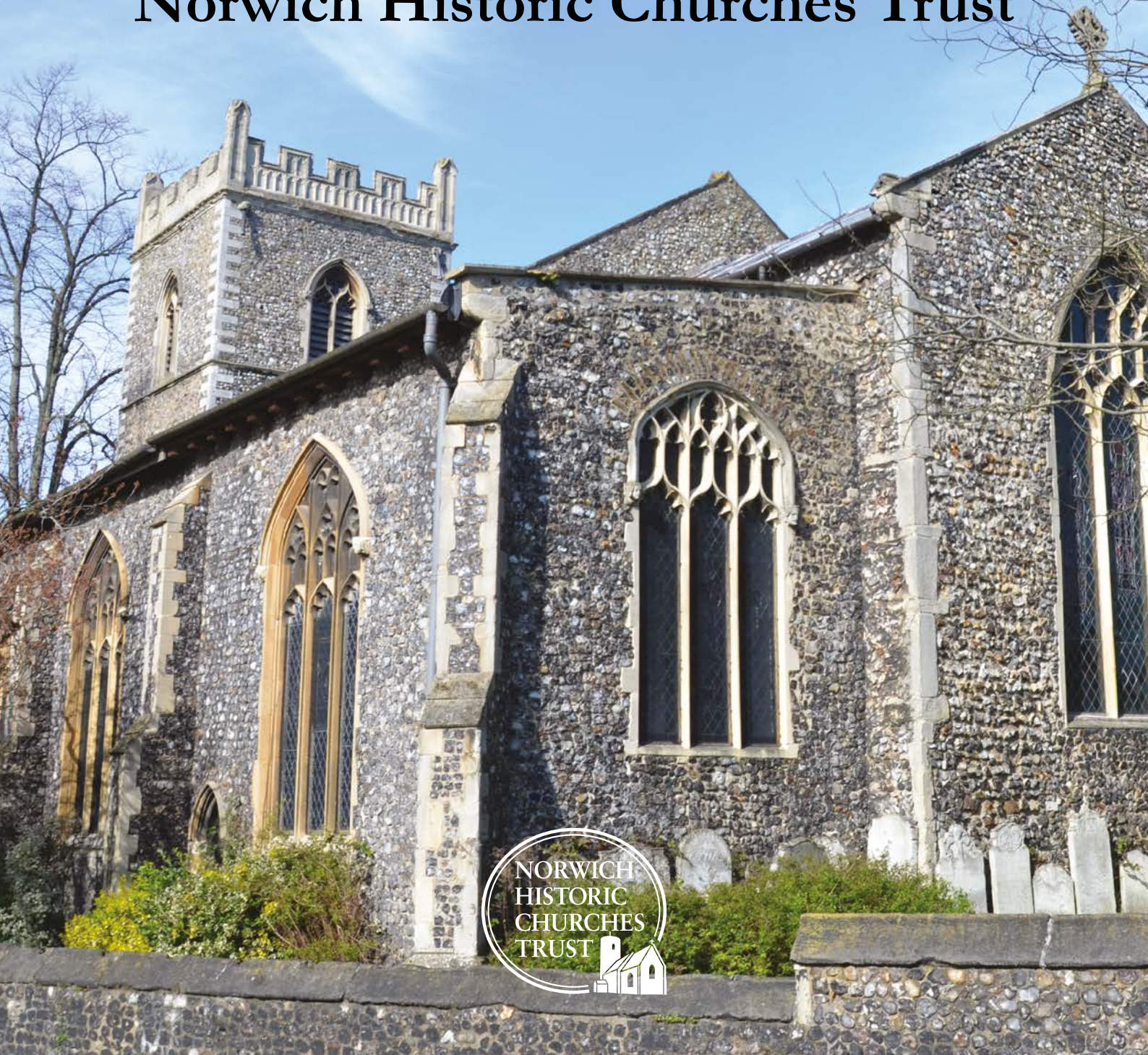




NORWICH HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST

ADOPT, ADAPT, IMPROVE ...:
the work of the
Norwich Historic Churches Trust



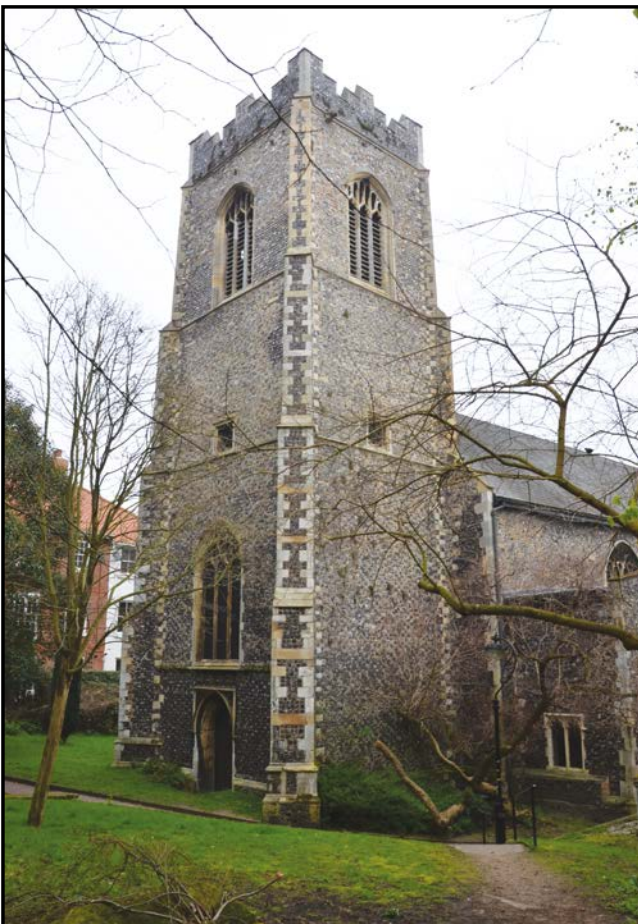


INTRODUCTION

Norwich's medieval churches form an important aspect of the cityscape – they fascinate visitors and are cherished by locals – while providing a window on the city's past. A recognition of their role is essential in understanding the history of Norwich and how it came to be the second city in the kingdom.

For more than forty years the Norwich Historic Churches Trust has managed and maintained 18 of the city's medieval church buildings no longer used for religious worship. A registered charity, our objects are the preservation and maintenance for the public benefit of redundant churches of all denominations in Norwich which are of historic or architectural value.

In fulfilling our responsibilities, the Trust has undertaken a number of major repairs, including substantial work to stabilise the tower of St Michael Coslany in 2013, and more recently extensive work has been carried out to the roof of St Peter Hungate in 2016. At the time of writing a programme of work is shortly to get underway at St Gregory, which includes repair of the roof. Work of this nature on listed medieval buildings is complex and expensive, but the Trust has been fortunate to receive grant aid without which we would have been unable to achieve what we have.



