

# Berkshire Historic Churches Trust



**ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25**

# Berkshire Historic Churches Trust

- Patron** The Rt Hon Lord Benyon of Englefield PC GCVO
- Joint Presidents** The Rt Revd Mary Gregory, Bishop of Reading  
Andrew Try, Lord-Lieutenant of Berkshire
- Honorary Vice-Presidents** The Lady Eliza Mays-Smith • The Most Revd and Rt Hon the Lord Carey of Clifton  
Erica Lady Harman • The Rt Revd Dom Geoffrey Scott OSB • James Puxley CVO  
Jim Barnes-Phillips
- Trustees** Graham Barker MStJ DL • Jim Barnes-Phillips (to June 2025) • Dr Peter Durrant MBE DL  
Catherine Haig (to June 2025) • Willie Hartley Russell MVO DL • Graham Mather CBE  
Torquil Montague-Johnstone • James Puxley CVO • Eleanor Rice FCA  
Jonathan Welfare OBE • Lucy Zeal DL
- Executive Committee** Chairman : Dr Peter Durrant MBE DL  
Hon Secretary : John Pritchard • Hon Treasurer : Eleanor Rice FCA  
Anne Armitage • The Revd Dr Julia Binney (to Dec 2024) • Marion Elly (to June 2025)  
Leslie Grout (to Dec 2024) • Catherine Haig (to June 2025) • Liz Kitch  
Prue Matchwick (to Dec 2024) • Torquil Montague-Johnstone  
The Ven Stephen Pullin • Henry Sanders AABC RIAS RIBA • Jonathan Welfare OBE  
Primrose Wilson CBE (from March 2025)
- Address** The Chairman, 84 Beech Lane, Earley, Reading RG6 5QE
- Bankers** Virgin Money (Yorkshire Bank plc), 35 Regent Street, London SW1Y 4ND
- Independent Examiner** John Cullen ACCA
- CONSTITUTION** The Trust was set up by a Declaration of Trust dated 6 Feb 1984 under the name  
“Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust”.  
The name was changed to “Berkshire Historic Churches Trust” in June 2020.  
Registered Charity number 288797
- OBJECTIVES** To raise funds to help with the cost of repairs to the fabric of Christian Churches,  
Chapels and Meeting Houses in Berkshire, and for the repair and preservation of  
monuments, fittings and fixtures and stained glass. The Trust will also consider  
applications from Churches, Chapels and Meeting Houses for schemes to achieve  
a sustainable future as the centre of every community in the County, making use  
of their buildings for the benefit of the community at large, and may help to fund  
facilities necessary for this purpose, if this can be achieved without compromising  
the historic or architectural quality of the buildings and their settings within the  
local landscape.
- REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES** The Trustees are authorised by the Trust Deed to delegate any of their functions,  
and have done this by the formation of an Executive Committee. Applications for  
grants are considered by the Executive Committee with the help of documentation  
and professional advice. Once decisions are made, progress of works is monitored  
before funds are released.

Approved by the Trustees on 2 June 2025 and signed on their behalf by

.....  ..... Trustee

## from the Chairman



Churches are precious – a precious inheritance and a precious resource. As places to enjoy architecture, art, sculpture and stained glass they are second to none. Not for nothing are so many churches rated Grade I or Grade II\* for their heritage value. But they are also immensely valuable as centres for mission and community support. The National Churches Trust has calculated that churches provide £55 billion of social benefit every year. In many villages, churches are the only public building remaining, after shop, post office and pub have closed, and even in busy urban streets churches are still among the most obvious of our public buildings, and among the few that are genuinely open to all.

But churches are at risk. They need money and people to flourish, and shrinking congregations and rising costs make them increasingly difficult to maintain. NCT calls the risk the greatest heritage threat of our generation. Fortunately, Berkshire has not so far seen the number of closures that have occurred in other counties, but we cannot be complacent.

For forty years the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust has been giving grants to help keep our churches in good repair, and to install essential facilities like kitchens and toilets. But we too need money and people. You, our supporters, have given generously financially, and we thank you for that. Could you also give us some of your time? We need people to join our Executive Committee to help sustain and grow our membership, to organise events, and generally to help us promote our work. The commitment need not be great, but the impact could be enormous. We are a friendly bunch, too. If you think you could help, do get in touch: you can email me at [berkschurchestrustchair@gmail.com](mailto:berkschurchestrustchair@gmail.com). I shall look forward to hearing from you!

