

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



In September 2024, the National Lottery Heritage Fund launched a new three-year initiative to support the UK's places of worship. This will involve a number of different initiatives that seek to tackle sector-wide issues and funding gaps and to secure the future of these important buildings, backed by lottery funding. As Sir Chris Bryant, Heritage Minister, said: 'Thanks to funding provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, these important buildings will continue to thrive and serve the communities that cherish them for generations to come'.

But in January, Sir Chris also announced only a one-year extension to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which offers grants to offset the VAT on building repairs, as well as a cap on the amount an individual building can claim, and on the total funds available (see p.8 for more information). In a difficult financial climate for both congregations and government, this is a worrying development.

It is clear how important these historic buildings are to their communities. A truly impressive number of people and church congregations contacted their MPs about the LPW Grant Scheme, resulting in MPs highlighting many examples of churches in their own constituencies in their speeches. On a county level, the NHCT raised more than £35,000 through Ride and Stride this year, and reading the reports from the churches that have received NHCT grants is encouraging and inspiring. Tourism in churches, to which Andrew Presland draws our attention (see p.28), is a meaningful way forward to build on this affection, and to generate wider awareness.

Within this uncertain landscape, our Trust really makes a difference, and we should be proud of that. When the beautifully melancholic bells of our village churches ring out on a warm summer's evening, something will always feel right.

Eleanor Townsend and Alice Magnay (Editors)



Supporting the Trust

Become a Friend – Leave a legacy – Give practical help

Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust

President: James Saunders Watson, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire
Vice-Presidents: The Rt Revd. Debbie Sellin, The Bishop of Peterborough
The Rt Revd. John Holbrook, The Bishop of Brixworth

Trustees: James Saunders Watson, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire;
The Rt Revd. Debbie Sellin, The Bishop of Peterborough

Hilary Aslett	Bruce Bailey
John Barker	Edwin Byland
Liz Doherty	Revd. Robert Farmer
Dr Martin Gaskell	Val Hartley
Virginia Henley	The Rt Revd. John Holbrook
Gareth Lugar-Mawson	Alice Magnay
James Miller	Michael Moore
The Ven. Richard Ormston	Susan Parkinson
Canon Andrew Presland	Eleanor Townsend
Rosalind Willatts	

His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire and the Bishop of Peterborough are trustees of the charity by virtue of their offices, and they appoint the remaining trustees. The number cannot exceed sixty, but cannot be less than four, and every trustee has one vote. These trustees administer the management of the charity.

Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust was constituted by a Trust Deed
dated 10th March 1955
Registered Charity Number: 1021632

Registered Address:

The Diocesan Offices, Bouverie Court,
6 The Lakes, Bedford Road, Northampton NN4 7YD

Trust Officers

Chairman:	Gareth Lugar-Mawson
Vice-Chairman:	John Barker
Treasurer:	Eddie Byland (to April 2024), Michael Moore (from April 2024)
Grants Secretary:	Michael Moore
Secretary and Friends Secretary:	Nuala Salter
County Ride and Stride Organisers:	Val Hartley and Liz Doherty

www.nhct.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - 2024

I am very pleased to report that, once again, 2024 was a successful year for the Trust.

In 2024, the Trust:

- Paid £67,300 in grants
- Raised £35,535 (to date) in the Ride & Stride
- Put in a claim for £5,587 in Gift Aid
- Received £6,540.60 in donations and subscriptions

I express my thanks, and those of all the trustees, to:

- Our President, James Saunders Watson, HM Lord Lieutenant for Northamptonshire, and our Vice-Presidents Bishop Debbie Sellin, and Bishop John Holbrook for their strong continuing friendship, support and encouragement.
- Michael Moore, our Grants Secretary, and to John Barker and Rosalind Willatts for visiting the applicant churches and chapels and reporting on their circumstances.
- Michael Moore, again, for stepping up to the plate and taking on the onerous job of being the Trust's Treasurer.
- Val Hartley and Liz Doherty, the Ride and Stride County Organisers, for their enthusiasm and the many hours they spent in planning and coordinating the event, and to all the Riders and Striders, Area Organisers, Church and Chapel Organisers and Church and Chapel sitters. Ride and Stride is the main funding source for our grants, and in making grants the trustees give priority to those churches and chapels which have a history of participation in the Ride and Stride, particularly those that have raised sponsorship money.
- Nuala Salter at the Diocesan Office, who has the unenviable task of being the Trust's Secretary and Friends' Secretary and who is doing a wonderful job in both roles.
- The Capron family for hosting the 2024 Celebration Evening in the beautiful surroundings of Southwick Hall on a wonderful English summer evening in July (see the article later in this Report).
- Bruce Bailey for organising the 2024 Church Study Day in August in which we visited the churches at Grendon, Whiston, Castle Ashby and Easton Maudit (see the article later in this Report).



Striders at St Martin's, Welton for Ride and Stride: (l-r) Pat Kent, Lynsey Dykes, Christine Reid, Jan Shepperson

- Eleanor Townsend and Alice Magnay for preparing this Report.
- All who made donations to the Trust and all the Trust's Friends for their continuing support.

I welcome on board our new trustee, Alice Magnay, who has very kindly agreed to help Eleanor Townsend with the preparation and editing of this Report.

I pay a heartfelt tribute to Eddie Byland, our former Treasurer, for the excellent way in which he looked after the Trust's accounts during the many years he held that role, and the very efficient way he dealt with the numerous individual Ride & Stride payments involved, making the Gift Aid refund claims to HMRC, and coping with the (sometimes strange) requirements of our bank. We made a presentation to Eddie at the Celebration Evening to show the Trust's gratitude for all his hard work.

It is with very great sadness that I report the deaths in 2024 of three stalwart supporters of the Trust: our Vice President, David Laing, our former Secretary, Ruth Fitch and Eric Peplow who made many inspections of our grant recipient churches on our behalf in the past years. Obituaries of David and Ruth appear later in this Report. All three will be greatly missed and our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

What is the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust for?

"It used to be the job of the churches to save people; now it is the job of the people to save churches..."

Those prescient words were delivered half a century ago by the late architect and academic, Professor Sir James Dunbar-Nasmith, at a public meeting in June 1974 in Edinburgh organised by the Cockburn Association (Scotland's oldest conservation charity), where local amenity groups, representatives of all of the major denominations, local planning officers and anyone with an interest in places of worship, were called together to try to find a solution to the problem of redundant churches in Edinburgh. This is still very much the case today.

The common view of the Church of England is that it is immensely wealthy. This is not entirely incorrect: it has an £8.2 billion investment portfolio, which generates an annual return of 9.4%. The Church spends around half of this and reinvests the rest to guarantee its fiscal solvency. But the largest single expenditure is on clergy pensions, and while some money goes towards cathedral maintenance, the rest is spent on general administration and wages. In effect, the Church spends next to nothing on maintaining its parish buildings.



Eddie and Lydia Byland,
with Chairman Gareth
Lugar-Mawson, at the
Celebration Evening, July
2024

Church maintenance, except in extreme circumstances, comes in the form of hard-won grants, some from the National Churches Trust and the Heritage Fund (until recently, the Heritage Lottery Fund), and from county Trusts such as ours, which are matched by fundraising. It is the local people who are forced to care and pay for the upkeep of their historic church.