The Trust has worked hard to find new uses for the churches in our care. Of the 18 referred to above, 17 are currently tenanted and the Trust is proud to provide accommodation for some of Norwich's most vital and innovative cultural activities. Among others these include: the Norwich Art Centre, the Norwich Puppet Theatre, the Wharf Academy, the Stonemasons Guild and the Oak Circus Centre.

One of our other responsibilities is to ensure public access to the churches. Some are accessible on a daily basis while others can be viewed by appointment with the tenant. All of them are accessible during the annual Heritage Open Day weekend in September when buildings across Norwich throw open their doors to the public.

But the Trust is keen to make its churches and their history more accessible and in the spring of 2017 organised Flintspiration – a varied programme of free events that celebrated Norwich’s outstanding collection of medieval churches with performances, family activities, church trails and guided walks, open buildings and exhibitions. Funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and working with partner organisations many of the city’s churches participated.

Recently the Trust moved its offices from the vestry at St Peter Parmentergate where we had been for many years to St Martin at Palace which had been empty for some time. The move will provide the Trust with better, more accessible accommodation for our staff and visitors. It will also provide space for a range of activities and rooms which can be let to compatible organisations at a modest cost.

I hope this booklet will provide an insight into the role of the Norwich Historic Churches Trust since its formation in 1973 and encourage further interest in the city’s churches.

