

Berkshire Historic Churches Trust

A wide-angle, low-perspective photograph of the interior of a large, historic Gothic Revival church. The view is down a long, carpeted aisle flanked by rows of dark wood pews with light blue cushions. The ceiling is a high, dark wood coffered vault. The walls are light-colored with large, pointed stone arches supported by tall, slender columns. In the distance, a large, ornate organ is visible on a raised platform. The lighting is warm and even, highlighting the architectural details.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023–24

Berkshire Historic Churches Trust

- Patron** The Rt Hon Lord Benyon of Englefield PC
- Joint Presidents** The Rt Revd Olivia Graham, Bishop of Reading
James Puxley Esq. CVO, Lord-Lieutenant of Berkshire *
- Honorary Vice-Presidents** The Lady Eliza Mays-Smith • The Most Revd and Rt Hon the Lord Carey of Clifton
Ian Pilkington Esq • Erica Lady Harman • The Rt Revd Dom Geoffrey Scott OSB
- Trustees** Graham Barker DL • Jim Barnes-Phillips • Dr Peter Durrant MBE DL
Catherine Haig • 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 • The Revd Carol Dunk (to Oct 2023)
Marion Elly • Catherine Haig • Liz Kitch • Prue Matchwick
Torquil Montague-Johnstone • The Ven Stephen Pullin
Henry Sanders AABC RIAS RIBA • Jonathan Welfare OBE
- 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.

** Mr Puxley retired as Lord Lieutenant on 23rd October 2023, but has continued as Joint President during the reporting year*

Approved by the Trustees on 3 June 2024 and signed on their behalf by

Peter Durrant

..... Trustee

from the Chairman



This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust. Founded in 1984 as the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust, and renamed in 2020, for nearly four decades we have been making grants to support the repair and restoration of Berkshire's churches. The first grant offers were made in 1987, and the first payments in 1988. In total we have given away over £750,000, and have made a significant contribution to the preservation of these wonderful buildings.

Much needed in 1984, our support is needed still more today, as rising costs and dwindling congregations make it harder and harder for local churches to raise the funds they need. But churches are there for everyone, not just the faithful few who gather on Sundays, and they must be preserved, not only as beacons of faith, but as places of historical value, architectural merit and artistic beauty – and also, as has been shown so often, as places from which community benefit, of all kinds, can be delivered.

It can be done, as striking examples of ambitious projects realised across Berkshire in recent years have shown. Our Trust has helped many of these. That we have been able to do so is entirely down to the generosity of our supporters – donors, subscribers and sponsors of Ride and Stride.

Thank you for your support.

Peter Durrant

Report of the Executive Committee

GRANTS

We gave seven grants in 2023/24, to a total of £35,300 – a significant increase from the previous year, but still only a fraction of the costs of the projects we supported. We also made five definite offers for work which, in most cases, is now under way, and agreed in principle to support two further projects, leaving the actual level of grant to be decided once details of the work to be undertaken (and the associated costs) have been received.



Our largest grant was to **St Lawrence, Hungerford**, for a project to develop the west end of the church with greatly improved facilities – a kitchen, capable of serving hot meals, two toilets (replacing a ‘glorified broom cupboard’ with no disabled access), three meeting rooms (two at ground level, with folding partitions to allow opening to the body of the church, and one in the existing gallery), and a new

vestry. The church has an active programme of events and activities, but attempts to develop these further have been greatly hampered by the poor facilities available, which this project addressed. The total cost was £813,000. We gave our maximum grant of £10,000.

Two other grants also helped fund projects that were wholly or in part to improve facilities. At **St Barnabas, Peasemore**, we supported a scheme designed to make much better use of space at



the west end of the church, and (by the installation of a York stone floor) to enhance the appearance of that end of the church. A wooden platform has been removed, so that the whole area is level, the font has been brought forward from its cramped position in the base of the tower to a new location in the nave, and the tower space has been used for a lobby/refreshment preparation area and a disabled-compliant toilet. Running water has also been introduced into the church for the first time. The scheme, developed in conjunction with the village community, was costed at £146,500. We gave £7,000.

