they can achieve in a short timeframe. Clearer communication was considered vital and archdeacons, financial secretaries and other senior players were invited to a familiarisation seminar in London in February 1999 and further such events were held elsewhere in the country. By then, HLF and EH had committed themselves to funding a new three-year scheme at £20 million pa, anxious to provide continuity and congregational confidence.

The new Joint Grant Scheme for Churches and other Places of Worship 1999–2002 was launched in April 1999. The emphasis was on supporting urgent repairs at high-level and meeting threats to the ‘imminent loss of historic fabric’. EH was still confined to grade I and II* buildings but HLF Trustees decided that their grants would go only to deprived areas, including those local authorities with closed coal mines. This was in response to Government pressure to get more Lottery funding towards the areas where most tickets were purchased. The areas listed in an Annex to the application form were mainly in the urban areas of the West Midlands and North of England. ‘Provision of appropriate access to the church will be a high priority’ and modest new facilities that ‘encourage wider community use’ would only be considered once all necessary repairs had been completed. Two annual deadlines were introduced for projects costing over £250,000 and projects costing £10,000 to £250,000. EH administered the Scheme within each region and provided professional advice, recruiting nine new in-house architects and surveyors. Now that HLF staff had received delegated authority to make grants and a more suitable contract, their offers proceeded more smoothly.

However, the demand remained much greater than the budget available; in 2000/01, the project cost for the 350 applications in the £10,000 – £250,000 stream for grade I & II* buildings was over £20 million against a budget of £9 million. The budget for 2001/02 rose to £22 million (equivalent to more than £50 million today after building cost inflation). Chancellor Gordon Brown announced a new two-year grant scheme, the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, in his March 2001 Budget, effectively reducing VAT from 17.5% to 5% on repairs. This operated across the UK. (As discussed later, the Scheme survives today, with an effectual zero VAT rate.) The gloss came off this generosity when it was revealed that Treasury had required the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to fund it by £6 million over 2001–03 so they had taken it from EH’s grant-in-aid. EH Commissioners decided that the sum should come from the Joint Scheme in 2001/02 and 2002/03. HLF Trustees agreed to make up the loss by funding what should be EH grants, but only once their eligible applications from deprived areas had been fulfilled.

HLF conducted a review of the Joint Scheme in 2001 in advance of the next triennium, including an *Assessment of the Needs of Places of Worship in Use across the UK* by Jeremy Eckstein Associates. On the basis of a relatively small sample, this cautiously estimated Church of England churches listed in grade I & II* required £60 million per annum for urgent repairs and grade II churches £32 million. As the Joint Scheme was providing only £20 million and other sources (like HCPT, Garfield Weston and the county trusts) barely another £2 million, the shortfall was huge, explaining the great demand as congregations struggled with their fund-raising

More positive conclusions were that the ‘single front door’ application, the streaming of applications and clear instructions were beneficial to applicants, the provision of expert advice

by EH to HLF was beneficial to all and targeting of high level works and works in deprived areas had made the most of the funding available. Less positive was the lack of recognition of deprivation in rural areas, the struggles that EH had had in administering the scheme within the consultancy budget HLF offered and that the demand was, once again, much greater than the funds available.

2002–2013: The Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme

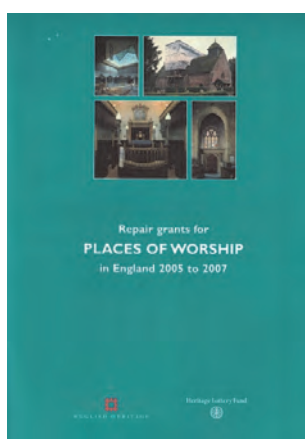
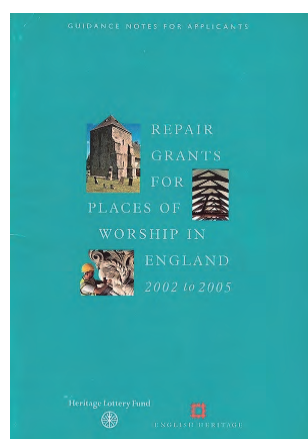
The 2002–05 Repair Grants for Places of Worship in England (RGPoW) was launched in April 2002 with a first year budget of £21 million, (£15 million HLF, £6 million EH) with a further £4 million from EH to fund unresolved 1999–2002 Scheme applications and increases. It was confined to urgent repairs to the fabric of all places of worship in England listed grade I and II* (£16 million) and grade II (£5 million). The HLF dropped the mandatory deprived areas requirement for their grants and the Scheme relied on assessing financial need from accounts, deprivation indices and the views of counter-signatories.