Nick Williams

Chair

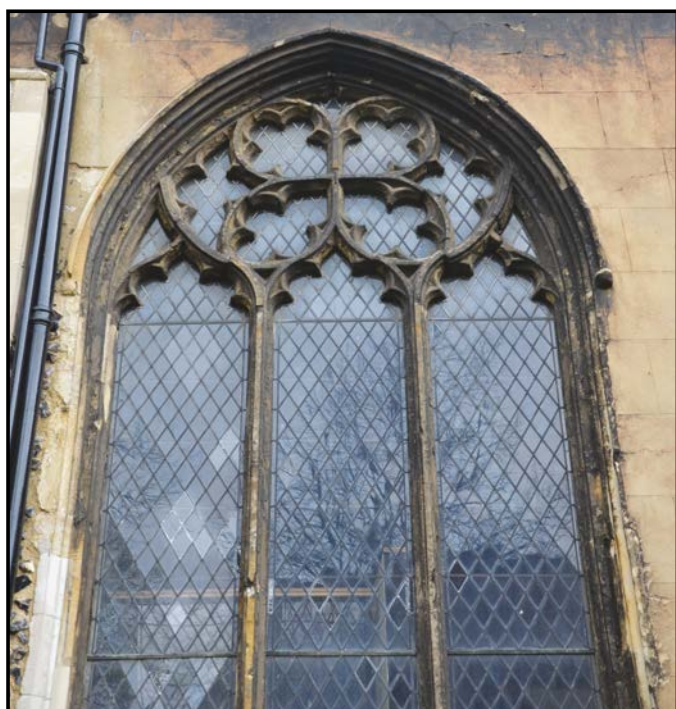


image to come from Mark

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORWICH HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST

By 1967, it was becoming obvious that maintaining thirty-one churches within the city centre was not a good use of church money. Increasing depopulation, caused by people moving into the suburbs, had caused congregations to fall in number, and those that did flourish rarely had any resident parishioners among their membership. Some churches had already been closed – Sts Simon & Jude in 1892, St Peter Hungate in 1936, and eleven more followed over the years. Five had alternative uses, and those that did not were generally in a very poor state. The Norwich Society had successfully prevented the demolition of Sts Simon & Jude. But St Peter Hungate was to lead the way. In 1936, it became a very successful and well-loved museum of church art: the first church in the country to be given an alternative, non-religious, use.

So in 1967 the Bishop of Norwich, Dr Launcelot Fleming, initiated a review of church provision within the city walls, a commission chaired by Lord Brooke of Cumnor, which published its Report (known as the Brooke Report) in 1973. It was radical in its proposals: that six churches should be retained for worship within four parishes. The rest were to be demolished, suitable re-use or funding was found for them. The Redundant Churches Fund, as it then was (now the Churches Conservation Trust) would accept curatorship of only the most outstanding buildings, and while the Norwich collection as a whole is internationally important, some of the churches are of very ordinary appearance. The idea of demolition shocked the city deeply, as did the idea of dispersing their ownerships to multiple bodies. The Friends of Norwich Churches was set up, and raised a good deal of money to effect some immediate repairs to the buildings; it took on St Mary Coslany as a base. It continued until 1986, when it wound itself up.



After much consultation, the city Corporation (as it was) decided to take matters into its own hands. Led by the Town Clerk, Gordon Tilsley, Alderman Thomas Eaton, and Councillor Raymond Frostick, the Corporation offered to take on the freeholds of the churches as they became redundant. The Church Commissioners accepted the offer, and the Corporation set up the Norwich Historic Churches Trust in 1973 to care for them, and find suitable new uses. Forty-odd years on, and all eighteen churches in NHCT care are in good shape – although maintaining a mediæval building is a never-ending

process! Some still need improvements (WCs, reliable heating, even running water in one case), and these are in hand.

The Trust itself consists of a number of Trustees, appointed in a variety of ways; three are always serving Councillors, nominated to sit for three years, though a significant proportion of them have remained on the Trust in their own right once their term of service has ended. The membership embraces a wide variety of interests and skills, including solicitors, accountants, architects, historians, and landscape architects, as well as those with a more general interest in the churches and who have other skills to offer. It is supported by two paid staff: an Administrator and a Surveyor of the Fabric, both of which roles have grown significantly in recent years.

After many years of functioning almost entirely as a landlord, concerned with leases, drains, and roofs, the Trust is now exploring ways of promoting the heritage side of its responsibility as well. In 2009 a Friends of the Trust was set up, and it has worked quietly to raise small sums of money, and to be an accessible face of the Trust to the general public.

I have chosen to use the Round Table's motto, 'Adopt, Adapt, Improve' for this booklet, as it encapsulates the Trust's work. We have adopted these churches when no longer needed, adapted them for new uses, and have improved them all.

With the move into St Martin-at-Palace, we look forward to a new chapter in our existence.