This includes the burden of lead theft, which is driven particularly by the rising price on the international market for raw metal, particularly for use in batteries, and is often carried out by organised gangs. On that score, I bring you glad tidings. Some years ago the Trust gave St John's, Quinton a grant to install an alarm and CCTV cameras on the roof. In the early hours of a morning in July 2024, the monitoring station rang the churchwarden to say that they could see someone on the roof stealing the lead. The monitoring station automatically contacted the police and an hour later the churchwarden was advised that a man had been arrested. The efficiency of the system and the prompt action of the police resulted in limited damage to the church's roof. The man was later charged with attempted theft, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a four months' prison sentence, ordered to undertake unpaid work and to pay £250 as compensation for his crime. The compensation ordered covered the cost of the insurance excess against a repair cost of about £1,100.

Later in this Report there is an article about changes to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. This scheme was set up in 2001, as a response to changes to VAT. The idea was that any listed building used as a place of worship by those of any faith could be refunded the VAT it paid on repairs and alterations costing more than £1,000. This is the only direct support offered by the State to places of worship. In return, the scheme delivers what are, by any measure, extraordinary and diverse benefits. In cultural terms, listed buildings of all kinds are by definition physical embodiments of our history, deserving of our care, and their restoration maintains important professional and specialist skills. Moreover, places of worship are anchors of community life.

The National Churches Trust's recent report 'The House of Good' (<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/house-good-research>) estimated that churches nationally, as measured by Treasury Green Book methods, are worth a staggering £255 billion annually in social value. In terms of direct expenditure, they also return £16 for every pound spent on them. They are centres of life at a local level and important contributors to our tourist economy. In 2023, for example, 9.3 million people visited England's cathedrals.

You might imagine, therefore, that a cash-strapped government would regard the £29 million spent, or rather returned, through the LPW grant scheme as exceptional value for money. It appears not so; at the end of the Westminster Hall debate on the renewal of the scheme, Sir Chris Bryant, the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism, himself a former priest, pleading financial pressures announced a renewal of the scheme for only one year with a reduced £23 million budget and an arbitrary cap of £25,000 on the amount that any one place of worship could recoup in that time. This is a real cut in an unrealistic time frame with no promise of further renewal. It's also a tax on people's generosity towards a clear public benefit and threatens to exacerbate the estimated £1.2 billion backlog of repairs to parish churches alone, condemning any ambitious repair project to a massive tax bill.

In this difficult climate, please consider making a donation to the Trust, or leaving us a legacy in your will, or becoming a Friend of the Trust – the application form is at the end of this Report.

Gareth Lugar-Mawson

Gareth Lugar-Mawson, NHCT Chairman

Tel: 01327 830219; Mobile: 07452930801



St Matthew's Northampton

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme was set up in 2001, to refund the VAT on repairs to listed places of worship of any faith. Since its inception, 13,000 places of worship have taken advantage of the scheme, which has a maximum annual budget of £42 million and makes about 500 monthly payments each averaging about £4,000. Last year, a total of £29 million was paid out, the return from a total sum of about £145 million raised and spent on repairs.

The Government has announced that The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme (LPWGS) will be extended into the next financial year until the end of March 2026, providing £23 million so that thousands of listed historical places of worship of all denominations and faiths throughout the UK can carry out restoration work such as works to the foundations, masonry and monuments integral to the buildings. The £23 million allocated compares unfavourably with a previous average allocation of £42 million per year.

There will be a cap of £25,000 that an organisation can claim during the year, and this can still be spread across multiple claims. Previously there was no cap. NHCT understands that the cap was designed to have no impact on the great majority (an estimated 94%) of applications. This is because most places of worship apply for a VAT refund of less than £25,000 in any one year, which is not surprising, as most repair and alteration projects cost less than £125,000 in a year.

Although NHCT is pleased that the Government has continued the scheme, albeit for only a year, the new cap of £25,000 per place of worship in 2025/26 is disappointing as it will cause substantial difficulties to larger schemes already in progress, or in later stages of planning and commitment, where more money will need to be raised or projects cut back.

Looking ahead; the future of the Scheme beyond March 2026 will depend on the Government's Spending Review, for which submissions to the Treasury are currently requested. NHCT understands that this covers the three-year period ending March 2029 (and five years for capital spending). NHCT along with National Churches Trust, the Heritage Religious Buildings Alliance, and many other organisations will be making the case for the Scheme's continuance with the necessary increased budget.

If you previously wrote to your MP and Lisa Nandy, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (enquiries@dcms.gov.uk), about the LPWGS, you may want to write again, expressing appreciation for the extension only to March 2026, together with your hope that, despite pressure on government finances, it will be extended again for a further three years. It is also not too late to write for the first time. If you are negatively affected by the cap, and/or the short period of extension of the Scheme, explain why politely. Evidence on the impact of the cap will help make the case for the future shape of the Scheme.

Gareth Lugar-Mawson, NHCT Chairman

GRANT COMMITTEE REPORT 2024



All Saints, Croughton

This year I thought that we would have had more churches applying for grants with the aftermath of the pandemic, but alas not so. Although I had several phone calls, not so many ended by completing the application form; maybe the costs are higher than expected or timelines don't match.

We do publicise our application closing date for each cycle, to give me time to arrange a round of trips around the county or several rounds, if need be, which can take a little time to arrange. Details are at <https://www.nhct.org.uk/Main/GrantCriteria>. However, several churches have contacted me after the closing date, and while I try to adjust the trips to fit them in, this can be embarrassing, so if you are thinking of sending in an application and are likely to be late, please let me know in advance.

This year we have allocated grants to the value of £74,800 to 18 churches from several dominations. That is the amount that is allocated, but during the year the trustees have also paid out grants to those who have completed their project.

We all know the cost of maintaining old buildings and restoring them to their glory for future generations to come, particularly as the collection plates seem lighter and populations are getting older, so it's vital that we encourage the younger members to discover the ancient buildings in our own county.

I would like to thank Rosalind Willatts for assisting on the trips and John Barker for his expertise, as well as Gareth Lugar-Mawson for chairing the meetings.

You can see from the schedules below the grants and pledges made during the year:

Town / Church	Works	Grant Given
Aynho St Michael's	Replace the old oil-fired heating system with a new infra-red lighting/heating system	£5,000
Badby St Mary's	Repairs to bell infrastructure	£2,000
Barnwell All Saints'	Churchyard walls repairs	£2,000
Church Brampton St Botolph's	Replace inadequate sound system	£500
Cotterstock St. Andrew's	Chancel floor repairs and broken pipe	£3,000
Cranford St John the Baptist	Replacement boiler	£2,000
Croughton All Saints'	Repairs to south porch	£5,000
Deanshanger Methodist Church	Roof repairs	£2,500
Glaphorn St Leonard's	Repairs to roof flashing	£5,000
Great Addington All Saints'	Urgent repairs to roof as cost of new one is prohibitive	£1,800
Lois Weedon St Mary's & St Peter's	Repairs to large crack in east window	£1,500
Passenham St Guthlac's	Installation of servery and WC, together with disabled pathway	£10,000
Piddington St John the Baptist	West door tower repairs	£5,000
Pitsford All Saints'	Roof repairs to flat roofs	£2,500
Rothersthorpe St Peter's & Paul's	Rewiring	£4,500
Towcester St Lawrence	Stonework repairs	£7,500
West Haddon All Saints'	Quinquennial repairs	£10,000
Weston-by-Welland St Mary the Virgin	Roof repairs	£5,000
		£74,800

In summary the Trust contributed as follows: -

Heating system	2	Churchyard walls	1
Building work	4	Roof repairs	5
Electrical	1	Servery/WC	1
Sound system	1	Tower repairs	1
Bell infrastructure	1	Window repairs	1

Until 2018 the trustees were able to recommend churches to the National Churches Trust (NCT) under the partnership agreement between the Trust and the NCT, however this scheme has unfortunately changed, and we are no longer able to do this. Nevertheless the Trust continues to welcome applications and tries hard to publicise the availability of funds to make grants.