**Peter Durrant**

## Report of the Executive Committee

### GRANTS

It is seldom that a year goes by without some discussion of church roofs, and the year 2024-25 was no exception. Three of the grants paid and one of the applications received were either entirely or partly for roof repairs. However, several other matters were among those discussed, including drainage, rainwater goods, plastering, heating, lighting, toilets, access and planning, demonstrating both the range of issues faced by churches today and the flexibility of the Trust when it comes to helping.

Of the grants paid last year, the two largest were to **St Andrew, Boxford**, and to **St John, Newbury**, though for very different purposes.



*New oak beams in the tower roof at Boxford*

Boxford church is beautifully situated on the bank of the River Lambourn, but because of its low-lying position is vulnerable to damp. It had also suffered from water penetrating the old lead roof of the tower, causing

damage to the old oak beams, which had also been affected by death watch beetle. The cost of work to repair the tower and to improve drainage around the walls was £150,000; we contributed £10,000.

St John's Church, Newbury, was built between 1955 and 1957 to replace an earlier church destroyed during the war. It is an impressive building, but was constructed at a time when questions of access for people with limited mobility were not so much at the forefront of thinking as they are today. Additionally, the main entrance, whilst impressive, is perhaps a little forbidding. The church wanted to address both issues, by creating an entrance that is both welcoming and accessible. Inevitably in a listed building, this was not straightforward, but an imaginative solution was devised which included an external glazed porch and a ramp into the south aisle. The total cost, including essential ancillary work, was £100,000, to which we contributed £10,000.

In addition to supporting these larger projects, we gave grants to **St Nicholas, Hurst** for installing wall-mounted infra-red heaters to replace a failed boiler (£3,000), **St John, Stockcross**, for repairs to rainwater goods ((£1,200); **Thatcham Methodist Church**, for roof repairs and the installation of an accessible toilet (£1,500); **St Peter, Caversham**, for replastering after water damage (£500); **St Mary, Fawley**, for repairs to the lead covering of the tower (£500); and to **St Nicolas, Newbury**,



*Decayed rainwater head at Stockcross*

towards a feasibility study for developing a scheme that would make major improvements to the church (£1,000). This last grant is the latest made in a scheme that allows us to pay towards surveys and feasibility studies. The hope is that by this means, more targeted and well-planned projects will be developed which will help to deliver cost-effective outcomes.

Altogether we paid out £27,700 in grants. This was less than in 2023/24, and less than we might have expected, or indeed could afford. However, to set against that, we had by the year's end a further £36,900 pledged towards eight projects. Three of these were carried forward from the previous year; the remaining five were new applications.



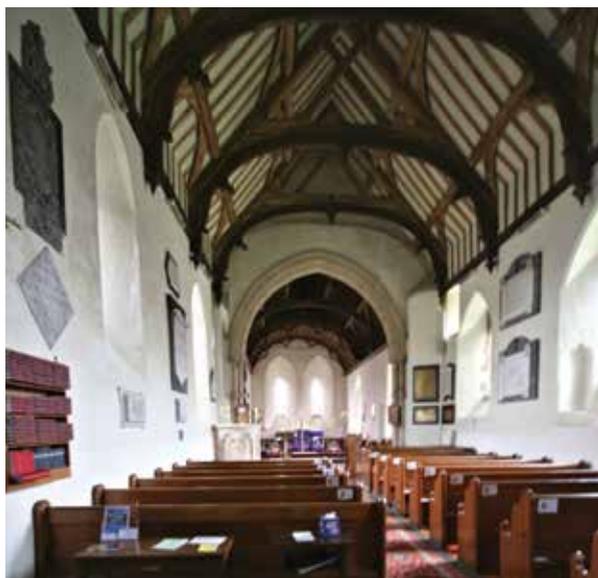
The church of **St Peter, Cranbourne**, was built in 1849-50. It was restored in 2006-7 after an arson attack had destroyed the organ and badly damaged the pews and other fittings. A recent inspection had revealed that the nave roof urgently required renewal, the tiles having reached the end of their working life and a

*The roof at Cranbourne St Peter*

number having broken and slipped, so that water was penetrating into the roof structure. The cost of repair was estimated at £149,000. We offered £15,000 – the first occasion on which we have offered a grant at our new maximum level.

Smaller grants were offered to **St Mary, Hampstead Norreys**, **Holy Trinity, Cookham**, and **St Peter, Brimpton**.

At Hampstead Norreys the heating system has completely failed and the lighting was inadequate: we offered £5,000 towards improvements estimated at £71,000. At Cookham, where we also offered to help fund a new heating system, the scheme is



*Hampstead Norreys St Mary*

part of a larger project that includes reseating and the installation of an accessible toilet. The total cost is £773,000, to which we will contribute £5,000. Finally, we made another offer under our scheme to support survey work. At Brimpton the spire needs urgent repair and re-shingling. However, the condition of the timber structure is unknown, so it is difficult to define the work needed, and a survey by a steeplejack, followed by an assessment by a structural engineer and the preparation of measured drawings is necessary. We offered £1,000 towards an estimated cost of £10,150.