Dr Nicholas Groves

Trustee & Education Officer

image to come from Mark

ALL SAINTS

Closed in 1973 as a result of the parochial re-organization, and handed to the Trust, which immediately spent £8000 on making it watertight. Various uses were suggested, including a library, but in 1979 it became an Ecumenical Multi-Purpose Centre, known as All Saints Centre. It started with few facilities, but gradually they were improved by the tenants. In 1989 a first-floor room was created in the aisle, originally to house the Diocesan Mothers' Union: they moved out in 2003. A commercial-standard kitchen has also been fitted. An arson attack in 1992 was made the occasion for cleaning and redecorating.

The Centre, which provided hospitality for the less-advantaged, eventually had to close in 2015. It was re-opened as an antique centre and tea-room by the same people as run St Gregory.



ST CLEMENT-AT-FYEBRIDGE



St Clement was closed for worship in 1971, and stood empty until 1977, when the Rev'd Jack Burton rented it and kept it open daily as a place of prayer and meditation, a use that continued until 1999. It was used between 2010 and 2012 by the Romanian Orthodox congregation, and since 2015 by Gildencraft – an apprenticeship scheme for stonemasons.

Unlike any other NHCT church, it retains all its fittings, which mostly date from 1912, when the church was damaged by flood-water. This suited its original re-use, and the masons work round this. An arson attack in 1991 resulted in restoring the tower, and the inside was redecorated in 2007, following another arson attack. Further improvements are planned.



ST EDMUND FISHERGATE

This church had ceased to be used in the 1950s, and became a cardboard box store for the factory across the street, and later a shoe store for another factory. The fabric was in a very poor way – it was described by one critic as a ‘grandiose pigeon-loft’! After the Trust took it on, it was thoroughly restored in 1984, and was then used as a scenery store for the Puppet Theatre (at St James Pockthorpe), and then from 1993 until 2010 used by Norwich Community Church. The current tenants are Call to Prayer.

Improvements by NHCT include the insertion in 1992 of a western gallery with kitchen in the tower at first-floor-level, two-storey rooms in the west end of the aisle, and WCs on the tower ground floor.



ST ETHELDREDA



The death of the last Rector in 1961 led to the closure of this church, which was eventually declared redundant in 1975. It then stood abandoned and unused until 1980, when a group of artists took it on with the idea of providing affordable studio space, a use that still continues. It currently houses thirteen artists in varying media – paint, print, sculpting, etc.

Repairs were first done in 1975, as its condition was so poor. A mezzanine floor was installed later, with access at both east and west ends, thus doubling the space available. This was complemented by a sky-light along the north nave roof. The church was lime-washed inside in 2014 – possibly the first time since it had a make-over since the 1950s.



ST GREGORY

Possibly the jewel in the crown of those churches cared for by NHCT, St Gregory was closed in 1971. It was used as a community arts venue from 1975 until 2002. During that time lavatories were installed in the north porch, a wooden floor was laid over the original, and stepped staging was installed in the chancel – this latter perhaps less than happy, as it obscures the differing levels within the building. The building was then run from 2007 to 2011 by an agent for the Trust as a venue for events, and since then it has been in use as an antiques market. During maintenance in 1999, an important set of wall-paintings was discovered, and these have been conserved.



ST JAMES POCKTHORPE

St James was closed in 1972. It was the original home of the Night Shelter, from 1972 until it moved to St Martin-at-Oak in 1976. In 1978 it was converted for use as a puppet theatre, a use which continues. Much has been done here: the nave has become the auditorium with raked seating (from a Cardiff cinema), while the chancel provides the performance space, with both trenches and bridges for different kinds of puppets. An octagonal extension was added in 1980 to provide extra storage and rehearsal space.