M J Moore, NHCT Grants Secretary

NHCT Makes a Difference

ST ANDREW'S, COTTERSTOCK

We needed to replace a downpipe on the north side of the church due to a leak, which was causing damp inside the church wall that the choir platform backed onto. An added expense was asbestos removal. The choir platform floor had rotted badly, so had to be cordoned off. Both of these issues were listed as a Priority 1 in the Quinquennial report dated November 2023.

The work entailed:

- Removal of the asbestos downpipe and replacement with black cast iron, and cleaning out the gully below.
- Removal of pews and defective flooring and replacement with 22mm tongue and groove pine.
- Removal of rotten joists and replacement with oak (supplied by a villager).
- Insertion of brickwork supports/damp-proof course membrane.
- Refitting of pews and treating the floor with Osmo oil.



Many hands make light work at St Andrew's, Cotterstock

We are immensely grateful to Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust for the grant of £5,000. St Andrew's is a notable landmark on the River Nene, and we as a PCC together with the villagers are committed to maintaining its upkeep.

Monica Crosby, Organist

ALL SAINTS, CROUGHTON

Our church is Norman, and is especially renowned for its superb medieval wall paintings, appearing in Simon Jenkins's book, *England's Thousand Best Churches*. It is much loved by the local, regional and national communities. It has always been a spiritual, atmospheric, original and beautiful place, but is incredibly expensive to maintain given its age, and the technologies employed during construction and further maintenance through the centuries.

Threats to its future include the ageing, dwindling congregation (and consequently fewer resources with which to maintain the building into the future sustainably), as well as diminishing numbers of volunteers to undertake the range of roles required to manage the building and church resources. In 2019 our roof lead was stolen and we struggled to raise the necessary funds to replace it.

The last Quinquennial Inspection, in April 2021, identified urgent major repairs required to the south porch.

Aspects of concern were detailed as follows:

"The west wall appears to be leaning out and more so at wall plate level. A structural assessment is recommended and should include the south wall and roof...

The copings to the head of the porch have eroded and open joints. There are further fine cracks around the doorway, which require pointing and the hood mould has spalling stonework and delaminating. A section to the gable and west of the opening has open and loose joints and stonework has vegetation growth.

To the base of the walling, there are further open joints. A programme of vegetation removal, raking out and repointing and conservation repairs is recommended for the porch."

The structural assessment was undertaken by a specialised civil and structural engineering consultant confirming the need for urgent and comprehensive attention as the structural integrity of the porch was under threat.

We began serious fund-raising in January 2024 towards a £40,000 target. We are most grateful to all our grant-giving agencies including the first to donate – Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust. By July we had raised nearly £25,000 in grants as follows:

Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust:	£5,000
National Churches Trust:	£4,000
Wolfson Foundation:	£4,000
Headley Trust:	£5,000
Francis Coales Charitable Foundation:	£5,000
Benefact Trust:	£1,750



The repaired porch at All Saints', Croughton

As a result of having all permissions in place and a selected tendered contractor, we were able to begin the work in September 2024 and it was completed by the end of the year - more or less on time and on budget (a little over). The gate to the porch has been restored by a local artisan metal worker.

A re-dedication service was conducted by the Bishop in May 2025. A record of the progress of restoration can be found on the church Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61564360697046>

Dr Trevor Davies, PCC Treasurer

DEANSHANGER METHODIST CHURCH

The village of Deanshanger has had a strong Methodist presence since the early 1800s, with members meeting together in their own homes. The first Deanshanger primitive Methodist chapel was built of stone in 1849 and extended in 1860. With the growing congregation this was replaced in 1892 by the present brick building which included a schoolroom.

Sadly, after 133 years, the roof began to leak quite badly so a full examination had to be undertaken. The initial estimate for the work was £11,500. With limited resources we commenced a fundraising exercise which included an application for a grant from the Trust.



Deanshanger Methodist Church

The repairs commenced and it was found, not unusually, that additional work was required. This included the replacement of 180 slates. Our builder spent considerable time sourcing replacement slates from various reclamation yards to fit in with the unusual size of the original ones. This added to the costs as did the additional work required.

In the meantime, our fundraising efforts continued and we were humbled by the generous donations from the congregation, the local community and beyond, who showed such affection for the chapel and all that it represents. Obviously with the increased work the costs also mounted, culminating in a final bill of £14,000.

The chapel has always been open on the Trust's Ride and Stride days to welcome fundraising cyclists and walkers so we were especially grateful when we were awarded a £2,500 grant from the Trust. It is heart-warming to say that we have managed to complete the repairs with all costs met. We can now worship in the dry, knowing that our roof will protect us for many years to come.

Anitra Bull, Steward



Tower doorway at St John the Baptist,
Piddington, during repair works

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, PIDDINGTON

In the early 1980s, an architect's Quinquennial Inspection itemised a large number of issues that required attention. The PCC of the time set about raising funds to initially repair the tower and north aisle roof, both being quite major projects for a small village church. At the time the architect's advice was that a major refurbishment of the tower doorway should be delayed until more urgent works had been completed.

Since 1984, stonework repairs have been made to the tower, spire and nave, both aisle roofs and the porch have been re-covered, the church has been rewired with new heaters and lighting, the organ has been dismantled and restored, and an internal re-ordering has provided a servery and toilet facilities. A considerable amount of money has been raised locally to fund all this work and various bodies have helped over the years to meet the costs, including several contributions from the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust. The church is most grateful for all the financial assistance that they have received in this time.

Restoration work on the West (Tower) doorway has been mentioned in every Quinquennial Inspection since 1980 but has been put back while other work deemed more important has been undertaken. In 2023, on the advice of our architect, Adrian Ringrose from Stimpson Walton Bond, the PCC resolved to investigate the possibility of carrying out restoration work to the tower doorway.

The carved ironstone used to form the lower half of the doorway had become heavily eroded with many of the features undistinguishable, so our first task was to try and find what records were available. The congregation was asked if they had wedding photographs or any other pictures or drawings of the doorway which might help. What turned up was the discovery of an illustration from a 1936 book in the County Archives at Wootton Hall. Our Architect used this to help prepare drawings and a specification to describe the restoration work required.

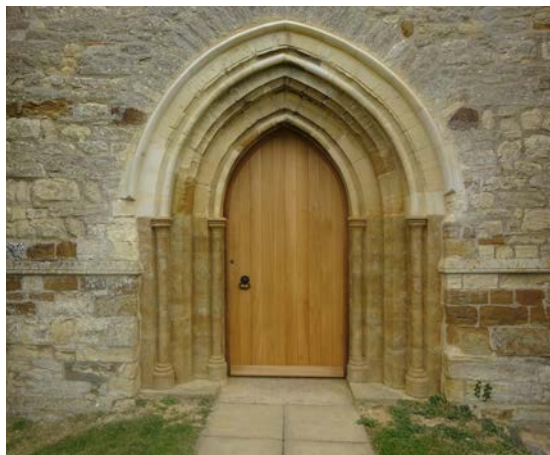
Consultation with the Peterborough Diocesan Advisory Committee followed and faculty permission for the restoration of the doorway was received at the end of February 2024. In tandem with the consultation, the PCC sought tenders for the work and approached NHCT for a grant to enable the work to proceed. After visiting the church, NHCT agreed to award the very generous sum of £5000 towards the cost of the restoration.