The third development grant also included an element for restoration. This was at **St James, Leckhampstead**, a church where we had previously supported a project to undertake major repairs to the roof (see the Annual Report for 2019/20). The new project, the third stage in an extended programme of work, comprised the levelling of the floor, which was relaid with traditional tiles (the Victorian ones being used as far as possible), with electric underfloor heating, supplemented with fan-assisted convection heaters; the retention of the Victorian pews (apart from those too badly affected by death-watch beetle to be useable), now mounted on castors; and the installation of a toilet and servery. As at Peasemore, the scheme was designed to enable the church to serve the village community more effectively, and to provide a space for larger events that cannot be accommodated in the village hall. It was costed at £168,000. We gave £6,000.



In addition to supporting these major projects, we gave grants to **All Saints, Windsor**, for a scheme to improve the very inadequate lighting in the nave (and simultaneously, through the use of LED lighting, to

reduce energy consumption; £5,000); to **St Mary, Thatcham**, for repairs to the roof and walls at the west end (the church had suffered from damp penetration, partly as a result of a blockage to the gully in the valley between the nave and north aisle roofs; £4,100); to **St Mary, Kintbury**, for reroofing the vestry following lead theft (£1,800); and to **St Peter, Brimpton**, to replace the heating system following the failure of the ancient oil-fired boiler (£1,400).

Most of the grants offered but not yet paid, were for repairs, some of significant scope. **St Andrew, Boxford**, on a low-lying site next to the River Lambourn, has suffered recently from damp in the walls. In addition, water has penetrated the old lead roof of the tower, causing damage to the main oak beams, which have also suffered from death-watch beetle attack. We offered £10,000 towards an estimated cost of £150,000. We also offered smaller sums to **Thatcham Methodist Church**



(£1,500) to replace a worn-out flat roof on an extension to the original (1834) chapel; to **St John, Stockcross** (£1,200) for repairs to rainwater goods; and to **St Mary, Fawley**, (£500) for repairs to the roof of the tower (the lead of the



pyramidal roof had split and half had become detached, so that daylight could be seen through the roof and the weather and birds could enter: the inspecting architect also reported a close encounter with a squirrel inside the bell chamber). Additionally, a further £900 has been promised to St Mary, Thatcham, towards the cost of installing a French drain. (This was part of an original offer of £5,000, but will not be paid until this part of the work has been completed). We made an in-principle commitment to **St Peter, Cranbourne**, for repairs to the roof, but wanted to see more detailed specifications and costings before determining the actual size of the grant.



Finally, we made an offer of £1,000 to **St Nicolas, Newbury**, towards a feasibility study for developing a scheme that would make major improvements to the church, but is likely to cost in excess of £1 million, and an in-principle commitment to **St John, Newbury**, for a project to improve access: here, as at Cranbourne, we are waiting for further details before determining the size of the grant. We also have an offer to **St Mary, Beech Hill** (towards the cost of a survey to investigate a rather alarming crack in the south wall), carried over from the previous year.

We are very aware of the inexorable rise in costs facing churches planning both repairs and improvements. In response to this situation, the Trustees have agreed to increase our maximum grant from £10,000 (a figure that has been in place for many years) to £15,000.

EVENTS

The 2023 Englefield Lecture, held in the Long Gallery of Englefield House, was given by Professor Nigel Saul, Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at Royal Holloway, University of London. His subject was “English Medieval Parish Churches: the Endless Joy of Variety”, and a large and appreciative audience was treated to an absorbing lecture, accompanied by a dazzling succession of images of churches from across historic Berkshire. The event raised £1,200 for the Trust.

