



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

Protect, Create, Inspire

The impact of our volunteers

visitchurches.org.uk



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Welcome

A message from the chairman



We have learned that for all of our churches to thrive they must be rooted in the lives of local communities; cared about, looked after, used and supported by local people.

At the same time, we want them to be open, welcoming and well presented for close on two million visitors to enjoy every year and into the future.

The key to making all this possible lies with our volunteers. Meet them and you'll be impressed. They are imbued with and committed to our values of expertise, ambition, being welcoming, innovative, collaborative, passionate and forward looking.

We can bring our expertise in conservation, fundraising, raising public awareness as well as a national team dedicated to supporting volunteers.

Together it is a powerful mix and certainly a distinctive feature of CCT. It enables the 1750 local volunteers, working alongside our staff, to feel empowered to innovate and be enterprising within a supportive framework. Under the CCT banner we move forward together to excel in sustaining our wonderful collection of historic churches.

The following case studies demonstrate just what can be achieved. We share these with you as we seek to learn together, and face the future with pride and confidence.

Loyd Grossman OBE FSA



Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) has identified five key areas of 'capital' (or assets) which volunteering helps to develop: human capital, social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and physical capital. These form the basis for the Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit developed by IVR.

More information can be found on their website at www.ivr.org.uk

In our experience, we've found that volunteers do indeed build up these five forms of capital. Volunteers develop their personal confidence, knowledge and skills (human capital), whilst developing a sense of community, stronger

social networks, trust and citizenship (social capital). They develop an understanding of, and engagement with, local culture and heritage (cultural capital). The activities volunteers undertake at churches benefit the local economy, create employment, and encourage community regeneration (economic capital), whilst making a significant contribution to developing local infrastructure (physical capital).

Using the Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit we have found evidence of this impact in all the following case studies, as well as in countless other CCT churches across the country.

Volunteering in The Churches Conservation Trust

Volunteering changes lives and strengthens communities. The nine case studies that follow give an insight into the many ways in which The Churches Conservation Trust's 1,750 volunteers work to share with others a unique set of cultural and community assets - 347 historic churches.

The research for the nine case studies was carried out by Simon Jaquet Consultancy Services Ltd between October 2013 and June 2014. It involved visits to all nine churches and discussions with volunteers, staff, and partner organisations. There was a conscious attempt to 'capture' the breadth of volunteering that exists at CCT.

In fact, volunteering within The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) does not adhere to a strict template. As much by response as by design, a number of different models have evolved. There are 58 friends groups - well embedded in the organisation, although variable in distribution throughout the country. Some of these are formally constituted, some are informal. There are 51 volunteer teams which each work within one church only. A further 91 churches are supported by 'mobile' teams which work across more than one church. There are six teams working on regeneration projects, often funded through major grant funding. Single (or sometimes pairs of) keyholders look after 137 churches, especially in rural areas.

Working as a volunteer for CCT is rooted in a desire to preserve and tell the story of England's

community heritage, and this is a striking feature in all the case studies. In each one, a group of community activists have succeeded in ensuring that a local historical building - often dating back to the middle ages - is open to the public.

The following pages describe how women and men throughout the country have made a significant impact on their local communities and how The Churches Conservation Trust has approached the challenge of protecting and making accessible 347 unique buildings in its care.



A bridge between communities

St Lawrence's Church, Broughton, Buckinghamshire

.....



The challenge

"The books have been there since the 1600s. There's talk of putting them in a museum, but we want them here."

Looking down on them is a series of fifteenth century wall paintings. A vision of the last judgement sits opposite St George battling the dragon (only mildly impeded by the loss of his helmet - an accident of later restoration). The books in question are two leather bound volumes that sit facing each other on wooden desks under the chancel arch of St Lawrence's Church in Broughton, near Milton Keynes.

Only a mile from the M1, you could easily be in the remotest corner of rural England. The urban sprawl of neighbouring Milton Keynes has now reached the village. This small rural community of 32 houses has been transformed by the addition of an estate of 4,000 houses. Life now feels very different. It is in this changing landscape that St Lawrence's Church faces its biggest challenge – how can it bridge the gap from old to new?