ST JOHN-DE-SEPULCHRE

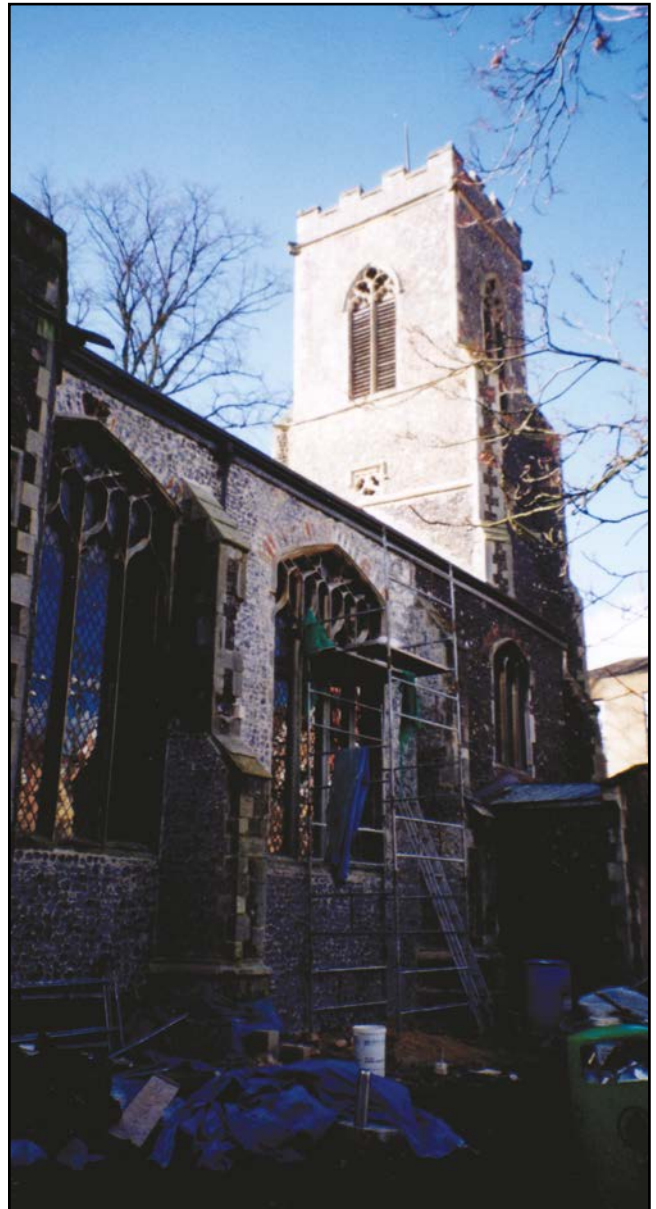
This was a late addition to the Trust's portfolio, as it did not close until 1984. It was used for many years by an Orthodox congregation, which moved out in 2009. They made few changes: the nave pews were removed, but the chancel fittings were left. The building was lime-washed internally. A new tenant took over in 2017.

Improvements here will include installing WCs and mains water.



ST MARGARET-DE-WESTWICK

Closed in 1975, the church was used for a while as a gymnasium, although without any facilities. For some years now it has been administered by an agent for the Trust who lets it out for exhibitions – hence its self-proclaimed title of ‘Church of Art’! Work here includes the installation of WCs, rewiring and connecting to the water-main in 2016.



ST MARTIN-AT-OAK

The church had been used as a parish hall since 1953; it lost its tower to bomb damage in 1942. When the Night Shelter left St James Pockthorpe in 1976, it came here, and remained until 2002, when it moved to the purpose-built Bishopbridge House. The chancel arch had already been bricked up in the 1950s, so that left the nave as a large hall, which became the dormitory. The arcade was glazed, and office, showers, and WCs installed in the aisle. The chancel was used as a common room.

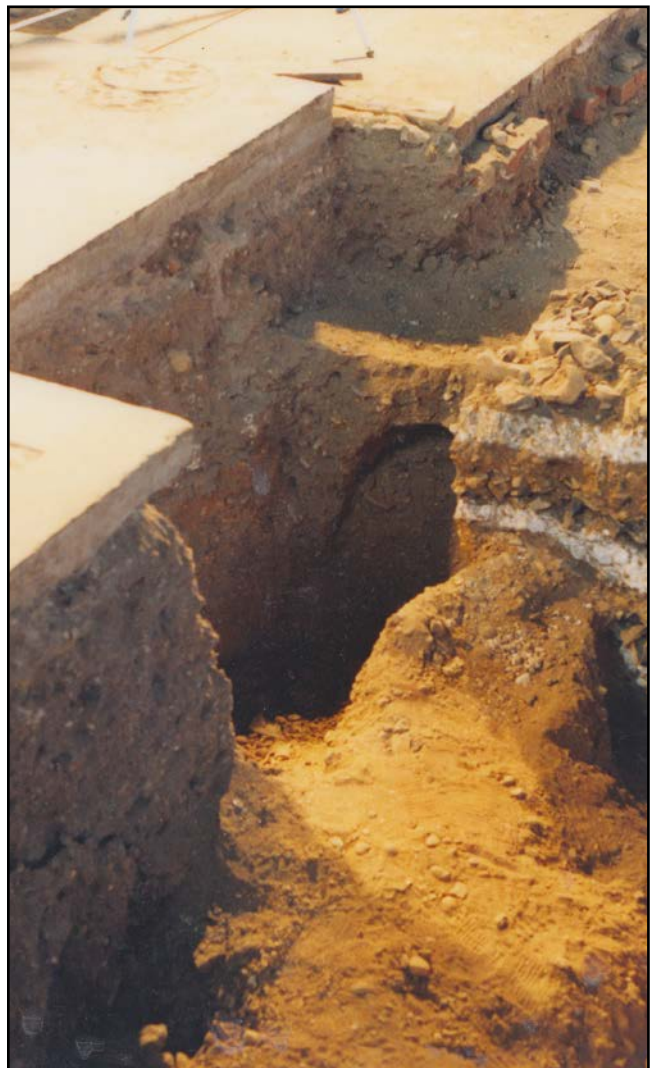
The church was rented for a very short time by some artists, and then in 2012, the Wharf Music Academy took it on. The building was brought up to standard – including replacing the showers in the aisles with soundproof teaching pods, and the upgrading of the chancel into office space and kitchen in 2013.