Following the success of our visit to Bray in 2022, we arranged three further events for supporters. On a lovely sunny day in June a group of us enjoyed a visit to the gardens at Bucklebury House, where our host



was trustee Willie Hartley Russell. He treated us to a leisurely tour, embracing all the varied areas of the gardens, including the medieval fishponds (Bucklebury was once a possession of Reading Abbey), followed by a delicious tea. In July, on a day that was sometimes very wet and always overcast, our secretary John Pritchard led a study tour of buildings designed by the architect John Johnson. We began the afternoon at Woolhampton House, now Elstree School, where, in the 1850s, Johnson designed alterations to the original house, and from there visited churches at Woolhampton, Midgham and Brimpton, ending the afternoon with tea and cakes at Brimpton. In August the sun returned to smile on us in Slough, where trustee Graham Barker led a visit to two churches, first St Laurence in Upton, a magnificent Norman building, and then St Mary, Langley Marish, which houses the amazing Kedermister Library. After the visits, we repaired to the Red Lion, across the road from St Mary's, for lunch. All three events were greatly enjoyed by those attending, and also raised valuable funds for the Trust.

The annual Ride and Stride, in September, took place on an exceptionally hot day, and all participants are to be congratulated on their endurance! We were encouraged to find that the sum raised for the Trust was slightly greater than in the previous year. However, attracting active engagement remains a problem. A full report appears on pages 9-10.

The final event of the year was our annual meeting and church tour, which took place later in September, and included visits to five churches in central Berkshire. A full report follows.

COMMUNICATIONS

Publication of our Newsletter continued, bringing news of the Trust to supporters and others. Three issues were published, very attractively designed and produced by our Secretary, containing news of recent grants and forthcoming events, reports of Trust activities, and occasional articles of interest. They are sent to all regular supporters (by email where possible) and are available on our website.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2024 the Trust celebrates its 40th anniversary. Over those 40 years we have given away over three-quarters of a million pounds to Berkshire churches. This has made a real difference to churches facing major challenges maintaining and repairing historic buildings. But is it enough? Though we are a small Trust, with resource challenges ourselves, we would certainly like to do more. Of course, we would like to have more money to give away, and one ambition must be to improve our fund-raising – for which we will need to raise our profile in Berkshire. But we would also like to offer more help to churches planning major projects, particularly since, in many cases, those involved in such planning will have had little prior experience to draw on. The sub-committee set up to consider these issues continues to meet, and though progress has been perhaps slower than we had hoped, plans are being developed which we hope will contribute to making the Trust more effective in achieving its objectives.

One urgent need is for more people to step to active roles in the Executive Committee, both to fill vacancies (Bracknell area representative, Ride+Stride co-ordinator) and for new positions (Events co-ordinator, Churches membership secretary, and people to undertake publicity, marketing and fund-raising).

PEOPLE

During the year we said farewell to the Revd Carol Dunk, who had joined the Executive Committee in December 2021, as commitments elsewhere obliged her to stand down. We thank her for her contribution.

Peter Durrant

Annual Meeting 2023

Our 2023 annual meeting and church tour took us to mid-Berkshire, to visit five churches just to the west of Reading.

We began the afternoon at Holy Trinity, Theale. After a brief business meeting held in the open air in front of the west end, we spent time looking round the church itself. It was built between 1820 and 1822 (the tower was added between 1827 and 1832) and has been described as one of the most remarkable of all English churches for its date. The architectural style is clearly modelled on Salisbury cathedral. It was paid for by Mrs Sophia Sheppard, sister of Dr Martin Routh, Rector of Tilehurst, the mother parish, and also President of Magdalen College, Oxford.



From here we drove to St Mark's Church, Englefield, where Ann and Miles Edgar gave us a guided tour. This is a thirteenth-century church, with an early sixteenth-century chantry chapel north of the chancel, largely rebuilt by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1857 and 1868. It remains a very attractive estate church, lying at the end of the village street, and in the shadow of Englefield House.