For anything else, like new facilities to support the sustainability of the users, congregations could apply to other HLF schemes, particularly Your Heritage, and these grants varied from £14 million for St Martin-in-the-Fields to a few hundred pounds for improved interpretation and a guidebook. The annual sum of these usually exceeded the RGPoW total, but for rather fewer projects. From 1995 to 2005, HLF offered over £225 million for 1,129 such projects in ‘places of worship’, including cathedrals and closed churches. The RGPoW budget rose to £25 million in 2003 (£15 million HLF and £10 million EH).

Two longer lasting improvements were made. There would be an initial offer for Stage 1 ‘project development’ up to tender stage, to include writing a specification and investigative works with an ‘in principle’ Stage 2 offer figure, which would be finalised after the tenders had been received and the applicant confirmed they had partnership funding in place. This introduced greater certainty into the process but did require good project management from the applicants, which put off some from applying. The first stage offer would also include the creation of a ten-year maintenance plan tailored to the building, which applicants would be required to self-certify each year to EH.

Secondly, only architects and surveyors who were conservation accredited could be employed. There was some resistance to this (especially from long established senior practitioners who did not feel they should be examined), but Diocesan Advisory Committees and others had started to request accreditation qualification too.

RGPoW was also aimed at projects under £200,000, with just £3 million set aside for grade I & II* and £1 million for grade II project costs over that sum. It continued the use of



2002 and 2005: The front covers of application forms for the Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme, which ran from 2002 to 2013.

This was initially jointly funded by EH and HLF, but after a heavy Government cut to its grant-in-aid, EH withdrew, and HLF funded the entire Scheme alone.

competitive batched applications and reduced the number of payments that could be requested. The access requirement was also beefed-up to 'regular advertised visitor access on at least 28 days of the year and at other times by appointment or through a keyholder'. Again, congregations had to certify their opening arrangements to EH every year. This caused some consternation for those who kept their places of worship locked outside services and was undoubtedly not fulfilled by a good number of grant recipients – as 'secret shopper' exercises proved. Despite the legal contract that lasted for ten years after the final payment, the only practical sanction for defaulters was not to accept further applications, which would jeopardise the building.

Greater public access to the heritage was a key HLF objective flowing from its Directions from Government. Although public access had been a grant condition from 1977, DoE/EH had basically assured itself that public money had preserved the heritage and was unwilling to devote staff time to enforcing the access condition. Unlike its secular building grants, opening times for places of worship were not advertised or put on the EH website. The Open Churches Trust founded by Andrew Lloyd Webber had provided grants to assist congregations to open and a national platform to advertise times, but found it impossible to keep it up to date. Locked parish churches remain an issue today and access to buildings of other denominations and faiths more so, as there is no tradition of opening outside services. Heritage Open Days may well be the only times that such places are ever open to all apart from those attending a public service.

A review of the RGPoW in December 2005 by the Architectural History Practice recommended its renewal. It did note that the concentration on high-level projects costing below £200,000 had excluded other areas requiring urgent repair (such as windows) and these were in danger of being neglected. 'This is a reactive, fire-fighting approach to conservation', but a pragmatic one in view of legitimate demand greatly outstripping available resources. Nevertheless, the Scheme had reached a very large number of buildings across the country and the sector was broadly supportive.

In 2005, English Heritage carried out a Fabric Needs Survey, which revisited 127 of the places of worship assessed in 1994/5 and used costs experienced by others looking after churches (such as the CCT). It estimated that £185 million needed to be spent annually on repairs and the average annual maintenance cost was found to be £943 per building, all at January 2006 prices. It was emphasised that the national figure needed to be 'treated with some caution' as the sample was not considered to be statistically representative enough.

RGPoW 2005–07 had refined the previous Scheme by producing guidance and a template for the preparation of Maintenance Plans and a 20-page step-by-step guide on the 'Management of your Grant'. The 'future approval' clause was amended to require copies of any applications made for statutory consents and a simpler payments process was adopted; 75% of the Stage I grant would be paid out as soon as the offer was accepted. From April 2004, all the VAT could now be claimed through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme and this could be used as partnership funding.