*Missing shingles on the Brimpton spire*

## EVENTS

The 2024 Englefield Lecture, delivered appropriately in St Mark's Church rather than the Long Gallery, was given by Professor Nicholas Orme. His topic was 'Going to Church in Medieval England', the subject of his recent award-winning book of the same title. His absorbing lecture was very well received by a large and appreciative audience, which also enjoyed a cup of tea and a choice of excellent cakes afterwards. The event raised over £1,000 for the Trust.

We were not able to arrange a garden visit or a study day this year, but a small group of supporters enjoyed a slightly windy tour of the ruins of Reading Abbey, led by our Chairman (who is also the Chairman of the Friends of Reading Abbey). The tour was followed by refreshments in Abbey Baptist Church, which, appropriately, is situated in the Abbey precincts, next to the Holy Brook, and between the sites of the old Abbey Mill and the Abbey stables. We are grateful to the church for its hospitality.

Ride and Stride took place, as usual, on the second Saturday in September. A full report appears below.

The final event of the year was our annual meeting and church tour, which this year included visits to four churches in west Berkshire. A full report follows.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Publication of our occasional Newsletter, attractively designed and produced by our Secretary, continued, with two issues during the year.

## PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

We continue to consider ways in which we can improve the Trust's effectiveness, but progress has been hampered by vacancies in key roles. We urgently need to find people to take responsibility for managing contact with our church supporters, organising events, co-ordinating Ride and Stride, and for publicity and promotion generally.

## PEOPLE

We were delighted to welcome Lord Benyon as Patron of the Trust. This is a new role, and we look forward to exploring ways in which we can work with him to raise the Trust's profile in Berkshire.



We were also very pleased that the Right Reverend Mary Gregory, Bishop of Reading, and Mr Andrew Try, recently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, both accepted invitations to become a Joint President. James Puxley, who stood down as a Joint President following his retirement as Lord Lieutenant, has accepted an invitation to become a Vice-President, and we are delighted that his long association with the Trust will continue.

There have been several changes in the Executive Committee. We accepted with regret the resignations of Leslie Grout, Revd Julia Binney and Prue Matchwick. Leslie's retirement brings to an end a connection with the Trust going back to its very earliest days, whilst Julia and Prue joined more recently. We thank them all for their contributions to our work.

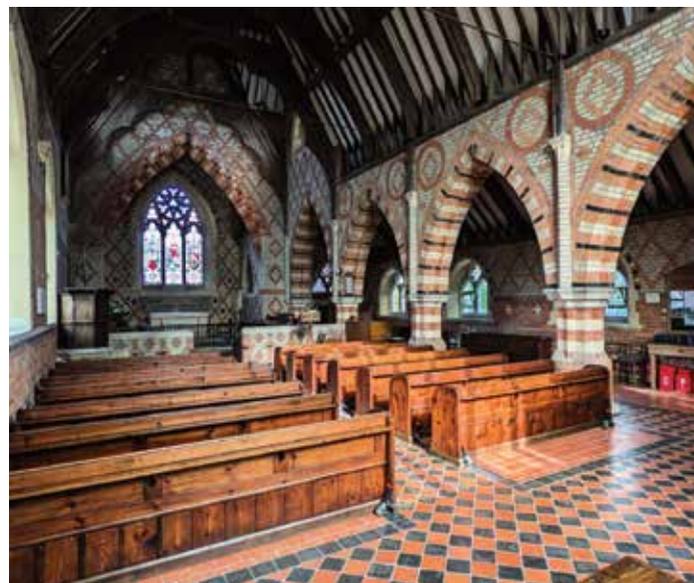
Towards the end of the year we welcomed Primrose Wilson as a member of the Committee. She brings with her a wealth of experience from her time with the Ulster Churches Trust, and we look forward to working with her in Berkshire.

Finally, we record with sadness the death of Ian Pilkington, a generous supporter of long standing, and for many years one of our Vice-Presidents.

**Peter Durrant**

## Annual Meeting 2024

Our 2024 annual meeting and church tour was spent on the Berkshire Downs. We began at St James, Leckhampstead, a church we have visited before and where, as always, we were made royally welcome. It proved a little difficult to draw the attention of the assembled company away from the generously-provided refreshments to the business of the meeting, but we eventually managed it! The meeting itself, consisting mainly of an introduction to the annual report, with an opportunity for



questions, was kept brief and to the point, so that we had plenty of time to admire the latest stage of the work that we had supported (and which is described in detail in last year's annual report). Leckhampstead is a church transformed, and we congratulated our hosts on their impressive achievement.