We then drove north, calling first at St Laurence, Tidmarsh and then at St Nicholas Sulham. The former is medieval: it was built in the twelfth century and remodelled and extended east in the thirteenth, which is the date of the unusual medieval apse. It has



a splendid Norman south door. By contrast, Sulham church was rebuilt in 1836-38 by the rector, John Wilder, who seems to have acted as his own architect. It has some delightful details, including a triple-arched stone screen between nave and chancel, and a hammer-beam roof. In both churches our guide was our Secretary, John Pritchard.

The final church on our journey was St James the Less, Pangbourne, where we were welcomed by Ellie Thorne who – after we had enjoyed a splendid tea – gave us a guided tour of the building. This is mostly Victorian, to designs by the Reading architect WH Woodman, though it has an eighteenth-century brick tower, and some rather nice monuments transferred from the earlier building.



We finished the day as usual with a service of evensong, where we gave thanks for our heritage of historic churches and for the work of the Trust in helping to preserve them, and prayed for blessing on our future endeavours.

We were made very welcome at all the churches we visited, and we extend our thanks to those who helped to arrange the day for us and who gave up their Saturday afternoons to welcome us.

Ride and Stride 2023

Ride and Stride 2023 took place on one of the hottest-ever September days. However, notwithstanding the heat, riders and striders set out in all parts of Berkshire to raise money for the county's historic churches. Together they succeeded in raising almost £28,000 – the best result for many years.

After a proportion of this was returned directly to participating churches, it means that the Trust's funds, and thus its ability to give grants, were boosted by over £18,000.

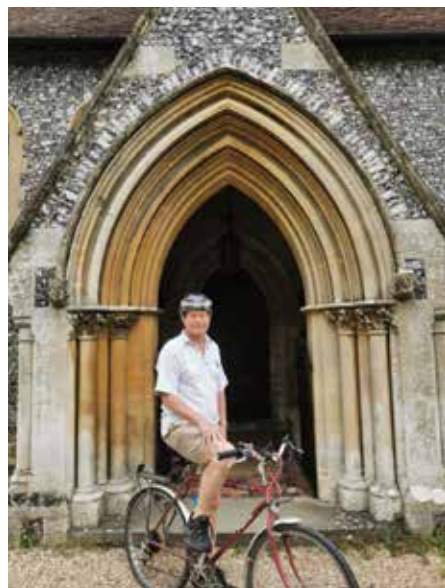
Of the 47 churches that made returns (this was slightly fewer than in 2022), some four-fifths had raised funds, in sums ranging for £20 to £2,500. The church with the best result was St Matthew, Midgham, but five churches raised over £1,000. Churches reporting visitor numbers recorded between one and 24 each, though only six had ten or more visitors on the day.

Altogether nearly 90 individuals took part either as riders or striders, or as stewards, welcoming people to their church. This was a considerable increase in participation from 2022, though the total number of church visits recorded was down – perhaps it was just too hot! Even so, some remarkable individual performances were achieved, including by one cyclist who clocked up 26 churches in east Berkshire between Wokingham and Maidenhead, and another who managed 17 in the Reading area.

Our trustee Torquil Montague-Johnstone visited 26 churches in his tour of the Bradfield area, where he is the area co-ordinator. Trustees Catherine Haig and Peter Durrant called at seven churches in the course of a nine-mile walk starting at Knowl Hill and proceeding by a circuitous route to Twyford.

Ride and 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, the riders and striders themselves, and those who generously sponsored them. We also acknowledge the work of the Trust's Ride and Stride team. This year's success, in challenging economic circumstances, is something to be very pleased about.

Nevertheless, we remain a little disappointed that we seem unable to encourage greater participation. For those who do take part it is generally a very positive experience, and our challenge for the future is to bring both more churches and more individuals to the event.