The 2005 Fabric Needs Survey was one element of research by EH for a national campaign to raise awareness of the approaching crisis facing places of worship. *Inspired!* was launched in May 2006 with five suggested solutions costing £26.52 million over three years, on top of continuing funding for RGPoW. Both findings and solutions were echoed in the 2017 Taylor Review, but the 2007/8 financial crash prevented any new initiatives beginning, except the introduction of some Historic Places of Worship Support Officers, with financial support from English Heritage.

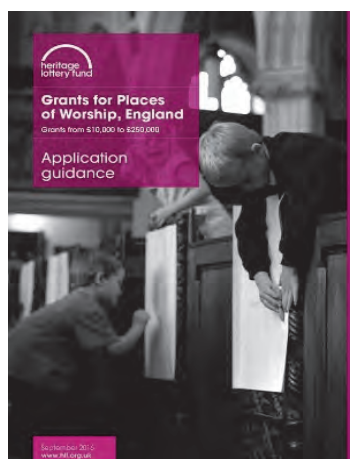
There were already concerns for funding before the financial crash of 2007/8. RGPoW was only renewed for two years (2007–09), at the same £25 million pa, because the second HLF Strategic Plan expired in 2007 and a Government Comprehensive Spending Review was expected for 2007 too. Its successor was not time limited, but after a heavy Government cut to its grant-in-aid, EH withdrew funding from the scheme from 2010–11, though continued to administer it and provide technical advice. HLF now provided all the £25 million per annum funding for England.

2013–2017: The Grants for Places of Worship Scheme

RGPoW continued until 2013, when it was replaced by Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW), the first capital funding scheme dedicated to places of worship to operate across the whole of the UK. The scheme was more in line with other HLF grants. ‘We expect all projects to include works that help the heritage of your place of worship to be more widely understood’. The project could also include facilities to increase community use, like kitchens and toilets, but not if they ‘only benefit the existing congregation and other users’. These were capped at 15% of total project costs. A minimum requirement of only 5% match funding of costs (which could include the Listed Places of Worship grant) helped to greatly increase the average grant. In the first year, just 160 grants averaging £184,000 were made. £116 million was offered over its four year life.

EH (Historic England (HE) from 2015) only gave GPOW technical advice, but continued to help some congregations prepare for an HLF bid and give grants for a few Heritage at Risk projects.

In 2013 English Heritage added listed places of worship across England to the Heritage at Risk Register, which is updated annually. This significant move was intended to help EH understand the overall state of England’s historic environment. It also plays an important role in persuading funders that a listed place of worship should be supported. The Church of England, with financial support from EH, also commissioned a ‘National Church Fabric Survey’ which reviewed all Quinquennial Inspection Reports (QIRs). It was hoped that this would provide a guide to overall fabric repair costs, but only one in five QIRs had complete costings. Furthermore it was found that ‘where churches had had work undertaken the actual cost of repairs was significantly higher (often 2–3 times higher) than the original costing in the QIRs’. There could be a number of possible reasons for this, including the fact that costings are nearly always broad brush, the delay before work was carried out, and the additional work that is often found to be required when detailed investigations are carried out, but it



2015 and 2016: Application guidance for the first round of the Roof Repair Fund (left, 2015), and for GPOW (right, example from 2016).

The Roof Repair Fund was a one-off scheme for England, funded by the Government. GPOW was the first UK-wide capital funding scheme dedicated to places of worship and ran from 2013 until 2017. It was funded by HLF.



2010: The most recent assessment of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme for recovery of VAT, commissioned by EH. DCMS have recently commissioned another evaluation of the Scheme which was carried out in the first part of 2025, but has not yet (May 2025) been published.

demonstrates that these reports are not suitable for assessing overall needs. However QIRs remain valuable tools for both parishes and dioceses.

In December 2014 the Chancellor announced the creation of a one-off Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund, which was administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) on behalf of the Treasury and DCMS. As suggested by the name, the Fund supported urgent work to roof and rainwater disposal systems, and the application process reflected this tightly-focused approach. There was huge interest in the programme, which was oversubscribed, and the available £55 million was distributed in two rounds in 2015 and 2016.