The response

The Friends of St Lawrence (FOSL) was spurred into life following a major theft of lead from the roof of the church, which has been with the CCT since 1986. A couple of local residents, incensed by this and keen to do something practical, advertised a meeting by putting leaflets on the pews at Christmas. Almost a dozen people turned up to that first meeting in January 2013, and the group was born. As one of the group members says:

"The core is basically those of us who were always involved in organising services as we had over the years – doing the flowers, cleaning the church. That group formed the basis of this group."

The fifteen FOSL members pride themselves on their relaxed approach. That said, they've identified a clear set of roles and the coordinator makes sure everyone knows what they're doing. They're a useful bunch, with skills including DIY, administration, cleaning, cooking, finance, research, interpretation, 'front of house', and IT.

On top of this, there are 70 supporters who help out on an occasional basis. One of the FOSL team recounts how she used Facebook to reach a wider target audience:

"I did start a Friends of St Lawrence Facebook page in lieu of having a website and that reaches a different demographic. I get 'likes' and responses, and there's a gallery of pictures from our events."

The learning

FOSL is firmly rooted in the local community, with key committee members living within a stone's throw from the church. The church offers a kind of oasis in the heart of the village, and this brings people together.

“I think it’s the fellowship with other people in the village as well. For me personally it’s the timelessness. In a world where things rage around you, you can be very busy, there’s lots of change, lots of activity, St Lawrence has been that one timeless thing that’s never changed.”

The group has evolved strong working relationships with local organisations, and this has widened their reach. Working alongside the ‘pioneer minister’ in the local ecumenical parish (which includes Baptists, Methodists, United Reformed Church, and Roman Catholics, as well as the Church of England) has brought more people on board.

“She has been a very good catalyst. Instead of the 30 to 40 we might have mustered at Christmas or Harvest, we have a hundred.”

The outcome

The members of FOSL talk enthusiastically about acting as a bridge between the old village of Broughton and the newer communities.

“FOSL has provided a link between the old and new communities of Broughton. Bringing them together has been a really valuable spin-off from our activities. Our events also provide an opportunity for neighbouring residents from Milton Keynes Village to keep in touch.”

For incoming residents, this connection to the past is important.

“You can imagine that in a new city, finding out what was there before you is quite a strong desire, so finding the old bits is something people really want to do. It gives you a connection with the past.”

In a rather extraordinary way, they have taken the church full circle.

“I think we’re almost back to what churches used to be – a place that brought the community together, meeting places, a focal point.”

This idea of collaboration extends to their relationship with CCT.

“You feel a sense of ownership. The relationship with CCT gives us just enough freedom to do our own thing, but keeps a sense of connection.”

The group is relaxed about its future plans. They



will undoubtedly do something to commemorate the centenary of World War One, and the annual picnic, held on St Lawrence’s day, will happen as usual. The important thing is that a kind of transformation has taken place.

“It’s warm now, in its feeling. It’s come alive, and not just because of the services. It’s like bringing Sleeping Beauty back to life again.”

St Lawrence’s in numbers

32

Number of houses in the original village

70

Number of local supporters on database

1567

Date of publication of ‘Defence of the Apologie of the Church of England’ which sits below the chancel arch

1½

Number of years that the Friends of St Lawrence’s has been in existence

Volunteers in all their diversity

St John's Church, Bristol



The response

Thanks to the commitment of the team of fifteen volunteers who enthusiastically welcome people into the church and its crypt below, St John's is now open to the public up to five days a week. A relatively new team, they formed two years ago and are led by informal 'management' of three volunteers.

The Volunteer Team Coordinator organises the rota, making sure St John's is open to the public as well as giving vital moral support to team members.

Making use of her ability as a networker, the Events Coordinator books and oversees art exhibitions, classical concerts and corporate functions amongst other activities. This is a field she's particularly interested in, and with support from the Volunteering Officer, she is gaining important experience.