Recent Grants to Churches

	£		£
2017/18			
Binfield, All Saints <i>Roof and other repairs</i>	10,000	Leckhampstead, St James <i>Repairs to windows</i>	2,000
Maidenhead, St Mary <i>Major refurbishment</i>	10,000	Wokingham, All Saints <i>Roof alarm</i>	1,000
Newbury, St Nicolas <i>Replacement of lighting system</i>	5,000	Woodley, Emmanuel <i>New facilities including toilets & kitchen</i>	5,000
Shinfield, St Mary <i>Roof alarm</i>	1,000	Woolhampton, St Peter <i>Repairs to bell-turret and spire</i>	10,000
Windsor, St John the Baptist <i>Buttress repairs</i>	5,000		
2018/19		2021/22	
Ascot Heath, All Saints <i>Repointing brickwork</i>	1,000	Boyne Hill, All Saints <i>Restoration of Victorian floor tiles</i>	10,000
Bisham, All Saints <i>Disabled toilet and meeting room</i>	5,000	East Ilsley, St Mary <i>Repairs to windows</i>	3,000
Bracknell, Holy Trinity <i>Roof repairs and new slates</i>	10,000	Maidenhead, St Joseph RC <i>Replacement of boilers</i>	5,000
Cookham, Holy Trinity <i>Restoration of tower</i>	5,000		
Reading, Sacred Heart (Polish) <i>Roof repairs</i>	10,000	2022/23	
Sandhurst, St Michael <i>Restoration of stained glass</i>	2,000	Beedon, St Nicholas <i>Repairs to plaster in ceiling</i>	450
Thatcham Methodist <i>New front door and flooring</i>	2,000	Eastbury, St James <i>Renewal of roof on south side</i>	5,000
		East Garston, All Saints <i>Tower access and repairs to stonework</i>	3,300
2019/20		Great Shefford, St Mary <i>Inspection & treatment of dry rot</i>	500
East Garston, All Saints <i>Repair of buttress</i>	2,000	Wokingham, All Saints <i>New floor, heating, toilets, servery, access</i>	10,000
Leckhampstead, St James <i>Renewing roof</i>	10,000		
Thatcham URC <i>Repair of windows</i>	500	2023/24	
		Brimpton, St Peter <i>New under-pew electric heating</i>	1,400
2020/21		Hungerford, St Laurence <i>New toilets, kitchen, meeting rooms and heating system</i>	10,000
Combe, St Swithun <i>Roof alarm</i>	1,000	Kintbury, St Mary <i>Replace stolen lead on roof with TCSS</i>	1,800
East Garston, All Saints <i>Roof repairs</i>	5,000	Leckhampstead, St James <i>Re-lay nave floor, heating, toilet, kitchen</i>	6,000
Farnborough, All Saints <i>Repairs to tower roof and nave window</i>	2,000	Peasemore, St Barnabas <i>Create meeting area, with toilet & kitchen</i>	7,000
Fawley, St Mary <i>Replace guttering</i>	2,000	Thatcham, St Mary <i>Repairs to roof and walls</i>	4,100
Lambourn, St Michael <i>Boiler replacement</i>	1,500	Windsor, All Saints <i>New lighting system</i>	5,000

**BERKSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2024

	Note	<u>2024</u>		<u>2023</u>	
		£	£	£	£
Income					
Voluntary Sources					
Donations, membership & legacies		9,185		9,106	
Gift aid for current year		944		639	
Church Membership		<u>2,135</u>		<u>2,230</u>	
			12,264		11,975
Fundraising Income					
Ride & Stride	1	18,395		16,192	
Englefield Lecture	4	1,530		1,530	
Other events / Fund Raising	5	<u>989</u>		<u>457</u>	
			20,914		18,179
Trading Income					
Christmas Card Sales	3		234		547
Other Income					
Interest		18		49	
United Trust Bank		1,570		432	
CCLA		<u>1,176</u>		<u>581</u>	
			2,764		1,062
Total Income			<u><u>36,176</u></u>		<u><u>31,763</u></u>
Expenditure					
Direct Charitable Expenditure					
Grants to Churches	2		35,300		19,250
Fundraising Expenses					
Ride & Stride	1		-		-
Lecture	4		308		266
Trading Expenses					
Expenses re Christmas Cards			-		51
Administration					
Printing, Postage & Administration			140		559
Web hosting			130		-
Insurance			75		150
Heritage Alliance, Local History Assoc.			64		-
Annual Report & Leaflets			<u>218</u>		<u>314</u>
Total Expenditure			<u><u>36,235</u></u>		<u><u>20,590</u></u>
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD			<u><u>(59)</u></u>		<u><u>11,173</u></u>