In 2017 HLF closed all its targeted schemes and since then, places of worship have had to apply to the range of open schemes. The NLHF 2023 Strategic Plan has now identified places of worship as Heritage in Need and it was announced in September 2024 that ‘we anticipate awarding grants worth around £85m to support this ambition over the next three years’ including works enabling ‘places of worship to achieve their potential as hubs for community activity and celebrating heritage’. The ambition excludes cathedrals and the money has not been ring-fenced for places of worship. An additional £15 million will be invested ‘to support large projects that address widespread needs and challenges’. The first partnership grant was £4.68 million to expand the Church of England’s Conservation Grants Scheme. NLHF had already supported the National Churches Trust to set up Cherish, a five year support scheme for places of worship in Scotland, Wales and North West England.

Recent developments

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme has continued without a break since 2001, from April 2004 repaying in full the VAT incurred on repairs (and on alterations as well from 2012, when they began to incur VAT). In 2023–24 it refunded £29 million and has proved to be a bedrock for congregational planning and fund-raising. However it has never been guaranteed more than three years ahead, and sometimes less.

Following considerable uncertainty, on 22 January 2025 DCMS only extended the Scheme until March 2026, pending the Government’s Spending Review. It was curtailed by limiting the budget to £23 million and restricting the total amount that a place of worship can claim during the year to £25,000, which has badly affected the budgets of many projects, especially the larger schemes. Although Government estimates that 94% of claims will be unaffected by this change, the Church of England stated that at least 200 current projects would be severely affected.

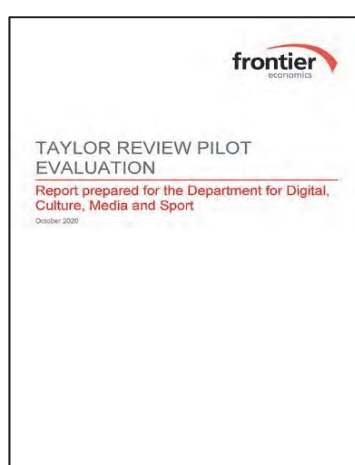
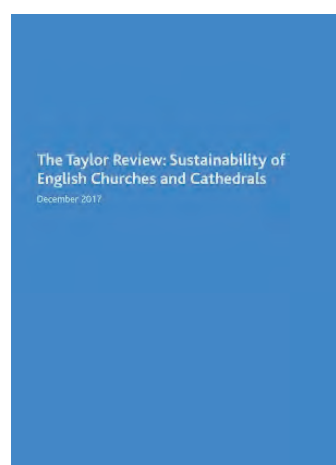
DCMS has commissioned a review of the Scheme from Harlow Consulting – it was last reviewed in 2010 – which at the time of writing has not been published. The future of the Scheme will become known after June 2025 when the results of the Spending Review are expected to be announced.

Support Officers and the need for maintenance

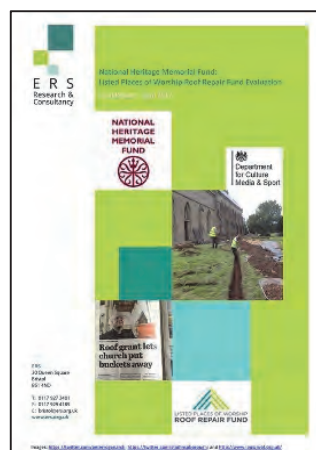
The need for regular maintenance was highlighted in all the HBC Annual reports from 1978 and the 1980/1 HBC report asked that Church of England dioceses consider setting up maintenance teams. Pilots for just such arrangements were pursued by EH after 2004 and they, with the HLF, were the main funders for the SPAB Faith in Maintenance scheme 2007–2012. The diocese of London has had a Gutter Maintenance Programme for many years but a small number of similar initiatives in other dioceses have not lasted. Dioceses have never been responsible for maintaining parish churches, so it requires a major culture change for them to take a direct interest in looking after, as distinct from controlling, fabric. Many are doing this now as part of programmes supported by the Church Commissioners-funded £11 million Buildings for Mission project (covering the three years 2023–5), with an ‘overall objective to help parishes keep their churches open and sustainable’. The project has supported the creation of some thirty-five diocesan Church Building Support Officers (following EH’s lead with a programme begun in 2007 by its ‘Inspired!’ project, and continued by HE) and offered funding to all 41 mainland dioceses for small repair grants and ‘essential improvements for the mission and ministry of a church’.