Steve Todd was appointed as contractor for the stonework and sub-let the carpentry work to Tom Seamark. It was hoped to commence work in April 2024, but a delay in the supply of the sandstone for the lower half of the doorway meant that work did not commence until mid-June.

Steve began replacing stones in the hood moulding initially which was complicated by the arch not being truly circular – a “flat spot” can be clearly seen in the upper right quadrant. Once the springing points of the arch had been established it became possible to locate the position of the new sandstone mouldings and commence removal of the weathered ironstone and building the new sandstone jambs. As the ironstone was removed markings were found on the rear of the stones which suggested that they may have been part of another doorway which was dismantled and brought to Piddington.

Work on the doorway was completed in early September and the architect has issued a Completion Certificate.

Stephen Watson, Churchwarden



The restored doorway at Piddington

ST JAMES THE GREAT, SYRESHAM

Work on the Syresham church spire began in January 2025. Its roof is made of wooden shingles, rather than slates, and our quinquennial report had suggested we get these checked - it turned out that they all needed replacing. Old shingles have been removed, a membrane attached and battens added.

The old shingles were made of cedar. Anyone who saw them being removed will have seen they were sodden, splitting and in much need of replacement. This includes the lower shingles that were replaced in 2003. We were advised to move to oak shakes, a different type of shingle, hence the need for planning permission. These are thicker and should keep the spire safe for many years to come.

Our bat visitors had some impact on the work. We commissioned a Bat Report, this advised that work should be done in the winter months. The other consequence of our visiting bats is that an old school felt 'bat-friendly' membrane has been used as bats can get caught on modern membranes.

So, the old shingles were removed and supporting timbers inspected. Fortunately these all appear to be sound. However everything under the shingles was very damp due to the lack of airflow behind them. To counter this situation once the membrane had been installed, the builders added battens and counter battens before adding the shakes. This will allow airflow to allow things to dry out if water should get in.

The final cost is expected to be £66,012.65, and we are so grateful to all who have contributed to funding this essential work. As an acknowledgement, we have signed one of the shakes with the name of the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust, to be rediscovered when future generations have to face their own repairs.

Alice Palmer, Syresham PCC



Oak shakes for the new tower spire at Syresham



Syresham spire during repair work

IN MEMORIAM

DAVID LAING CBE DL

Our Vice-President David Laing CBE DL died peacefully at home on 3rd March 2024.

David was born in Devon in 1945, the second son of Sir Kirby and Lady Laing and the grandson of Sir John Laing, the founder of the John Laing Construction Company. As a result, he grew up in an environment steeped in the building construction industry and throughout his life maintained a firm interest and a broad base of experience in construction. After graduating from Cambridge University, David trained as an architect with Sir Basil Spence Bonnington & Collins in London before setting up his own private practice in Hertfordshire. He was a director of GHM Rock Townsend Architects until 1999, and chairman of Country and Metropolitan Homes until 2005, taking it on to OFEX and then to a main stock exchange listing, as it grew to be one of the country's larger housing developers, specialising in brown field sites, high quality and affordable housing. He was a director of Eskmuir Properties Ltd, the Laing family's property company and served as Master of the Worshipful Company of Paviers in 2006.



David, with his wife
Mary

As an architect, he designed both modern and period buildings, but specialised in listed buildings and conservation work. He restored the Grade I listed Mackerye End in Hertfordshire and oversaw the two-year full restoration of Grade II listed Fermyn Woods Hall near Brigstock, together with the restoration of the listed gardens at those historic houses.

Since moving to Northamptonshire just over twenty years ago David, together with his wife, Mary, threw themselves into the life of the county and were committed to making it known as the Heart of England. He brought an energy and dynamism to everything he was involved in, serving as High Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 2010–2011; Lord-Lieutenant of the County from 2014–2020 and was the first Pro-Chancellor of the University of Northampton from 2015–2024. He was awarded a CBE in the 2024 New Year's Honours list for services to charity and philanthropy.

David was actively involved with numerous local (first in Hertfordshire, then in Northamptonshire) and national charities, supporting them through his own foundation, the David Laing Foundation, and the Laing Family Trusts. He had a keen interest in literature, music, opera (his son, James Laing, is a well-known counter-tenor), the wider arts and sport, and his charitable giving reflected this, along with a passion for historic buildings and encouraging the preservation of heritage crafts and skills ... and his strong Christian faith.

David is survived by his wife, Mary, his five children and eleven grandchildren. He will be especially missed by them, by his friends, and by the many others to whom he made a real difference through his kindness, support and numerous charitable activities.

At Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust, we were very fortunate to have David as one of our Vice-Presidents and a trustee. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, children and wider family.

Northamptonshire Historic Churches
Trust Income and Expenditure
Year ending December 2024

	£	£	£	£
		2024		2023
INCOME .				
Ride and Stride :				
Year ended December 31st 2023	280.00		44162	
Year ended December 31st 2024	35535.26	35815.26		44162
Income Tax Recovered	see note 1	278.90		7117
Friends' Subscriptions		1410.00		3165
friends - Subscriptions individuals		1705.60		
other		9695.81		
transfers from building soc a/c		2500.00		
misc		155.00		
Donations		3,425.00		1595
Investment Income : Charinco		2439.55	1952	
: Bank & Building Society Interest		1813.77	918	
		23423.63		2870
Note 1. gift aid claim awaited expected value £5587		59238.89		58909
EXPENDITURE .				
Grants Paid (Note 1 A)	(Grants pledged but unpaid			
at the year end are shown in Note 1 B)		67300	58595	
Less Part Grant Returned		0	2778	
		67300	55817	
Ride & Stride - Refunds to participating churches		18305.62	22441	
Administrative expenses printing .		875.54	2115	
Administrative expenses postage		319.60		
Administrative expenses - other/stationary		487.53		
Subscription		774.94		

Northamptonshire Historic Churches
Trust Income and Expenditure
Year ending December 2024

Upgrading Website other	80.00 9695.81	97839.04	262 80635
(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR .	-38600.15		-21726
ACCUMULATED FUND			
Balance brought forward January 1st 2024	326999		334033
(Deficit) for the year	-38600.15		-20520
Increase/(decrease) in Market Value of Investments	6836		13486
Balance carried forward December 31st 2024	295235		326999
REPRESENTED BY :			
Investments (NOTE 4)	206410		198940
Bank : Current account	3012		2061
: Deposit account	3247		42546
Building Society account	82565		83452
	88824		128059
	295234		326999

Prepared by M J Moore

30/04/2025

NOTES TO THE INCOME & EXPENDITURE A

DECEMBER 31st 2024

1. GRANTS : ACCUMULATED FUND.

A) PAID : YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31st 2024 .

	£
St.Andrew, Kettering	6000
St.Mary, Blakesley	10000
Ss.Peter & Paul, Kings Sutton	3000
All Saints, Wilbarston	5000
All Saints, Flore	5000
St Michael Aynho	5000
Broughton Baptist	3000
St Mary the Virgin, Western by Welland	5000
St Mary/ Paul, Lois Weedon	1500
All Saints, Croughton	5000
St Botolphs, Church Brampton	500
St Johns, Piddington	5000
St John, Cranford	2000
St Andrews, Barmwell	2000
All saints, Great Addington	1800
Deanshanger, Methodist	2500
St. Andrews, Cotterstock	5000

67300

Note : Pledged grants lapse if unclaimed
after three years of being made available.