From Leckhampstead we travelled the short distance to St Mary, Fawley, where we had recently offered £500 towards the repairs to the tower roof. This is another Victorian church, though very different from Leckhampstead.

It was built in 1865/6 to designs by G E Street, in what Pevsner describes as 'a serious, muscular essay in 13c French Gothic style' and paid for by Blanche Wroughton in memory of her husband Philip, who had employed Street to build the new church at



Brightwalton. It replaced a small medieval church (now demolished) on a different site. Immortalised by Thomas Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*, it is an impressive building, large and imposing in this small village.

From Fawley we made our way back across the A338 (formerly the Hungerford to Wantage turnpike) to All Saints, Farnborough. This is a small, aisleless church of Norman origin (see the windows on the north side and the blocked north doorway), thoroughly restored in the nineteenth century, when the chancel arch was widened and the roof renewed, but it still has an ancient feel about it. It is a church of particular

significance for Trusts such as ours,

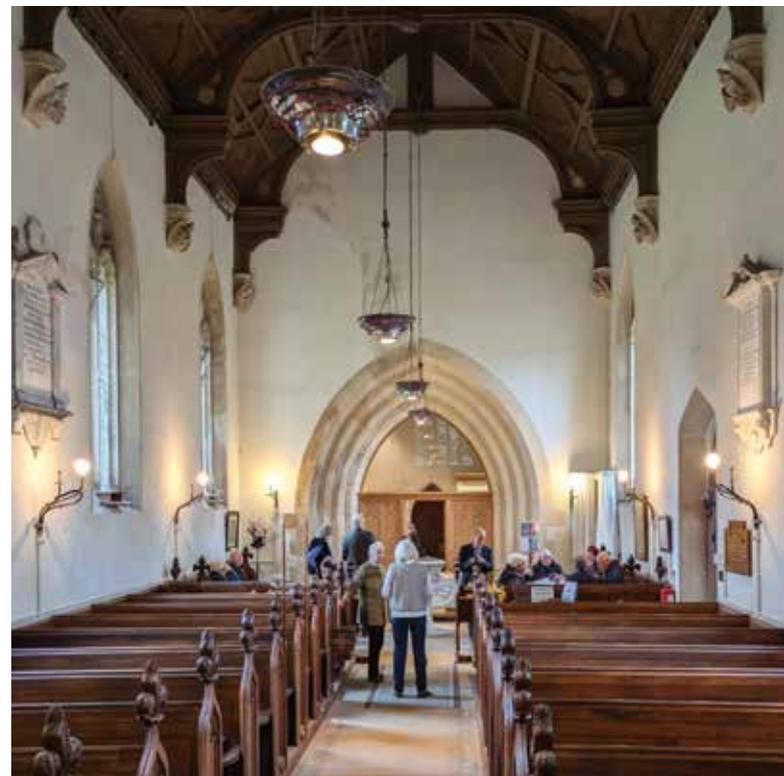
*In memory of  
SIR JOHN BETJEMAN  
1906-1984 Poet Laureate  
sometime resident at The Old Rectory Farnborough  
This window, designed by his friend John Piper  
& executed by Joseph Nuttgens, was placed here  
by the Friends of Friendless Churches  
I am the Resurrection & the Life*

and for all who care for historic churches, for Sir John Betjeman lived for a time at the Old Rectory, and there is in the church a stained-glass window to his memory designed by John Piper, and Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, founder of the

wonderfully-named (and wonderfully effective) Friends of Friendless Churches is buried here: as his monument rightly says, he 'dedicated his life to the preservation of ancient churches'.

Finally, we reached St Barnabas, Peasemore. This is an interesting church, with an eighteenth-century tower, remodelled in 1842 when the rest of the church was rebuilt, and with a new (and longer) chancel added in 1865 by Street. We had given a grant towards various improvements, including the installation of a food preparation area and toilet in the base of the tower. By now it

was raining, but we were made warmly welcome inside and given a splendid tea. The day ended with a service of evensong where, as it was Sunday, we were joined by members of the local church community, and where we gave thanks for our rich heritage of historic churches and prayed for blessing on our future endeavours to help preserve them.