The Taylor Review

The latter were two of ten recommendations made by the 2017 Taylor Review and tested by pilot schemes 2018–2020. This milestone study, commissioned by DCMS, efficiently and swiftly pulled together evidence from a wide variety of sources including the 2015 Church Buildings Review run by Bishop John Inge for the Church of England. Taylor’s finding that a Major Repairs Fund was required to top-up planned major repairs ‘financed principally by local fund-raising’ was endorsed by the pilot evaluation. Taylor suggested £36 million per annum from government, which just five years later is already £44.8 million after general inflation (Bank of England inflation calculator) or more than £50 million after allowing for building cost inflation. It was fixed as ‘a median point between average annual public funding levels between 2014–16 (around £90 million annually) and levels over the next two years when only the Listed Places of Worship scheme will be available (£42m annually)’. The Roof Repair Fund had no difficulty spending its £55 million over two years and the Heritage



2017 and 2020: The Taylor Review into the sustainability of English churches and cathedrals was published in 2017. It made a number of recommendations. Many of these were successfully piloted, as reported in 2020. The Taylor review has influenced thinking, but many of the recommendations, including a Major Repairs Fund, await implementation.



2017 and 2023: Evaluation of Roof Repair Fund and Summary Evaluation of the Heritage Stimulus Fund. The evaluations of both these one-off repair schemes found there were positive social benefits.

Stimulus Fund (part of the Covid-related DCMS Culture Recovery Fund 2020–22) also succeeded in spending its budget, despite Covid restrictions and some very tight timescales. The latter was noteworthy for distributing funds via block grants to intermediary organisations, the use of the money being monitored by HE: this could be considered as a model for any future repair grant scheme.

For the Church of England, the Church Commissioners contribution of £11.5 million over three years is a lot less than Taylor's suggested £30 million a year for Minor Repairs and Fabric Support Officers and Community Support Advisers. Although the current NLHF Heritage Grants scheme will clearly help some places of worship, it is not in my view the answer for many of them because, as the Taylor pilot evaluation reported of previous HLF Schemes, 'its requirements, particularly in terms of community engagement activities, were seen as prohibitive for those listed places of worship with limited capacity'. It has to be remembered that unlike very many other applicants to NLHF, church congregations are not heritage bodies able to monetise their heritage asset, which in most cases they fund from their own pockets. Their prime reasons for engaging with their place of worship are not to look after an historic building, no matter how nationally important.

Small congregations can rise to the short-term challenge of fund-raising specific repairs, but 'achieving greater inclusion, diversity and access to heritage', providing 'opportunities to develop new skills and explore heritage', and 'taking steps to reach out to new people, to share heritage beyond their organisation', may well be beyond them. In any case, such requirements may be misdirected. Independent reviews of both the Roof Fund and the Heritage Stimulus Fund showed that even though these schemes were entirely dedicated to the repair of the building, they led both to the restored spaces being used more extensively and also allowed congregations, freed from the grinding burden of fund raising, to become more active – thus, paradoxically, the 'wider and unintended outcomes' of these projects which had been focused on buildings, was to enhance community life.

Looking back, looking forward

Forty years of government repair grants has surely proved beyond any doubt that public funding, particularly in support of major repairs, is essential to maintain the fabric of historic places of worship. As Taylor states 'In addition to sustaining our valuable heritage, investing in the maintenance and repair of these buildings provides economic and social benefits to the country as a whole, particularly through our growing tourism economy. At a local level, investing in these buildings provides a thriving community asset'. The further observation that

Church of England churches were thought at the time to be currently in good repair is followed by the warning that ‘if the condition of buildings is not maintained but allowed to deteriorate, much larger sums will be required to return this to an acceptable level, which would render many past investments wasted’. This was prescient: as the HRBA has recently shown, with reduced capital grants, in the last seven years there has been a steady decline in the number of listed places of worship in England coming off the Heritage at Risk register from more than 100 a year to fewer than 30.

The greatest difference between today and when I wrote my 2011 article is the more positive involvement in parish churches taken by the dioceses of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church, whilst the Methodist Conference has had a national conservation officer from the 1980s. In part this can be attributed to the difficulties in providing adequate pastoral care against a falling number of clergy and the unwanted pressures those people face from building issues. Greater lay leadership is helping but for many parishes, there are simply too few regular and able supporters. The adoption of Church Buildings Support Officers often working within a diocesan Buildings Team is another major step forward and setting their work within missional objectives helps stop them being considered an optional luxury.