ST MARTIN -AT-PALACE

Another casualty of the parochial re-ordering, St Martin was closed in 1971. Initially it was used as the store for the Diocesan Furnishings Officer (re-homing unneeded church furniture). In 1987 it was taken over by the Probation Service (and later its various successors) – it is conveniently close to the Law Courts. This resulted in the most interesting alteration in any church. Besides screening in the two chancel chapels for use as meeting-rooms, and inserting a mezzanine floor in the north aisle, a three-tier structure has been inserted in the nave which gradually increases in height, rather than a simple mezzanine. Below, it has been excavated on two descending levels (which provided an opportunity for an archæological investigation). The whole arrangement provides a number of communicating but discrete spaces. Other improvements include restoring the north aisle roof in 2007.

MoveOn East, the latest successor of the Probation Service, vacated the building in 2012. It then stood empty until 2017, when the Trust itself decided to move its base of operations there. This will provide us with an identifiable base in the city, in which a variety of activities can be housed, including a visitors' centre, as well as the Trust's administrative offices..



ST MARY COSLANY

St Mary has had a very chequered history, falling into disrepair, being closed, and then restored and re-opened several times – the last in 1905. It was declared redundant in 1971. It was then used until 1984 as the HQ for the Friends of Norwich Churches – a body which existed alongside NHCT – then became a craft and design centre. It was next used by a publishing services company and an internet book-seller, which latter use still obtains.

Work here has included installing a kitchen on the north transept (used by the craft centre for its café), WCs in the ground floor of the tower, with a room above accessed by a wooden staircase. The publisher installed two immense curtains across the chancel arch in an effort to reduce heating bills.



ST MILES COSLANY



St Miles closed its doors in 1971. It was a scenery store for the Puppet Theatre (at St James) for a time, and then became a martial arts gym. This involved the construction of the complex at the west end of the nave – changing rooms and showers, etc, with a viewing gallery above. It does not intrude too greatly. When the gym closed in 1995 (it was attached to a local authority facility nearby) it became the Inspire Science Discovery Centre until 2011. After a short period, it was taken on by the Lost In Translation circus skills school in 2015.

It has needed little internal work since the new additions. However, in 2013 a major programme of restoration repair on the tower was undertaken.



ST MICHAEL-AT-PLEA

St Michael closed in 1971, and stood empty until the Trust took it on. Its initial use was as an antiques market, with a café in the chancel. When this came to an end, it was taken over by the SPCK bookshop in 2004, which continued the café. The SPCK sold its bookshops to another charity in 2006, but as it was domiciled in the USA, it was not possible to reassign the lease. So it became an independent shop under the same manager, which is its use still.

Work here has included the installation (and later refurbishment) of a kitchen and WC in the chancel chapel.



ST PETER HUNGATE



The latest acquisition by the Trust, this church was declared redundant in 1936, and was the first church nationally to be repurposed. It became a very popular museum of church art, which closed in 1995. After a period of private occupation, it passed to the Trust in 2006. Since 2009, it has been the home of Hungate Medieval Art.

Much had been done by the City Corporation (later, Council) to make it weathertight, but the chancel roof needed major repairs in 2016. Other planned improvements include improving water and WCs.



ST PETER PARMENTERGATE

St Peter did not close until 1980, when the congregation decided to move to St John Timberhill. Despite its being a large open space without its pews, it was not possible to let it until 2007, when Norwich Academy of Martial Arts took it on. They have laid a special floor in the nave. The chancel contains medieval stalls, and the early seventeenth-century Berney-Hobart monument, and so is less easy to use.



Work here has involved WCs and a kitchen in the base of the tower, and a full conservation of the Berney-Hobart monument in 2008.