## Ride and Stride 2024

Once again we benefitted from a sunny September Saturday, and the riders and striders who set forth from their churches, whether singly or in groups, and whether for a lengthy cycle ride or a short walk round the churchyard, were able to enjoy the fine autumn weather as well as raise money for the churches of our county. And together we did raise

money – almost £28,000, just a fraction less than in 2023, which had been our best result for many years. After a proportion of this was returned to participating churches, the Trust's funds, and thus its ability to give grants, were boosted by nearly £18,000.

Some 50 churches made returns, reporting visitor numbers of between one and 24, though only a handful reported ten or more visits on the day. Altogether over 150 individuals participated (considerably more than in 2023), making almost 400 recorded church visits (though the true figure may well be higher). Participation figures were boosted by a large team from St Matthew, Midgham, and an even larger one from St Nicolas, Newbury – the latter taking part for the first time, and promoting the event as the 'West Berks Parish Olympic Challenge,' with a variety of routes devised at gold, silver and bronze levels of difficulty. Both St Matthew and St Nicolas made Ride and Stride a parish 'event', and generated a lot of interest and community spirit. Other churches which fielded smaller groups similarly found that the day can be fun and congenial, a great way to spend the day together – and a marvellous opportunity to see some of Berkshire's fabulous churches. A number of tested routes can be found on our website.



*Riders and striders at St Nicolas Newbury*

Ride + Stride remains the most important fund-raising event of the year, and we are grateful to all those who took part – local organisers, church stewards who welcomed visitors, the riders and striders themselves, and those who generously sponsored them. It is a little disappointing that still only a minority of Berkshire's churches take an active part, and our challenge is to spread the word about the event's potential benefits. Perhaps the example of Midgham and Newbury will encourage others!

## Recent Grants to Churches

Year	Church	Grant (£)	Year	Church	Grant (£)
<b>2018/19</b>	Ascot Heath, All Saints	1,000	<b>2022/23</b>	Beedon, St Nicholas	450
	<i>Repainting brickwork</i>			<i>Repairs to plaster in ceiling</i>	
	Bisham, All Saints	5,000		Eastbury, St James	5,000
	<i>Disabled toilet and meeting room</i>			<i>Renewal of roof on south side</i>	
	Bracknell, Holy Trinity	10,000		East Garston, All Saints	3,300
	<i>Roof repairs and new slates</i>			<i>Tower access and repairs to stonework</i>	
	Cookham, Holy Trinity	5,000		Great Shefford, St Mary	500
	<i>Restoration of tower</i>			<i>Inspection &amp; treatment of dry rot</i>	
	Reading, Sacred Heart (Polish)	10,000		Wokingham, All Saints	10,000
	<i>Roof repairs</i>			<i>New floor, heating, toilets, servery, access</i>	
Sandhurst, St Michael	2,000	<b>2023/24</b>	Brimpton, St Peter	1,400	
<i>Restoration of stained glass</i>			<i>New under-pew electric heating</i>		
Thatcham Methodist	2,000		Hungerford, St Laurence	10,000	
<i>New front door and flooring</i>			<i>New toilets, kitchen, meeting rooms and heating system</i>		
<b>2019/20</b>	East Garston, All Saints		2,000	Kintbury, St Mary	1,800
	<i>Repair of buttress</i>			<i>Replace stolen lead on roof with TCSS</i>	
	Leckhampstead, St James		10,000	Leckhampstead, St James	6,000
	<i>Renewing roof</i>			<i>Re-lay nave floor, heating, toilet, kitchen</i>	
Thatcham URC	500		Peasemore, St Barnabas	7,000	
<i>Repair of windows</i>			<i>Create meeting area, with toilet &amp; kitchen</i>		
<b>2020/21</b>	Combe, St Swithun	1,000	Thatcham, St Mary	4,100	
	<i>Roof alarm</i>		<i>Repairs to roof and walls</i>		
	East Garston, All Saints	5,000	Windsor, All Saints	5,000	
	<i>Roof repairs</i>		<i>New lighting system</i>		
	Farnborough, All Saints	2,000	<b>2024/25</b>	Newbury, St John	10,000
	<i>Repairs to tower roof and nave window</i>			<i>Alteration to entrance to improve disabled access</i>	
	Fawley, St Mary	2,000		Boxford, St Andrew	10,000
	<i>Replace guttering</i>			<i>Repair of tower roof and drainage</i>	
	Lambourn, St Michael	1,500		Thatcham Methodist Church	1,500
	<i>Boiler replacement</i>			<i>Roof repairs and accessible toilets</i>	
Leckhampstead, St James	2,000	Fawley, St Mary		500	
<i>Repairs to windows</i>		<i>Repair to lead cap on tower roof</i>			
Wokingham, All Saints	1,000	Newbury, St Nicolas		1,000	
<i>Roof alarm</i>		<i>Feasibility study for re-ordering project</i>			
Woodley, Emmanuel	5,000	Stockcross, St John	1,200		
<i>New facilities including toilets &amp; kitchen</i>		<i>Replacement of defective rainwater goods</i>			
Woolhampton, St Peter	10,000	Hurst, St Nicholas	3,000		
<i>Repairs to bell-turret and spire</i>		<i>Replacement heating system</i>			
<b>2021/22</b>	Boyne Hill, All Saints	10,000	Caversham, St Peter	500	
	<i>Restoration of Victorian floor tiles</i>		<i>Re-plastering after water damage</i>		
	East Ilsley, St Mary	3,000			
	<i>Repairs to windows</i>				
Maidenhead, St Joseph RC	5,000				
<i>Replacement of boilers</i>					

**BERKSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST  
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2025**

	Note	<u>2025</u>		<u>2024</u>	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Income</b>					
<b>Voluntary Sources</b>					
Donations, membership & legacies		4,895		9,185	
Gift aid for current year		444		944	
Church Membership		<u>2,415</u>		<u>2,135</u>	
			7,754		12,264
<b>Fundraising Income</b>					
Ride & Stride	1	17,737		18,395	
Englefield Lecture	4	1,010		1,530	
Other events / Fund Raising	5	<u>216</u>		<u>989</u>	
			18,953		20,914
<b>Trading Income</b>					
Christmas Card Sales	3		193		234
<b>Other Income</b>					
Interest		-		18	
United Trust Bank		2,467		1,570	
CCLA		<u>1,731</u>		<u>1,620</u>	
			4,198		3,208
<b>Total Income</b>			<u><b>31,108</b></u>		<u><b>36,620</b></u>
<b>Expenditure</b>					
<b>Direct Charitable Expenditure</b>					
Grants to Churches	2		27,700		35,300
<b>Fundraising Expenses</b>					
Ride & Stride	1		-		-
Englefield Lecture	4		-		308
<b>Administration</b>					
Printing, Postage & Administration			105		140
Web hosting			130		130
Insurance			75		75
Heritage Alliance, Local History Assoc.			66		64
Annual Report & Leaflets			<u>182</u>		<u>218</u>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>			<u><b>28,258</b></u>		<u><b>36,235</b></u>
<b>BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>			<u><b>2,850</b></u>		<u><b>385</b></u>

**Balance Sheet as at 31 March**

	<u>2025</u>		<u>2024</u>	
		£	£	£
<b>Assets</b>				
<b>Yorkshire Bank</b> Current account		34,702		37,417
Ride & Stride account		2,840		1,915
<b>CCLA COIF Charities Deposit Fund</b>		36,673		34,943
<b>United Trust Bank</b>		59,674		57,208
<b>United Trust Bank 1-year deposit</b>		25,000		25,000
<b>Gift Aid</b> on donations, received 9 April 2025		444		-
<b>Yorkshire Bank WREN account (Restricted)</b>				1
		<u><b>159,334</b></u>		<u><b>156,484</b></u>
<b>General Fund</b>				
Balance at 1 April 2024		156,484		156,099
Surplus for year		<u>2,850</u>		<u>385</u>
Balance at 31 March 2025		<u><b>159,334</b></u>		<u><b>156,484</b></u>

**BERKSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST  
NOTES TO THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT**