In the Church of England there have been other developments. The widespread endorsement of Festival or ‘fallow’ churches should prevent buildings simply being left to rot (as before 1968) as they remain within a benefice and the overview of the diocese. The role of the Association of Festival Churches has been recognised by a grant from the Buildings for Mission Fund. Unfortunately, the Churches Conservation Trust has only been able to take a handful of closed churches of late as its funding from the Commissioners and DCMS has stagnated. The Friends of Friendless Churches has stepped up, helped enormously by the Culture Recovery Fund and some generous donors, but remains a small charity. Norwich diocese has created its own Trust for fallow churches and other dioceses might follow its example. The proposed new Mission and Pastoral Measure presented to the February 2025 General Synod commends this approach too, but does not identify where the money might come from, initially and subsequently.

However, this welcome change has to be set against the background of a reforming Church of England. Numerous consultations and strategies on church buildings and parish structures are being adopted by individual dioceses to address existential problems. Changes in mission and worship patterns are driving new organisational structures which for urban and suburban areas will likely lead to more closed churches and pressure to redevelop others to suit today’s needs. New congregations may well appear in new housing areas, but they will use school or community space, possibly provided by the developer. In rural areas, with too many churches and congregations literally dying out, new patterns of pastoral care and different ways of worship, beyond the historic parish church, are emerging. Church buildings will need to be adapted for wider community use or be closed completely, with conversion to housing often being the only commercially viable option for keeping the building. Perhaps a Town or Parish Council could take a lease from the diocese or Church Commissioners, or possibly a group of concerned individuals might form a local preservation group. They will need to be well organised, not least with fund-raising, and as with any volunteer group, succession planning will be vital. The Melton Old Church Society near Woodbridge in Suffolk has existed since 1980 (and actually bought the church in 1982) so there are precedents.

This is a world away from what Ivor Bulmer Thomas experienced or indeed, the loss of control to the dreaded local authorities that the Church of England especially feared from taking money from the State in the 1970s. What does endure is the need to keep in good repair the nation's unique stock of historic art and architecture, present and (usually) open at the core of virtually all our communities, for future generations to enjoy just as we do.

Appendix 1: Lessons for any future support for major repairs

This appendix briefly discusses some lessons from the past for any future support for major repairs to listed places of worship, especially where Treasury rules apply.

Budget

To begin with, calculating the precise need is impossible because of the huge number and variety of buildings involved, even if the statistical problem of accommodating the small number of exceptionally expensive repair projects were successfully resolved. Whilst quinquennial reports can give an approximate estimate of costs at the point of writing, they are not created on a uniform basis, and, as mentioned earlier, the evidence shows they are often under-estimated. HE's Heritage at Risk Register contains places of worship that have applied for grants or have been referred to HE for help, so functions as a reasonable indicator of need and is clearly useful to grant givers in prioritising offers from an inadequate budget, but it is hardly a guide to absolute numbers.

The budget for any future scheme will therefore have to be set by learning from the performance of previous schemes and of course, by what a Minister thinks can be afforded against other government priorities.

Trickier is how to assess the appropriate level of financial support for a congregation to fit Treasury rules. EH had developed a formula based on congregational predictions and accounts, likely grants from established charities (like the National Churches Trust) and deprivation indices to find a grant percentage. This obviously could not accommodate an applicant's particular circumstances, such as a ferocious fund raiser or the reverse, the lack of one. It is often reported that fund raising can become easier once the scaffold is up. Fixed percentages of 40% and 50% only worked for a minority of applicants and led to much officer's time assessing the need and scale of increases, but might work if they were fixed higher. It is interesting that the evaluation of the GPOW scheme (which was not, of course, taxpayer funded, so not subject to Treasury rules) found that on average 65% of funding was provided by GPOW grants.

Operational lessons

There are some operational lessons that can be learnt from history.