Balance Sheet as at 31 March

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£
Assets		
Yorkshire Bank		
Current account	37,417	36,828
Savings account	-	48,559
Ride & Stride account	1,915	1,590
CCLA COIF Charities Deposit Fund	34,499	33,322
United Trust Bank	57,208	35,638
United Trust Bank 1-year deposit	25,000	-
R&S for 2022 received in 2023/24	-	161
Yorkshire Bank WREN account (Restricted)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	<u><u>156,040</u></u>	<u><u>156,099</u></u>
General Fund		
Balance at 1 April 2023	156,099	144,926
Surplus for year	<u>(59)</u>	<u>11,173</u>
Balance at 31 March 2024	<u><u>156,040</u></u>	<u><u>156,099</u></u>

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

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
	£	£	£	£
Note 1 - Ride & Stride				
The major fundraising event during the year was the sponsored Ride & Stride. This raised:				
Gross Funds (without Gift Aid)	23,749	21,881		
Gift Aid	4,202	4,102		
	27,951	25,983		
less repayments to Churches	9,556	9,790		
	18,395	16,192		
less expenses	-	-		
	18,395	16,192		
Note 3 - Trading profits from sale of Christmas cards				
Total Receipts			234	547
Less purchases & postage			-	51
			234	497
No account has been taken of the value of stock in hand, which at 31 March 2023 was negligible. It has been decided that it is not economically viable for the Trust to continue to sell Christmas cards.				

Note 2 - Grants to Churches in year to 31 March

St Mary, Great Shefford		500
St James, Eastbury		5,000
All Saints, East Garston		3,300
St Nicholas, Beedon		450
All Saints, Wokingham		10,000
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	-
	35,300	19,250

Grants offered but not paid at 31 March

St Mary, East Ilsley		7,000
St Mary, Kintbury		1,800
St Barnabas, Peasemore		7,000
St Lawrence, Hungerford *		5,000
All Saints, Windsor		5,000
St James, Leckhampstead		6,000
St Mary, Beech Hill	500	500
St Mary, Fawley	500	-
St Andrew, Boxford	10,000	-
St Mary, Thatcham **	900	-
St John, Newbury ***	10,000	-
St Nicolas, Newbury	1,000	-
St Peter, Cranbourne ***	9,000	-
St John, Stockcross	1,200	-
Thatcham Methodist Church	1,500	-
	34,600	32,300

* amount to be confirmed

** balance of original grant

*** these churches have been awarded a grant in principle, but the amount has not been finalised; the figure shown is a provisional sum

Note 4 - Englefield Lecture

Total Receipts	1,530	1,530
Less expenses	308	267
	1,222	1,263

Note 5 - Other Events & Fundraising

Ringers teas	25	79
Donation from Wesley Methodist Church	108	-
Visit to Bray	-	300
Open garden	255	-
John Johnson study day	240	-
Visit to Kedermister Library	275	-
Annual meeting teas (less expenses)	86	78
	989	457

Berkshire Churches Trust - the first 40 years

In 2024 the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust celebrates forty years of supporting the churches of Royal Berkshire. Established in 1984 as the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust (it changed its name in 2020), it has made grants totalling over £750,000 to churches of all ages and many different denominations, for essential repairs and for the installation of the basic facilities (principally kitchens and toilets) that are necessary to enable the buildings to be used both for worship and as true centres of the communities that they serve.