	<u>2025</u>		<u>2024</u>	
		£	£	£
<b>Note 1 - Ride &amp; Stride</b>				
The major fundraising event during the year was the sponsored Ride & Stride. This raised:				
Gross Funds (without Gift Aid)		<b>22,249</b>	23,749	
Gift Aid		<u><b>5,592</b></u>	<u>4,202</u>	
		<b>27,841</b>	27,951	
less repayments to Churches		<u><b>10,105</b></u>	<u>9,556</u>	
		<b>17,737</b>	18,395	
less expenses		-	-	
		<u><b>17,737</b></u>	<u>18,395</u>	
<b>Note 2 - Grants to Churches in year to 31 March</b>				
St Barnabas, Peasemore			7,000	
St Mary, Kintbury			1,800	
St James, Leckhampstead			6,000	
St Peter, Brimpton			1,400	
All Saints, Windsor			5,000	
St Lawrence, Hungerford			10,000	
St Mary, Thatcham			4,100	
St John, Newbury		<b>10,000</b>		
Thatcham Methodist Church		<b>1,500</b>		
St Andrew, Boxford		<b>10,000</b>		
St Mary, Fawley		<b>500</b>		
St Peter, Caversham		<b>500</b>		
St Nicolas, Newbury		<b>1,000</b>		
St John, Stockcross		<b>1,200</b>		
St Nicholas, Hurst		<b>3,000</b>		
		<u><b>27,700</b></u>	35,300	
<b>Grants offered but not paid at 31 March</b>				
St Mary, Beech Hill		<b>500</b>	500	
St Mary, Fawley			500	
St Andrew, Boxford			10,000	
St Mary, Thatcham *		<b>900</b>	900	
St John, Newbury **			10,000	
St Nicolas, Newbury			1,000	
St Peter, Cranbourne **		<b>15,000</b>	9,000	
St John, Stockcross			1,200	
Thatcham Methodist Church			1,500	
All Saints, East Garston		<b>9,500</b>		
St Mary, Hampstead Norreys		<b>5,000</b>		
St Peter, Brimpton		<b>1,000</b>		
Holy Trinity, Cookham		<b>5,000</b>		
		<u><b>36,900</b></u>	34,600	
<b>Note 3 - Trading profits from sale of Christmas cards</b>				
Total Receipts			193	234
			<u>193</u>	<u>234</u>
It has been decided that it is not economically viable for the Trust to continue to sell Christmas cards. The income shown is for the disposal of remaining stock.				
<b>Note 4 - Englefield Lecture</b>				
Total Receipts			1,010	1,530
Less expenses			-	308
			<u>1,010</u>	<u>1,222</u>
<b>Note 5 - Other Events &amp; Fundraising</b>				
Peter lecture				25
Donation from Wesley Methodist Church				108
Open garden				255
John Johnson study day				240
Visit to Kedermister Library				275
Reading Abbey tour			150	-
Annual meeting teas (less expenses)			66	86
			<u>216</u>	<u>989</u>

\* balance of original grant

\*\* these churches had been awarded a grant in principle, but the amount had not been finalised; the figure shown for 2024 is a provisional sum

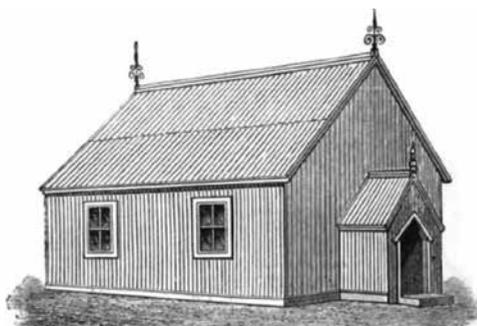
## Tin Tabernacles : Iron Churches in Berkshire

Corrugated iron was invented in the early 19th century - the process for forming corrugations into a sheet of iron by a rolling mill was patented in 1829. Iron rusts easily when exposed to the elements, but a further invention, hot dip galvanising (patented in 1837), enabled sheets to be coated in a thin layer of zinc which made them weatherproof. Victorian entrepreneurs were quick to take advantage of this cheap, light and easily transported roofing and cladding material - prefabricated buildings of corrugated iron were shown in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the first "iron church" was built around 1855.

A number of manufacturers produced iron churches as pre-fabricated kits of parts, ready to be exported to the colonies or sold to meet a growing demand for churches and chapels in the UK. Construction was quick and simple - it needed only a level piece of ground, with a few courses of bricks to provide a foundation. The frame, of wood bolted together, could be erected by local volunteers and the sheets of corrugated iron bolted or nailed onto it. Window and door frames were fastened into the wooden frame, with pre-cut corrugated sheets fitted around them. The interior of the walls and roof was usually lined with a layer of felt, to provide some insulation, and pine tongue-and-groove boarding, which could be whitewashed, stencilled with patterns or religious texts, or stained and varnished. The floor was commonly laid with boards.



*An early advertisement for an iron church - by S Hemming, 1857*



*A mission room - 1880 advertisement by JC Humphries*

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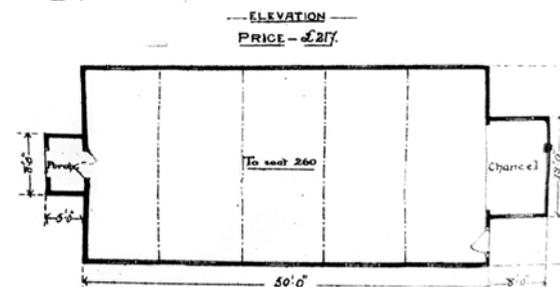
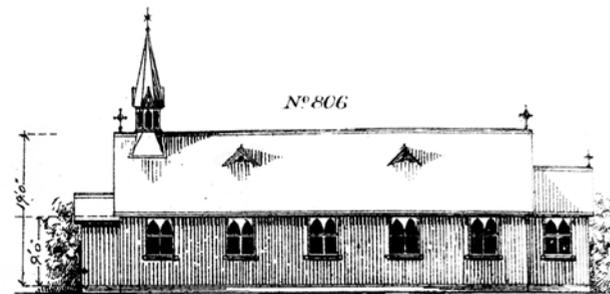
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windows - sometimes even filled with stained glass - and a bell-cote or small spire. Manufacturers also offered iron schools, hospitals and houses.