B) PLEDGED AND NOT YET PAID AS AT DECEMBER 31st 2024.

Year of Pledge	£
April.2021	All Saints, Adstone(water supply
April.2021	St.Martin, Welton
April.2022	Raunds Methodist
Nov.2022	St.Michael & All Angels,Creaton
Nov.2022	St.Katherine, Irchester
Nov.2022	All Hallows, Wellingborough
Nov.2022	Ss.Peter & Paul, Harrington
April.2023	St.Mary, East Haddon
Nov.2023	St . Mary, Titchmarsh
Nov.2023	St.Peter, Brackley
Nov.2023	St . Leodagarius, Ashby St.Ledgei
Nov.2023	St.Peter, Weston Favell
Nov.2023	St.James the Great, Syresham
Apr.2024	St Leonards, Glapthorn
Nov.2024	St Mary's Badby
Nov.2024	St Peters/Pauls, Rothersthorpe
Nov.2024	All Saints , Pitsford
Nov.2024	All Saints, Haddon
Nov.2024	St Lawrence, Towcester
Nov.2024	St Gunthlac's, Passenham

90500

3.INVESTMENTS

	Cost at 31/12/22 & 31/12/23 £	Market Value @ 31/12/23 £	Market Value @ 31/12/24 £	Change in Mkt.value y/e 31/12/24 £
BLK Charities UK Equity Fund Accumulation				
5896.125 Units	14970	152188	160293.25	8105.25
BLK Charities UK Bond Fund Income :				
32527.563 Units	60000	47386	46116.93	-1269.07
	74970	199574	206410.18	6836.18

4. GENERAL NOTE RE: DONATIONS .

Under Solicitors` Accounts rules, client funds held by a solicitor which cannot be allocated or returned, may be distributed as charitable donations . The Trust received such a donation from Hewitsons (Solicitors) in the sum of £ 3,545 in year ended December 31st 2024, and has given an indemnity to the effect that , if this sum is requested, it will be repaid . The Trust is obliged to maintain its resources at a sum in excess of the above amount .

Prepared by M J Moore

30/04/2025

RUTH FITCH

The trustees were very saddened to hear of the death on 5th July 2024, at the early age of 54, of Ruth Fitch, our former Secretary and trustee.

Ruth was born on 28th September 1969, the elder daughter of Alan and Evelyn Fitch. On leaving school, Ruth decided to pursue Agriculture at Moulton College. The course helped her eventually to be employed by Hewitsons, Solicitors of Northampton, working for John White, our former Chairman, dealing with agriculture and farming generally.



A committed Christian, in her spare time, Ruth was a 'perpetual student'. Among her many accomplishments was a gift for languages, which she studied part-time. Two of these were Latin and Classical Greek, which helped when, through the Central Methodist Church in Kettering, Ruth became a Worship Leader and then went on to become a Local Preacher.

While at school, Ruth learnt to play the recorder and violin. She then decided to buy a viola and joined the music group at her church. Approximately ten years ago, Ruth decided to learn to play the piano and bought a keyboard; found a teacher in Northampton near where she worked and proceeded to pass Grades 1 to 6. She received the Grade 6 certificate just before her teacher retired.

Whilst in her teens, and after a great deal of effort, Ruth obtained the Bronze, Silver and eventually, the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Awards. She was also a member of her church's Girls' Brigade.

Ruth was also a keen athlete. She began cycling at a very early age, and in her 40th birthday year decided to cycle from Land's End to John O'Groats over a period of 3 weeks. In order to cope with the journey by bike she attended a cycle maintenance course. Ruth took part in several cycle outings with her family and colleagues and also took part in several runs ranging from 5 miles to, in 2015, the full 26.2 mile Brighton Marathon, all of which resulted in her gaining many medals.

Ruth rarely watched television. Instead, by using headphones, she would listen to books being read, language lessons, bible study groups etc. and could happily walk to and from work or leisure while doing so. She also enjoyed jigsaws (her mother and father found 83 of them, ranging from 500 to 2,000 pieces) and would do these while listening to her programmes.

Ruth was a very lovely and loving daughter, and sister to Jo. Judging by the vast number of cards and emails her mother and father, and Jo, received after her passing Ruth left many happy memories with a great many people. This was clear from the very large number of people who attended her funeral service on 22nd July 2024 at the Central Methodist Church in Kettering, which was filled to capacity.

Ruth was the Trust's very capable Secretary and trustee for many years until her illness compelled her to give up the post. We all miss her very much.

She is now out of pain and with the Lord.

Ride and Stride

A great day out visiting England's churches – discover extraordinary treasures in Northamptonshire's religious buildings

The next RIDE and STRIDE will be held on Saturday, 13th September, 2025



Hat sponsorship: a novel way of fundraising at St George's, Evenley

Ride and Stride was 'born' in Suffolk in 1982 as a sponsored cycle ride or walk and is held annually, in virtually every county in England. It is the main fund-raising event for the county churches Trusts and is held on the second Saturday in September. It is now a sponsored event for cyclists, joggers, walkers and horse riders but any mode of transport can be used as long as sponsors are happy; a couple of people have used vintage cars! It is also possible to sponsor the people welcoming visitors to the church or gain sponsorship in other imaginative ways as the congregations get older. This was wonderfully shown by St George's Church in Evenley, as Jane Gibbs tells us:

'As most of us aren't bike riders, or we can't walk too far, we look for alternative ways to get sponsorship. This year our phrase was: "Wear your hat to church with Pride and get yourself sponsored for Ride and Stride!"'

Julia, third from the right in the photo above, got the most sponsorship with her pink and white bobble hat!

In Northamptonshire, 50% of the money raised and any Gift Aid is retained by the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust and a cheque for 50% of the money raised is sent to the church chosen by each of the participants. The money raised, along with other funds, is used to give grants for preserving, restoring and improving churches, chapels and meeting houses in Northamptonshire who take part, whether they are historic or not.

Some keen long-distance cyclists challenge themselves to visit as many churches as they can, some cycle groups set themselves a planned route, and others prefer a more leisurely approach, visiting fewer churches and taking more time at each.

Challenges around Northamptonshire vary – the hill in Rockingham meant the church had no visitors braving it again this year, and the HS2 works near Edgcote has closed roads leading to two-mile detours. Other village churches are far flung, and we tried to encourage the cyclists to include churches that hadn't had visitors in past years. We applaud Richard Lewis from All Saints', Kettering:

'In response to your request to visit churches at Easton-on-the-Hill, Collyweston, Duddington, Wakerley and Harringworth, who had no visitors last year, I decided to go across to those as my sponsorship effort for this year. My wife and our friend got to all five buildings!'

Churches are usually open from 10am to 6pm and a list of participating churches is produced and made available on our website at www.nhct.org.uk, as are links to churches in neighbouring counties, as well as sponsor forms, posters and other paperwork. An open church or chapel attracts visitors and with refreshments it really makes a difference; many Local Organisers take pride in drawing attention to their special features, or put on events. All this information is available on the Open Churches file which can be downloaded from July 2025 on the NHCT website: <https://www.nhct.org.uk>.