Of course, setting up a trust doesn't happen overnight. The first moves to create our Trust came in 1982, and were inspired by the Suffolk Churches Trust's bike ride, first held in that year. Brigadier David Barbour, the driving force behind our Trust, heard through a nephew of this new venture in Suffolk. Why, he thought, can't we do something similar in Berkshire? Discussions with the Bishop of Reading, the Archdeacon of Berkshire and rural deans followed. Some were enthusiastic, others less so (David Barbour's surviving correspondence shows occasional frustration at the slow rate of progress he was able to make), but eventually it was agreed to go ahead. But questions remained to be answered. What should the Trust be called? Should it support just 'historic' churches (which, to David, really meant medieval: some of his comments on Berkshire's Victorian churches would have horrified the Victorian Society!)? Should it be just for Anglican churches, or should it include (as it eventually did) churches of all denominations? What about the 'contested' areas of Berkshire – the 'occupied' territories now in Oxfordshire and that part of the Deanery of Burnham that was transferred to the administrative county of Berkshire in 1974?

Eventually these thorny problems were resolved, and in February 1984 the Trust was formally set up, for the 'preservation repair maintenance improvement upkeep beautification and reconstruction' of churches in Berkshire or 'any parish adjacent thereto'. The first trustees were the Bishop of Reading, the Archdeacon of Berkshire, Sir John Smith of Shottesbrooke, and David Barbour himself.

But to fulfil its mission the Trust needed money. By June 1986 some £1,500 had been raised, but that wasn't going to go far. David Barbour's enquiries had revealed that over the previous few years just 13 churches had needed to raise over £360,000 for essential repairs, and that was clearly only

a small part of the story. A fundraising campaign was therefore set up. Though a man of great energy and drive, David Barbour could clearly not do this on his own. So in 1986 an approach was made to Erica Harman – and thus began her connection with the Trust that happily still continues.

Funds were raised initially from donations and subscriptions, and by December 1986 some £3,295 had been received. After much planning and hard work the Bike Ride was held for the first time in September 1987. It was a great success, raising some £11,600, and (as the annual report for the year rather oddly declared) 'generating much goodwill and some joy'.

David Barbour's vision had been achieved, but tragically he did not live to see it develop. He died suddenly, just before the Bike Ride (by now called CRoW – 'Cycle, Run or Walk') in September 1988. His contribution had been vital. In the words of the annual report for 1988, 'he was the founder of the Trust, its Secretary, sometime Treasurer and Organiser of the CRoW. His loss to the Trust cannot be measured: it owed its whole existence to his vision, courage and industriousness'. He had, however, lived to see the first grant offers made by the Trust – a total of £7,700, divided between seven churches. Then, as now, grants became payable only once the work they supported has been completed. The first to be paid, in 1988, were to St Gregory, Welford (£500), St Agnes, Reading (£500), and St Mary, Burghfield (£3,500).



David Barbour and Erica Harman in 1987

Following David Barbour's death, much of the work that he had initiated fell upon Erica Harman. Whilst ably supported by a succession of Trustees and Executive Committee members, it was her energy and determination that proved vital to the Trust's success. Looking back in 2011 after 25 years as Chairman, she wrote:

"I shall never forget the excitement of the first meeting of the Executive Committee when we had actually raised enough money to start making offers of grants. At last we felt we were doing something useful and the atmosphere was completely different. The late Brigadier Barbour and I were

completely ignorant about how to go about it. We knew there should be an application form, so David Barbour cobbled one together on his typewriter (at that time I was Chairman and he was Secretary because he had been to Staff College and could type better than me). He was all for sending the money to the churches as soon as we had decided how much to give them, but by now Jo Cormier had joined us as an Honorary Architectural Adviser and she pointed out that we needed some proof that work had actually been done before we parted with our hard-earned cash'.