"Mostly it's about hiring out the two church bases for events – coordinating that and making sure you go through the booking process – insurance and risk assessment and everything like that. So that's given me good experience in relation to events."

The third member of the team is the Presentation Coordinator. Keeping an eye on how the building looks, he ensures that the church is ready for visitors. For him, the role combines elements of tour guide and historian.

"I get a lot of satisfaction from people enjoying themselves gaining interesting knowledge about the building and Bristol – the old city, and the docks - the history of the city going back to pre-Norman times."

The learning

One of the most striking aspects of the Bristol volunteer team is its diversity. There is a good mix of ages, with people coming from a range of

The challenge

The curious visitor enters St John's church in Bristol:

"We come from Bath on the bus and we always say we must take time to potter around the church. I love the simplicity."

Like many before her, she was discovering the tranquil beauty of St John's hidden away within Bristol's old city walls. The only one remaining of five medieval churches built into the city's ancient defences, you could easily miss it as you went about your shopping.

St John's has been cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust since 1985, but with a somewhat vulnerable location in the heart of the city centre, keeping the doors open has been a struggle. With closed doors, St John's remained surprisingly unknown to even the longest standing of Bristol's residents; people walked through its arches every day without seeing what was right in front of them.

backgrounds. One volunteer describes how his professional experience helps him relate to people who might otherwise struggle to get the most out of a visit to the church.

“My background is in health and social care. I love connections. You find that people don’t know how to have a dialogue with people with learning disabilities, or who may be blind or deaf, and I feel I’ve got those skills.”

With the potential to gain valuable experience in the heritage field, many younger people have joined the team. For others, volunteering helps them to take a new direction:

“I’m interested in further study. I’m funding myself to do a master’s in heritage management. Career change becomes more of a possibility as I get more into the role.”

Events are increasingly important to the life of St John’s. The Events Coordinator talks enthusiastically about the varied programme which she has developed. Not only does this attract new visitors and offer unique experiences, but it’s also a vital source of revenue for CCT.

“It’s mostly for the crypt at St John’s because that’s a big open space. It’s quite unusual. We get quite a lot of recording and music events. We had a big art exhibition in there a few weeks ago which was really nice. That was a good fundraiser as well.”

The programme is unashamedly experimental, and not everything works as well as it could.

“We had someone who was regularly using the crypt for his rock concerts. And it was generating a decent amount of income but there was noise, and the church wasn’t left as tidy as it could have been. So we’re moving away from that.”

CCT has three regional offices outside its London headquarters. St John’s is lucky enough to be located a ten minute walk from the west office and it’s something of a hub for the volunteers. One speaks about how this drew him in:

“I don’t know what it would be like if there hadn’t been that office there. If it had been in Salisbury, I wouldn’t be on that train, popping in to get a leaflet.”



The outcome

The team at St John’s are rightly proud of what they are achieving. An important historical church is now regularly open to the public - history buffs and passing shoppers alike. The walls of the city are giving up some of their secrets. As one of the volunteers says:

“It’s a kind of magnetic operation. You can’t see the forces there, but something makes it all come together.”

St John’s in numbers

15

Number of active volunteers on the team

1 out of 5

St John’s is the one remaining medieval church built into the city wall

£700

Amount raised recently through renting the crypt space for an art exhibition

A hub for the community

St Peter's Church, Sudbury, Suffolk

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The challenge

St Peter's has a habit of doing the unexpected.

Sudbury is a small Suffolk market town of 12,000 inhabitants. St Peter's sits in a commanding position at the head of the market hill. When it was first closed for regular worship in 1971 there were plans to pull it down. It was saved by the efforts of local volunteers, determined to prove that the building could be a useful asset to the town.

The response

Forty years later, its central position in the town is reflected in its pivotal role in community life. A local organisation says:

"The community would be lost without this facility. It's the hub of cultural, community, and artistic activity. Anybody who wants to organise an important, successful event in the town needs to book here. The problem we're having is finding a Saturday which isn't already booked!"