Further work saw the two-story east vestry converted for use by the Magdalen Group. It then became the NHCT offices. Following the Trust's move to St Martin-at-Palace, the vestry will be let out commercially.



ST SAVIOUR

Following its closure, the church became a parish hall, and then a badminton club. It also had a spell as the diocesan furniture store. The major works were undertaken in 1996, when it became a youth club associated with the King's Church, which called it The Gate. This use lasted until 2010. In 2011 the Thalia Theatre Company took it on – an educational arts-related learning provider for disabled people, especially (though not exclusively) for those with physical and sensory impairments and learning difficulties.



STS SIMON & JUDE

Another early redundancy – 1892 – the church was used as a Sunday School for many years, and then abandoned between about 1920 and 1952. It was taken over by the Boy Scouts as a shop and centre in 1952, and they inserted the floor in the nave, together with offices built into the west gallery. They left in 1997, and after a time as a boxing gym, it is now used as a dance studio.

Few improvements have been needed here. The chancel, which had become divided into a warren of small rooms, was cleared, and is now a single space again. Access to the important Pettus monuments on the east wall of the nave has been improved. Work continues on the tower, which originally collapsed in 1911, to prevent it doing so again.



ST SWITHIN



After a long period in which it and its neighbour St Margaret, with which it shared a clergyman, were opened and closed in turn, St Swithin opened for the final time in 1905, when the mission hall (the same size as the church) was built onto it. It finally closed in 1951, and became a shoe store. In 1980 Premises Arts Centre moved in from further along the street, and have been there ever since – now as Norwich Arts Centre. It is a very successful and well-known venue.

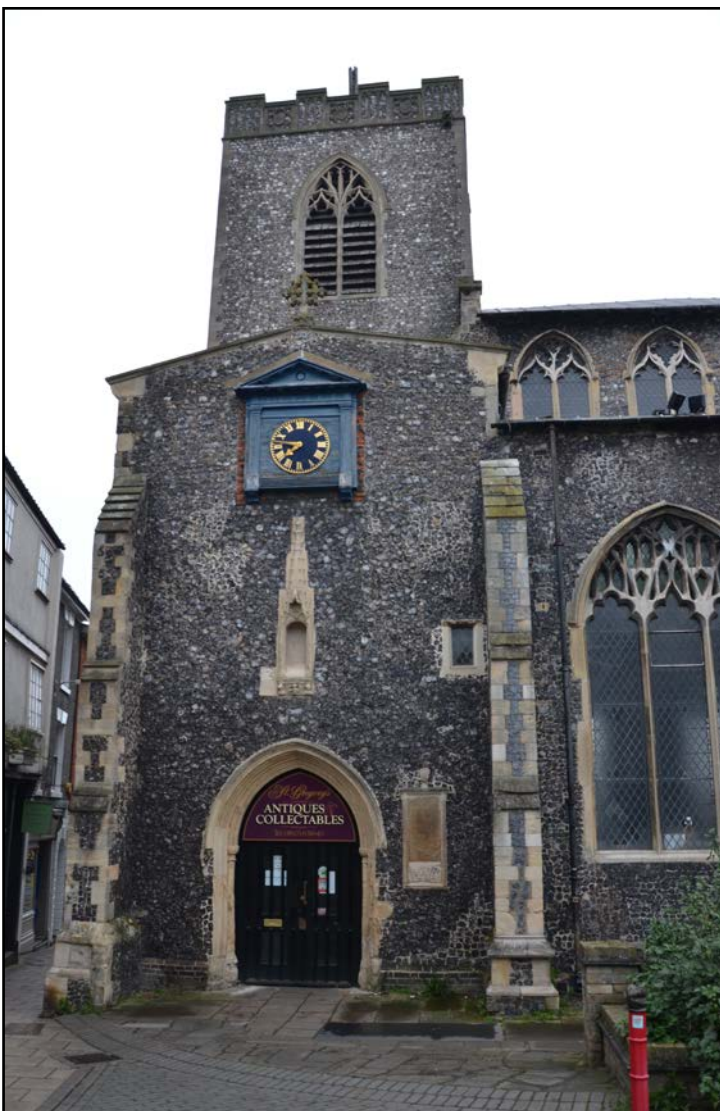
The church itself forms the auditorium, and a doorway has been cut through the east wall where it joins the mission hall for ease of access. Other than staging and lighting gantries, little has been done to it, as all facilities are in the hall. A new entrance was built, giving access direct from St Benedict Street, rather than from the alley.