- Set precise, clear criteria allowing a little wriggle room for emergencies (historic fabric at risk of imminent loss) and stick with them
- Accept that, even so, demand will likely exceed the budget and a batching system with fixed application dates and budgets may help to manage the flow of applications
- Have appropriately qualified professionals involved from the start in assessing and monitoring applications
- Ensure there is an identified administrator to work with the applicant throughout
- Make available exemplars of applications and instruction on the requirements of the scheme – applicants frequently have no previous experience of making a grant application
- Devise a simple initial application form supported by a professional assessment of the required repairs and cost set within the context of a full QIR

- Set up a two-stage offer that involves a generously supported investigation and specification phase up to tender with a second stage offer that will only be increased in exceptional circumstances
- Arrange a small number of timetabled stage payments
- Have grant conditions that are both achievable and monitored, particularly those relating to heritage outcomes and community benefit additional to keeping a key historic building in use

Appendix 2: Background documents available on HRBA website

The following documents are available on the HRBA website <http://www.hrballiance.org.uk> under 'Repository'. They are shown here in approximate date order. The page number shown is the page of first significant mention of the relevant topic in this publication; in most but not all cases the actual document is referenced in the text. The lead author for each document is shown in brackets.

Page	Document
1	1952, Church Assembly (Ivor Bulmer-Thomas), <i>The preservation of our churches</i>
11	1994/5, pub. 1998, EH and CCC (Geoffrey Claridge), <i>Churches needs survey</i>
13	2001, HLF and EH (Jeremy Eckstein Associates), <i>An assessment of the needs of listed places of worship in use across the UK</i>
9	2004, Church Heritage Forum on behalf of the Church of England, <i>Building faith in our future</i>
15	2005, HLF and EH (Architectural History Practice), <i>Review of funding 1996–2005</i>
15	2006, EH and CCC (Michael Wingate), <i>Places of worship fabric needs survey, 2005</i>
15	2006, EH <i>Inspired!</i> campaign, various materials
18	2010, EH (bdrcl continental), <i>Listed places of worship grant impact assessment</i>
16 ¹	2010, EH (bdrcl continental) <i>Key findings from the Repair Grants for Places of Worship (RGPoW) impact assessment</i>
18	2015, Church of England (Bishop John Inge), <i>Report of the Church Buildings Review Group</i>
15 ²	2016, Trevor Cooper, <i>Churches Funding Gap</i>
17 ¹	2017, DCMS / NHMF (ERS), <i>Listed places of worship Roof Repair Fund evaluation</i>
18	2017, DCMS (Bernard Taylor), <i>The Taylor Review: sustainability of English churches and cathedrals</i>
18 ³	2019, DCMS (Frontier Economics), <i>Enhancing the sustainability of listed places of worship</i>
22	2020, NLHF, Becky Payne, <i>Evaluation of the Grants for Places of Worship (GPOW) programme: a four-year longitudinal study</i>
19	2020, DCMS (Frontier Economics), <i>Taylor Review pilot evaluation</i>
19	2023, HE (morris hargreaves mcintyre /Ortus Consulting), <i>991 stitches in time: evaluation of Historic England's Heritage Stimulus Fund (executive summary only)</i>
17 ⁴	2025 (May), House of Commons Library (Antony Seely), <i>VAT and Churches</i>

¹ Document not explicitly mentioned in text

² Not mentioned in text. Contains summary and critical synthesis of the 1994/5, 2001 and 2005 Needs Surveys.

³ Summary of many different grant schemes, and the evidence for their efficacy

⁴ Document not explicitly mentioned in text. Useful history of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance brings together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings.

The HRBA is an independently-funded group within The Heritage Alliance. This is the biggest alliance of heritage interests in the UK and was set up to promote the central role of the non-Government movement in the heritage sector.

We are independent of any faith group or individual heritage body. Since our foundation in 2008 we have built up an enviable reputation as a trustworthy and fact-based advocate for the future of historic churches and other places of worship.

We provide briefings to members on matters of mutual interest and help them share information and best practice with each other, and move toward a common mind on the issues of the day. We engage directly with a much larger constituency through our newsletter, public meetings, website and publications.

Views expressed in the publications of the HRBA are those of the author, not of the HRBA or The Heritage Alliance, nor any individual or body associated with them.

Published by the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance

For further information about the HRBA or a print copy of this report, please contact:

tel: 0203 781 8002

email: hrb@theheritagealliance.org.uk

www.hrballiance.org.uk

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

The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance (HRBA) is an independently-funded part of The Heritage Alliance. The Heritage Alliance is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 4577804 and a registered charity no. 1094793.