Run by a team of volunteers, each year the church hosts a varied programme of events led by local groups such as Rotary, Sudbury Fair Trade Group and Sudbury Choral Society. A typical month will include up to a dozen events including craft fairs, choral concerts, farmers' markets and model railway exhibitions. There are religious services too - 'Kettle and Fish' drop in sessions take place several times a month.

Visitors come from all over the county. In 2013, the annual footfall was close to 60,000.

The learning

A local councillor speaks enthusiastically about the economic impact that St Peter's has on the town. The first ever food festival held in June 2013 attracted 3,500 visitors, and the Visions of Sudbury art exhibition drew in 2,000 people over a five day period. This all has a knock-on effect for the town's businesses.

The Friends of St Peter's are a group of fifteen at the heart of a much larger network of active citizens and community members. Volunteers become involved for numerous reasons, but for

most it is a desire to give something back to the community combined with an interest in ‘the best community space in the town’.

In the past, the friends have agonised long and hard about the best way to recruit new members.

“It’s fair to say that over the years we’ve sat round the table periodically and said we need new members, and we’ve gone into the inevitable ‘press routine’, with wonderful photographs of the committee, saying ‘why don’t you ring this number and become a volunteer?’ Complete and absolute waste of time!”

Sitting on a committee is not everyone’s idea of a good time. The friends find it much easier to ask people to help with a particular role, so that in the end they have a team with all kinds of skills. In practice, this means having a chat with the people attending events.

“The most productive way is to have one or two members of the committee present at the farmers market, the craft fair and the Kettle and Fish event. We have attended about five of these with the aim of talking to people who are running stalls, and the general public.”

The new recruitment campaign is being developed jointly with CCT. The local Volunteering Officer says:

“With the volunteer roles that we’re developing here, they will be based in Sudbury and working on a day to day basis with the friends committee. They’ll be a joint volunteer, who’ll predominantly be volunteering for the friends but will have access to the support and training that CCT can offer.”

The outcome

Volunteers at St Peter’s clearly delight in their fifteenth century building with its striking nineteenth century painted ceiling. Some have been on the committee for nearly forty years. A wealth of ‘know how’ resides in the team - whether it’s stage managing events in this 430 seat venue or producing a business plan for the church. The team’s strengths lie in its connections to the local community, an ambitious vision for the future and an impressive commitment from individual volunteers.

They are realistic about the challenges they face in helping this volunteer led enterprise to flourish. Not least of these is the risk of a small number of people bearing the whole weight of responsibility. Burn-out is always a threat. Many of the committee have been involved for a long time, and are now retired. Aware of this, they hope that the new recruitment drive will draw in some younger volunteers.

As the Friends of St Peter’s contemplate the next few moves, they are upbeat about their plans. Continuing a programme of community events remains a given. Central to this is their ambition to attract up to 50 new volunteers who will help to maintain the life of this much loved ancient building.

The final word is left to one of the groups that uses the church on a regular basis.

“On the Kettle and Fish days we have lots of visitors who come to the town and want to look round the church. They discover we’re inside and they look disappointed at first that there are no pews. They don’t see a church in a traditional sense. Then you spend a little bit of time talking to them, and you show how the church serves the community and the diversity of things that go on in here, and they’re convinced that we’re doing the right thing.”

St Peter’s in numbers

1859

Date when the church pews were sold ‘overnight’ by the then rector Rev Canon Molyneux

25

Number of new volunteers recruited in four months

2

Number of years in advance that local organisations book their event in the church

60,000

Footfall in St Peters in 2013

12,000

Population of Sudbury

Partners and collaborators

St Bartholomew's Church, Lower Basildon, Berkshire

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"I think it's wonderful to see that beautiful building come to life, and being used for what it was intended and for other purposes like concerts. If you were to go into that church when it's decorated for harvest for example, with candles and fruits and flowers and a church full of people, it's very moving."