NHCT AND CONSERVATION, 1973 – 2017

Over the past 44 years the Trust has gradually grown the number of churches in its care from the original 12 to 18 medieval buildings. With this impressive portfolio of some of Norwich's most important medieval buildings comes a great responsibility to repair, conserve and ensure their suitable development into the 21st century.

The first duty of those in charge of fine ancient buildings is to keep in structural repair. The second is to make sure that suggested alterations are indeed necessary, and to see that these are seemly. In keeping with the ethos of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the primary function of the Trust is to preserve and keep in good order those medieval churches it has been tasked with protecting. All of the sensitive conservation and repair is carried out by experienced craftsmen who are both locally and nationally renowned and well experienced in working on medieval ecclesiastical buildings. The conservation and repair work is extremely varied and encompasses many traditional trades and crafts from stonemasonry and flintwork to leadwork, carpentry and stained glass window repair.



Several of the churches have had imaginative conversions carried out which sensitively conserve the historic fabric of these wonderful buildings but also brings them into the modern era in terms of use and multi-functional spaces. Examples of this can be found at St James – the Puppet Theatre, and at St Martin at Palace Plain – the offices of the Norwich Historic Churches Trust.

While the majority of day-to-day maintenance is funded by rental income, this is not enough for larger repair projects. Much assistance in terms of advice and grant funding has been received from

Historic England, formerly English Heritage and other local and national grant giving bodies such as the Town Close Trust and WREN. Examples of some of their recent grants for repair works can be found at St Martin at Palace

(North aisle roof repair 2008), St John De Sepulchre (tower repairs 2008), and most recently at St Peter Hungate (chancel roof and porch repair 2016).

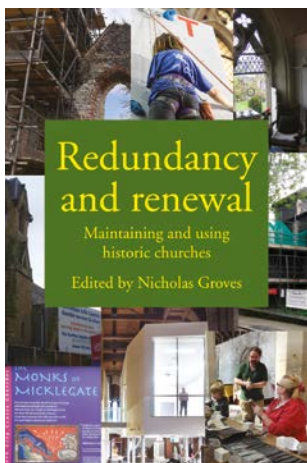
Our next project is repair of the roof at St Gregory's in order to protect the medieval wall paintings which were discovered in 1999. This project is mostly funded by a grant from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Scheme and will be completed later in 2017. We hope to continue forward with new fundraising campaigns to fund more excellent conservation and repair projects into the future using the best local craftspeople and promoting best practice building conservation techniques.

Mark Wilson – NHCT Surveyor of the Fabric



CONCLUSION

The Trust can look back on almost forty-five years of preserving the City's religious heritage, a heritage of international importance. It is unique among such bodies, as no other similar trust, with the exception of the CCT, has so many churches to care for. We are able to access grants and funding, and thanks to the foresight of our founding members, the city's churches are safe for years to come. It is a matter of regret that not all of the churches are open for 'on spec' visits, but we hope that intending visitors will understand why.



Available from
bookshops or direct from
the publisher:
www.lassepress.com

The website also has
details of a companion
volume, *Of Churches,
Toothache and Sheep*



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Press

*Learn more about
the Norwich Historic
Churches Trust*

Redundancy and Renewal has been produced by local publisher the Lasse Press on behalf of the NHCT, with all profits going to support the Trust's work. A range of experts discuss how policies and practice on the use of redundant and under-used churches have changed over the years, with two long contributions specifically outlining the NHCT's history and activities. It is highly readable and fully illustrated, with many colour photos of churches and activities in Norwich and beyond.



NORWICH TOWN CLOSE ESTATE CHARITY

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Norwich Historic Churches Trust

St Martin-at-Palace

Palace Plain

Norwich; NR3 1RW

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CHURCHES IN THE CARE OF NHCT



- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1 | All Saints | 10 | St Martin -At-Palace |
| 2 | St Clement-At-Fyebridge | 11 | St Mary Coslany |
| 3 | St Edmund Fishergate | 12 | St Miles Coslany |
| 4 | St Etheldreda | 13 | St Michael-At-Plea |
| 5 | St Gregory | 14 | St Peter Hungate |
| 6 | St James Pockthorpe | 15 | St Peter Parmentergate |
| 7 | St John-De-Sepulchre | 16 | St Saviour |
| 8 | St Margaret-De-Westwick | 17 | Sts Simon & Jude |
| 9 | St Martin-At-Oak | 18 | St Swithin |