St Andrew's, Cotterstock: (l-r) Rosie Sands, Holly Rowlett, Kate and Jon Grussing, Bertie Rowlett, Karena Sands, Susie Rowlett and Kathryn Kroese

RIDE AND STRIDE 2024

Another successful year for Ride and Stride in Northamptonshire

Thank you to all Local Organisers and especially those who had their churches open with a warm welcome and persuaded Riders and Striders to take part

The weather was perfect this year after the heat of 2023 - no wind to impede cyclists and no rain! In Northamptonshire we have a great loyal following in most of the

churches now, with kind enthusiasts opening the church, putting out the register and welcoming visitors. The next stage of encouraging riders and striders to raise sponsorship for their church often comes when it is realised that half the sponsorship money comes back to their church, and they are regarded favourably when applying for a grant from the NHCT.

Income from sponsorship is down this year, £35,585 to date (lower than each of the last six years). However, three parish churches, at Stoke Doyle, Walgrave and Weston Favell, raised over £1,000 each, and Welton raised nearly £1,000. We are extremely grateful to all the church communities which have raised money and, of course, a special thank you to the above four.

As ever, we would like to thank all those volunteers who work so hard to make Ride and Stride in Northamptonshire the success that it is.

Local Organisers who work so hard to publicise the day in their parish newsletters and social media around the church, encouraging Riders and Striders to take part. 328 churches took part in 2024 and of those, 183 were manned for at least part of the time, 121 open with a register available, and 24 with just a register outside.



Mick Ball and Maisie take a break at St Martin's, Welton

We are grateful to all our **Area Organisers** who show great tenacity in contacting churches. We extend particular thanks to the Area Organisers who are leaving us – Dorothy Fitzgerald who has worked with many of the Northampton churches, Barbara Kelso who has looked after half of the Towcester Deanery churches, Cheryl and Maurice Jaynoy who were in touch with a third of Brixworth Deanery's churches, and Sally McGurk who has also stepped down as Area Organiser for half the Brackley Deanery. Thank you to them all.

However, this means that we need to recruit quite a few more people as Area Organisers as we are also trying to reduce the number of churches each one looks after, both to make it easier for them and also to make it easier for us to replace them when they retire. If you can make any suggestions, even approach people, we would be extremely grateful. Please let us know via liz.nhct@hotmail.com.

Thank you to everyone else who helped to make the day such a success: All the Riders and Striders and the hundreds of sponsors supporting them, anyone who helped publicise the event and encouraged people to take part, those who prepared the churches and welcomed visitors on the day, and of course our new Treasurer Michael Moore, who coordinates the sponsorship money and writes the return cheques to the churches.

Liz Doherty and Val Hartley, County Organisers

‘THE REVVING REV’

Over 8 hours I visited and prayed for 39 churches across Kettering and Higham deaneries, I drove 103 miles, and still managed to clock up over 14,000 steps walking up and down church paths! Sponsorship raised over £770!



The Revd Nicki Hobbs
outside St Andrew's,
Broughton

Revd Nicki Hobbs

**Rector, St Andrew, Broughton with Cransley and Mawsley
Rural Dean of Kettering and Higham
‘Hop and Hope’**

This year's Ride and Stride was more Hop and Hope, thanks to my recent knee operation!

First stop was the magnificent Holy Sepulchre, one of only four remaining medieval round churches still in use in England. This was my first visit, despite living in Northampton all my life.

It was built around 1100 by Simon de Senlis, Earl of Northampton, who wanted to make Northampton a Norman stronghold after returning from the Crusades. He also built the now-demolished Northampton Castle.

Among the majestic stone pillars and intricate wood carvings is a very thorough display on the history of Northampton and its huge importance in medieval England. It includes the story of Thomas Becket's escape from Northampton castle in 1164 after his arrest by King Henry II. Becket is said to have run to the Holy Sepulchre for a last prayer before fleeing on horseback disguised as a monk.

Today, he could have popped into the nearby Thomas à Becket pub for a few Hail Marys before jumping on the next train out.

Next, Denise and I visited All Saints' to admire the wonderful dome. It's incredible that Charles II donated wood from Royal forests to rebuild the church after the Great Fire of Northampton in 1675, considering the townsfolk had fought with the Roundheads against his dad.

Then to St Peter's in Marefair, thought to be the third church built on the site of a former Saxon palace. Although now closed, St Peter's dates back to 1150 and is protected by the Churches Conservation Trust. We were given a guided tour by Trust historian Jenny who showed us the magnificent Norman zigzag chevron arches and wonderful stonework which was later plastered over by Puritan zealots. Cromwell and his killjoys really have a lot to answer for. Beheading the King and banning Christmas are bad enough without defacing our beautiful churches.

Final stop was the White Elephant for a cool pint and chance to rest that painful knee!

Nick, St Matthew's, Northampton



Romanesque column capital
at St Peter's, Northampton



Sunrise for Sheila Edwards's early start

'PHEW! NOT SUCH A HOT DAY'

As always, Ride and Stride is such a wonderful day out, getting outside in the fresh air and meeting like-minded people from various churches with so many stories to tell.

Always lovely to meet the church sitters, who give so freely of their time, to give a warm and friendly welcome and provide refreshments and give out any information of any special features of their particular church.

This year was not as hot as last year, Thank God.

I walked to eleven churches and although over the years of walking I've visited most of them, somehow there always seems to be something new to see.

The Guildhall runs tours and although I have always promised myself to go to one of them, it has never materialised. So this year after leaving St. Giles Church,

I realised the tours were on, so I booked in. It was 90 minutes well worth the time, lots of history. There's a Mayors' Corridor, so called because of its history of all of Northampton's Mayors' portraits on a small individual plaque. I was able to visit the Session House and jails, which were a bit grim; any misdemeanour, and a person might land themselves a spell in jail.

Sheila Edwards, Christ Church, Northampton

RIDE AND STRIDE ON FOUR LEGS

My nephews and nieces decided that we should support Ride and Stride not only by mounting both bikes and a horse, but taking a completely cross-country route! For this reason the adults decreed that we would just make our way from St James's, Newbottle, to Holy Trinity, Hinton-in-the-Hedges and back. It was a big adventure, and quite hard work for the smaller legs, but we sailed down the hill into Hinton, where the children were very grateful for the delicious cookies that had been left out for Riders and Striders. The youngest opted out of the return trip, but the rest of us made it back to Newbottle in one piece, and even Elsa the horse had enjoyed the day.



Eleanor Townsend, Toby and Mikey Townsend, Violet and Molly Behan at Holy Trinity, Hinton-in-the-Hedges

Eleanor Townsend, NHCT trustee

ST ANDREW'S COTTERSTOCK

Cotterstock as ever came up trumps with its fabulous local produce stall and its now famous bicycle biscuits, this year made by Ingrid Hunter Coddington's brother. Delicious as always. The produce stall was a feast for the eyes, set in the heart of the beautiful churchyard. With thanks to Michele Mor, Lucy Horne, Elaine Brooker and others for manning it.



Produce stall at St Andrew's, Cotterstock: Elaine Brooker, Lucy Horne and Michele Mor with other friends

Attracting Visitors and Tourists to our County's 'Plethora of Churches'

Among other things, the Discover Northamptonshire Visitor Guide 2024¹ encourages people to 'explore the UK's largest collection of historic houses, as well as a plethora of churches, museums, stately homes and National Trust properties, to delve into our rich local heritage'.

Whether the purpose is to delve into heritage; to help people visit an important community building or find out more about the Christian faith, there are several steps that can be taken to make a church building attractive and welcoming.

Here are a few of them:

A) Unlock it

Although some visitors will be pleased to see only the outside of a church building and to try to decipher the inscriptions on any gravestones, many will be disappointed at not being able to go inside.