These iron buildings met a variety of needs. A temporary iron church could be erected to house the congregation whilst their parish church was undergoing restoration. Other 'tin tabernacles' were built as mission rooms or chapels in the more remote parts of parishes, or to provide additional church accommodation in crowded towns or in the rapidly growing suburbs. Once a worshipping community was established, these buildings were often replaced by permanent brick or stone churches - for example, an iron church was erected on the Redlands estate in south-east Reading in 1878, replaced by St Luke's church in 1882-3. Other examples include the Coley area of south Reading (iron church 1877, permanent church of St Saviour 1887-8); Furze Platt, in the north of Maidenhead (iron church 1887, permanent church of St Peter 1897-8); South Ascot (iron mission room of St Saviour 1884, permanent church of All Souls 1896-7, completed 1911). An 1882 guidebook noted that Reading had no less than five iron churches - at the Redlands estate (St Luke), Katesgrove (St Michael), Coley (St Saviour),

North St (Greyfriars mission) and the Barracks (Tilehurst St George).

Iron churches could also serve the needs of temporary communities - an iron mission room (St Bartholomew) was erected in 1879 at Shaw Fields, Cold Ash, to bring church services to the men who were then building the Didcot-Newbury-Southampton railway line and labourers at brick kilns at Clay Hill. It was dismantled in 1889 and moved to the Eastfields area of Newbury, near the gasworks.



Because these buildings were easily taken down and rebuilt elsewhere, they could serve more than one community, and there was a significant second-hand market. The iron church of St Saviour at Coley had previously stood in Farnham, Surrey; when the permanent St Saviour's church was consecrated, the iron building was moved to the Elm Lodge Estate in west Reading, to

become St Mark's chapel - in turn replaced by a permanent church in 1904-5. In 1913 the Oxford Diocesan Church Building Society decided to buy an iron church (at a cost of £300), which could be hired out to parishes



*St Paul's iron church, Lower Whitley, Reading - erected 1911, closed 2011*

for temporary use - it was first erected at Botley, to the west of Oxford.

Although originally seen as a temporary measure, for short-term use, an iron church was actually quite comfortable and durable, and some found a long-term function. St Paul's

church, in Lower Whitley, south Reading, was erected in 1911 and continued in use until 2011; St Saviour's, erected on Lower Common Bucklebury in 1870 and moved to a new site and enlarged in 1902, was only demolished in the 1970s, as was St Mary-the-Less at Winkfield Row, which had been erected in 1896. The iron room at Tilehurst St George was replaced by a brick-built church in 1886, and became the church hall; the iron church of St Barnabas, Emmer Green, erected in 1897 and replaced by a permanent church building in 1925 is still in use as a church hall.

There is only one 'tin tabernacle' in Berkshire which is still in use as a church - St Paul at Warren Row. After missionary work in the area by the Church Army, a



*St Paul's mission church, Warren Row*

Photo credit: Wollaston Rose Architects



*St Paul's mission church, Warren Row - erected 1894 and still in use*

mission room was erected in 1894 as a chapel of ease to St Peter, Knowl Hill, to accommodate 80. Land was given by Sir Gilbert Clayton East, the principal local landowner. The prefabricated iron building was supplied by JC Humphreys Ltd of Knightsbridge, at a cost of £104 14s 0d; the total cost including building work and fittings came to £191, which was raised by public subscription. Waltham St Lawrence, which had been given a new set of silver Communion plate, donated their old set for use at Warren Row. The mission room was dedicated on 6 October 1894 by the Bishop of Reading, and licensed for services. The east window and four side windows were originally filled with stained glass, but that was removed in the 1920s. The present east window contains three figures of saints, designed by GE Street and made by Hardman, for the east window of St Michael at the North Gate, Oxford as part of Street's major restoration in 1853-4. St Michael's was badly damaged by fire in 1953, and much of the Victorian work was removed in the restoration by Gilbert Flavel, including the east window; Canon Basil Clarke, the noted architectural historian who was vicar of Knowl Hill and Secretary to the Oxford DAC, rescued six figures of saints from the window, and installed three at Knowl Hill and three at Warren Row.

**Front cover** : Newbury St John - the new glass porch