Much had been achieved in those 25 years. A leaflet on church maintenance (later enlarged to a handbook) had been published, Christmas cards introduced, a new appeal launched (in 1991), and new events, such as open gardens, organised. Between 1988 and 2008 the Trust administered the distribution of money received from the Landfill Tax. And CRoW went from strength to strength, in 2007 raising over £28,000. And, of course, many more grants had been approved.

Whilst it was accepted that grants should not be paid before the work had been completed, it was from the beginning the policy of the Trust to respond to applications as soon as possible, both to provide encouragement to the applicants and in the hope that our support would encourage other funders to step forward.

Many of the problems leading to applications to the Trust in those early days are, unsurprisingly, ones that we are familiar with now: leaking roofs, crumbling stonework, decaying timbers, fractured tracery in windows and collapsing rainwater goods. Damage to shingles caused by woodpeckers is nothing new either. Floors wear out too, though only once, as far as I know, did we have to respond to a cry for help from a churchwarden whose floor (in his own words) had turned into Weetabix (an early venture into underfloor heating, overlaid with sub-standard flooring by the contractor, was evidently the cause of that problem).

In recent years our grants have helped, amongst other things, to renew or repair roofs (St James, Woodley; All Saints, Binfield; St James, Leckhampstead; St James, Eastbury), to repair a tower (Holy Trinity, Cookham) and to re-shingle a spire (St Peter, Woolhampton), to repair windows (St Nicolas, Newbury; St Michael and All Angels, Sandhurst), to replace a floor (a particularly fine Victorian example at All Saints, Boyne Hill), to improve or replace heating systems (St Michael, Lambourn; St Joseph, Maidenhead) and to support major refurbishment work (St Andrew and St Mary Magdalen, Maidenhead; All Saints, Wokingham). In 2015 the trustees agreed to accept applications for projects to instal

kitchens and toilets, and grants have been offered for this purpose to All Saints, Bisham (a particularly challenging case, as the drain had to run uphill), Emmanuel Church, Woodley and St James, Leckhampstead. More recently they have offered small grants for investigative work, in the hope that early identification of problems will lead to early action and will save money in the long run, and for feasibility studies to plan major projects.

Meanwhile the Trust has developed new activities designed to raise its profile and to keep supporters informed. Following a new appeal in 2013, a reception and exhibition of Victorian church building plans was held at the Berkshire Record Office. The following year the annual Englefield Lecture was inaugurated (so called as it is usually held in the Long Gallery at Englefield House, by kind permission of Lord Benyon). Not always on a church theme – indeed, the first was on Paul Sandby's drawings of Windsor, and a later one discussed the life of the first Duke of Wellington – this has proved very popular, and has raised useful income as well. A new website was introduced in 2018, and in 2022 the first of a regular series of newsletters was distributed to supporters and others. Also in 2022 new events, principally visits and study days, were offered. At the same time the annual meeting and church tour continues to provide an opportunity for supporters to see some of the work to which their subscriptions and donations have contributed, and CRoW – now redesignated 'Ride and Stride', to match the name by which it is known across the country – continues to bring in valuable funds.

In 2024 our work remains as vital as ever. Though the need is huge and our contributions are modest, they are still extremely important. They give encouragement, and they help to lever contributions from other sources, and without them, some projects would undoubtedly struggle.

Church buildings are important – not just to regular worshippers, but to many outside the church, even unbelievers, who nevertheless value them as community spaces, as landmarks in our countryside, as buildings of enormous architectural, artistic and heritage worth – and often simply as quiet places for reflection and regeneration. They have also, as recent studies by the National Churches Trust and the University of York clearly demonstrate, proved immensely important as places from which help can be given in times of crisis. Our mission is to help local communities ensure that these special places can continue to serve their communities for generations to come.

Front cover : Hungerford St Lawrence