Keeping a church building unlocked is therefore an obvious solution to this, but not always straightforward to arrange in practice. Although the best approach is likely to have a friendly and knowledgeable person present, some people aren't always available. However, such people – not necessarily church members – might welcome the opportunity to sit in their local church building, perhaps reading a good book or catching up with tasks on a laptop (wifi permitting) when visitors aren't present. It may be that people who have previously been persuaded to sit in church during Ride and Stride event would be willing to do so more often, on a rota with others. Alternatively, many churches are left unlocked with no one present, but with particular valuables locked away. Another possibility, albeit less immediately helpful to visitors, is to keep the church locked, but to give clear information – at the entrance to the church building and online if possible – on how a key can be obtained.

Five reasons for unlocking church buildings were set out in an article, written from a Church of England perspective, in the Church Times in August 2024.² In summary, these are:

- A church building is consecrated as a physical representation of God's presence with his people. When the church building is open, it invites people to come in. When that building is closed, it implies that God is absent.
- An open church is an opportunity for mission and evangelism. While there is no substitute for telling people about Jesus, an open building can be part of that process.
- The building can have a pastoral function. An open church provides a space for the grieving, lonely, lost, or distressed. The act of lighting a candle, or leaving a prayer request, or simply sitting in silence, can be a deeply healing one.
- It is also good for the image of the Church. There may be people who, however wide open the doors are, remain highly unlikely ever to cross its threshold. But their attitude to the Church may be softened by seeing the "Church open" sign.
- Finally, keeping churches open is deeply Anglican. The open church is a church that is available to all parishioners: they do not have to profess a faith, or prove their identity, or pay an admission fee.



Discover Northamptonshire
Visitor Guide

The article added that, although unlocking a church might be seen as risky, Ecclesiastical Insurance encourages churches to be kept open “because of the positive effect that it can have on security”, adding ‘an open church that is visited is more secure than a locked church that is not’.



B) Use the ‘Churches’ section of the Northamptonshire Surprise website: where ‘100 best churches’ are listed at <https://northamptonshiresurprise.com/churches/> and access to four church trails (e.g. churches with notable stained glass) and 15 particular themes (e.g. Americans in Churches) is at <https://northamptonshiresurprise.com/crm-categories/things-to-do/churches/>

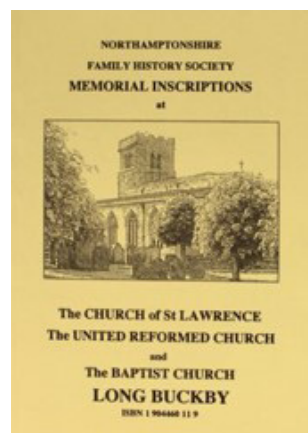
C) Take part in the Annual Ride and Stride Event – preferably with the church open and manned: many churches already do this, of course. As well as enabling those taking part to be registered and to look around the building, other people can be encouraged to make use of the fact that it is open, and to visit. More details are elsewhere in this report and at <https://nhct.org.uk/Main/RideAndStride>.

D) Seek grant funding to improve the fabric of the church building and the facilities available. There isn’t space here to go into detail, but the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust provides grants for a wide range of purposes (see <https://nhct.org.uk/Main/GrantCriteria>) and various other funders provide grants, sometimes including ‘secular’ funders such as parish councils, if the work would improve community facilities, promote wellbeing or result in environmental benefits.

E) Provide information on memorial inscriptions - and mention this in publicity material. In particular, a church may wish to have a copy of the Northamptonshire Family History Society’s published and indexed transcript for its church and churchyard available for reference (if available) – as well as copies for sale to visitors.

For over thirty-five years, volunteers from the NFHS have been transcribing churchyard gravestone inscriptions, indexing them, producing graveyard plans, and publishing the results in inexpensive booklets. They have so far covered about 225 Church of England parishes in the county, together with many Nonconformist graveyards and older parish cemeteries.

These booklets can provide a very helpful reference source for queries from people tracing family or local history, whether local people, visitors, or people enquiring from afar.



Memorial Inscriptions transcript for Long Buckby

Some practical points:

- A list of the published parishes can be seen on the Society website at: www.northants-fhs.org/publications together with individual prices. It also gives details of how to purchase them.
- Some parishes find it helpful to have a supply in stock to sell to visitors – and might wish to arrange for an extra supply to be delivered to them to sell at a special church or community event.
- Copies can be provided on a sale or return basis if preferred.
- New volunteers to help record are always welcome. If you would like further information on purchasing a supply of books for your parish or would like to volunteer to help with this work, please contact the society at info@northants-fhs.org

F) Consider joining the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum: several individual churches (and Friends of Churches groups) are already members of the Forum, which, among other things, provides training and marketing advice for churches focusing on tourism/visitor opportunities: see <https://www.northamptonshireheritageforum.co.uk/become-a-member>.

G) Appoint a Visitors Officer: not necessarily a member of the Parochial Church Council (or equivalent in non-Anglican churches), but a volunteer with a remit to ensure that the church is open and welcoming to visitors, with relevant information etc. This was a recommendation of the Rural Church Buildings commission appointed by the Bishop of Norwich which reported back in 1991. It wasn't formally adopted, but may be worth trying.

Finally, as a contribution to this article, Cllr Daniel Lister, West Northamptonshire Council Cabinet Member for Local Economy, Culture, and Leisure, has said:

“Northamptonshire is home to a wealth of stunning churches and places of worship including some of the finest Saxon and Norman parish churches in the country, as well as one of only four remaining round churches - each with its own unique heritage, architecture, and cultural significance. These historic sites are not only places of faith and community but also valuable attractions that can draw visitors from near and far, boosting our local economy and helping to tell the rich story of our area.

“Through our newly established Northamptonshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), we are working to promote all that our county has to offer, ensuring that visitors can discover and appreciate the incredible historic and cultural gems in our communities. We encourage church leaders and volunteers to reach out and explore how they can be part of this exciting opportunity to celebrate and showcase their sites.”

Andrew Presland, NHCT trustee

andrew.presland.harborough58@gmail.com

1. <https://discover-northamptonshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Discover-March-Update-Low-Res.pdf>

2. Church Times Why churches should keep their doors open by Daniel Sanham, 2nd August 2024

All Saints' Northampton - The Great Fire

Stand in front and take a look at All Saints' in Northampton. All looks perfectly normal: in fact, just what you would expect in an ancient market town – a large church standing in its centre. But then take another look and what you see is not a substantial medieval edifice, a cruciform church rippling with crenelations. Instead beneath the high tower there is a classical building topped by a statue, not of a saint but of a monarch. If you penetrate inside, no high vaulted gothic structure confronts you but rather a sublime baroque interior centred on a dome. Isn't this all rather strange in a town surrounded by three medieval churches. Why? What happened?



All Saints', Northampton

All Hallows', as the church on this site was originally called, was a substantial medieval building continuously being enlarged. It was one of the principal victims of the Great Fire of Northampton which destroyed the center of the town 350 years ago on 20th September 1675. All that remained of this huge building was the tower but like a phoenix from the ashes of the old building a new church in every sense, All Saints', emerged.

The new church was exactly that, brand new. It was a way of putting the Fire and the old town behind and audaciously adopting the latest of architectural styles. Churches in the form of a classical temple first emerged in Renaissance Italy and percolated north emerging in England in the third quarter of the 17th century, first in Wren's London (again after a disastrous fire) and then Northampton. It is no accident that the architect here was Henry Bell (1647-1711), friend of both Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke, and conversant with their work in London. In January 1677 only 18 months after the Fire he was engaged by the Northampton Commissioners with Edward Edwards, a local surveyor "as manager for the rebuilding of All Saints' church". Their ecclesiastical patron was the distinguished theologian the Rev. John Conant, formerly both professor of Divinity and Vice Chancellor of Oxford University.

The building was a centerpiece of the reconstruction of the town, matched architecturally with the Session House (law courts) and the smart new stone houses. It made Northampton the acme of taste. The traveller Celia Fiennes noted in 1697 that it was "a large town, well built, the streets as large as London," and a few years later Daniel Defoe would write of "the best built and handsomest town in all this part of England ... the beauty is owing to its disaster".

The interior of All Saints' certainly lives up to the expectations of its exterior. It is a light airy building with rich plasterwork by Edward Goudge, another of Wren's team; a magnificent gilded pulpit and mayoral throne; galleries all around and Thomas Swarbrick's splendid organ installed in 1706. Large paintings of Moses and Aaron flanked the altar together with commandment boards. The final touch was the erection of the statue of the monarch Charles II who had been instrumental in raising the funds, both Royal and Parliamentary, for the rebuilding of the town. It is appropriate that the sculptor John Hunt was both a native of the town and a pupil of another member of Wren's team, Grinling Gibbon.

The new church and indeed the rebuilding of the town was not just well done but an outstanding example of civic determination, ingenuity and vision, exactly the things that are to be celebrated in this year's commemoration of the Fire and the celebration of what came after: a brilliant phoenix.

James Miller, NHCT trustee

Celebration Evening

18th July 2024

On a warm and peaceful July eventide, the 2024 NHCT Celebration Evening was held in the gracious grounds of Southwick Hall, near Oundle, by kind permission of the Capron family. Three interconnected families have owned this fascinating house since the Middle Ages - the Knyvets, the Lynnes and the Caprons.

The tiny village of Southwick is tucked away in a valley beneath Rockingham Forest. The church, St Mary the Virgin, is particularly worth visiting in the Spring, when the bulbs are at their zenith. The great treasure here is Roubiliac's tomb for George Lynne. Thanks in part to the NHCT, this newly conserved monument is looking glorious.

The evening was a wonderful chance for trustees to meet the representatives from churches and chapels which have benefited from the Trust over the past year, and to thank them for all their steadfast work. It was also an opportunity to thank and encourage the impressive Ride and Stride fundraisers. The late-afternoon sun shone, the wine flowed, and the cucumber sandwiches and pretty cupcakes swiftly disappeared. A very enjoyable and memorable time was had by all!

Alice Magnay, NHCT trustee



2024 Church Tour

Led by Bruce Bailey

Saturday 31st August 2024

Grendon, Whiston, Castle Ashby, Easton Maudit

Bruce Bailey led another fascinating study day for about thirty Friends of the NHCT on Saturday 31st August 2024. To the extent that it had a theme, it was connections with the Compton family, of Castle Ashby House and Compton Wynyates, Warwickshire.

It started in Grendon, a fine Medieval building with some double arcading and scallop capitals and some Compton heraldry including three catchments. The South Aisle houses an unusual Italian curtain from Castle Ashby House, probably from a sixteenth-century funeral service. The fifteenth-century Perpendicular tower includes bands of different types of ironstone.



St Mary's, Grendon



NHCT Chairman, Gareth
Lugar-Mawson at
St Mary the Virgin, Whiston

We then visited Whiston, either by walking up a footpath up a hill or by going cross-country at the top of the hill, a beautiful Perpendicular church building that can be dated to 1534 through a document written by Anthony Catesby, a member of the branch of the family that lived in the village. It is said to be the last church to be built before the Reformation. It has many original fittings and monuments and is set in a commanding position overlooking much of the Nene Valley. The tower here is banded limestone – possibly from Weldon – and ironstone – from Duston – with carved angels at the top and demons at the bottom representing Heaven and Hell. There is a hatchment for Frederick, Lord Boston, who was descended from the Catesby family through the Pagets, and his two wives.

After a lunch break, we visited Castle Ashby church, a fine Medieval building with elaborate Compton memorials, the effigy of a twelfth-century knight and an associated brass, plus seventeenth-century woodwork and excellent Victorian stained glass. Unusually, we were able to walk out through the North Porch to see the side of the building that faces Castle Ashby House. The churchyard includes a stone slab in memory of Thomas Warren, a blacksmith of Weston Favell, who also arranged water supplies for country houses including Drayton and Hampton Court. His forge at Castle Ashby was used to produce ironwork at Finedon and Haselbech and for Vanbrugh for Kimbolton and Blenheim.



St Mary Magdalene,
Castle Ashby

The final visit of the day was to Easton Maudit, another splendid Medieval church, built about 1350 on top of a Saxon building, with the tower following about 1450, with some outstanding monuments to the Yelverton family. Local farmer, Councillor and Churchwarden Tim Allebone met us there, telling us about the building – including his boyhood visits to see the coffins in the crypt – and telling of a connection with the Compton family here too as the major landowner. Former residents of the village include Christopher Yelverton, speaker for Elizabeth I; Rev Thomas Percy, a literary Vicar who belonged to the Garrick Club and, much more recently, actor Derek Nimmo – also a Garrick Club member – who is buried in the churchyard with his wife.

The day ended with tea and cake in the cosy surroundings of Easton Maudit Village Hall.

Andrew Presland, NHCT trustee



St Peter and St Paul,
Easton Maudit

Friends of Northamptonshire Historic Churches

From: Name(s)
Address:
.....
Postcode:
E-mail (PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS):
.....

I/We would like to join the Friends of Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust.
I/We

- a. Have completed the Banker's Order below. (preferred option for NHCT)
- b. Enclose a cheque for £..... (payable to Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust)

Gift Aid Declaration

If you are a UK taxpayer and able to donate under the Gift Aid Scheme, it will cost you nothing and will increase the value of your donation to the Trust by 25%. Depending on your circumstances, you may be able to offset any gift aid payment against your personal Income Tax.

I am a UK taxpayer and I will pay in the year an amount of Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax to be reclaimed by the Trust.

Signed Date:202
The minimum donations requested are: £10 for individuals; £20 for Churches/PCCs
Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust is registered with the Charity Commission No. 1021632

Banker's Order

To (Bank/Building Society):.....
Bank Branch address:
Postcode:
Sort code:
Name:.....

Signed:.....
Date:202

Please pay to: Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust
C/o NatWest Bank plc Sort code: 56-00-60 A/c No: 05608961
On the day of (month) 202 ...
The sum of £..... (words)
And the same sum annually until further notice.

Please send the application form to:
Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust, Friends' Secretary
E-mail: nuala.salter@peterborough-diocese.org.uk
c/o Bouverie Court, 6 The Lakes, Bedford Rd, NORTHAMPTON, NN4 7YD

Dates for your diary:

CELEBRATION EVENING (by invitation):

Wednesday 23rd July 2025

at Eastcote House, near Towcester

by kind permission of Mr and Mrs David Rowden

CHURCH STUDY DAY (for Friends of NHCT):

Saturday 30th August 2025

A visit to the churches of Dodford, Norton, Ashby St Ledgers,
Winwick and Stanford-on-Avon, led by Bruce Bailey

RIDE AND STRIDE:

13th September 2025



St Andrew's, Cotterstock

With thanks to all those who contributed to this Report

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