St Bartholomew's has the third largest programme of events of all the CCT churches in the west region. In 2013, there were sixteen events. Many of these were planned in partnership with local groups and organisations. Though a small team, the St Bartholomew's Friends Group is beginning to punch above its weight.

The challenge

For many people, Jethro Tull is the curious name of a British rock band that rose to fame in the 1970s, noted for its flamboyant flute-wielding frontman. In fact, Jethro Tull lived in the eighteenth century and was a noted agricultural pioneer, inventing a particularly effective horse drawn seed drill.

For visitors to St Bartholomew's Church the evidence is there. A memorial can be found in the graveyard; it is one of the things that makes this church unique.

The 700 year old church was shut in 1976. Since then, a committed group of volunteers have been working hard to find a way to preserve its heritage and to re-establish its place in the community.

The learning

A mile up the road is Beale Park, a 350 acre wildlife park, aimed largely at young families. The manager has a strong relationship with St Bartholomew's and is able to tell his visitors about the church.

"It's very nice to be involved from a personal point of view. I'm limited in what I can do, but what I can do is use the size and the catchment that we have in terms of visitors to help publicise events and activities that go on at St Bartholomew's to our audience and hopefully draw them down here."

A recent development adjacent to the church is the Racing and River Boat Museum. Opened in 2013, it houses a collection of small historic boats, including vintage racing dinghies, historic canoes and kayaks.

The response

The St Bartholomew's Friends Group, although well established, remains an informal team. With eight members, it meets on a regular basis and has developed an enviable programme of events within the church.

One of the problems faced by many CCT churches is the lack of toilet facilities. This was true for St Bartholomew's until the manager of Beale Park came up with a creative approach.

"We were talking about the issues of buying a toilet, and it struck me they've got toilets in the Boat

Museum round the back there, so why not try and tie the two together? If it's close enough for your requirements and he's willing to help support that, then why not use the loos that are already built and plumbed in?"

The result - access to the facilities for visitors to the church and an increased profile for the Boat Museum. The partnership will continue and there are plans for a joint Christmas concert.

Two of the committee are also on the PCC of the local parish church in Upper Basildon. This helps to cement the partnership and to ensure that the event programmes of the two churches work together well.

Slightly closer to home are the local CCT churches within the area. St Bartholomew's is currently working with five other churches in Oxfordshire on the development of a trail around the Thames Valley.

The outcome

The friends talk positively about their relationship with CCT. The Volunteering Officer makes regular appearances at meetings. He also gets to know the volunteers who are able to attend local and national events such as conferences and lectures. The volunteers describe having a 'hotline' to him.

"We've got more enthusiasm because the CCT have got more organised. You feel there's back-up there."

CCT are aware that recognition is a vital part of the volunteer experience. The award that St Lawrence's Friend's Group received at the recent CCT Awards event was a surprising bonus. One of the committee says:

"There were some certificates being given out. The person who was giving the award said this group had done 'blah blah blah' and done so many events during the year.... And then I realised they were talking about us! We didn't do all that, did we?!"

As well as achieving a great deal, as a group they genuinely enjoy the work they do. A committee member reflects:

"We've got to know each other quite well. We have a laugh and it becomes a social thing when you meet



up to clean the church."

With all of these aspects coming together, it's clear that a small team can bring about a big change. Even if sometimes it feels like an uphill struggle, they remind each other to be optimistic:

"Many the time we've thought we'll never fill the church, and then we've thought 'Oh blow it, let's go for it', and we've always been so surprised."

St Bartholomew's in numbers

16

Number of events in St Bartholomew's in 2013

5

Number of other local CCT churches the friends group is working with

700

Age of St Bartholomew's

8

Current members of the friends group committee

1701

Date when Jethro Tull perfected the seed drill

Keeping the customer satisfied

St John's Church, Leeds



The response

St John's has a team of ten volunteers who welcome visitors into the church. As you'd imagine, having a team this size means that the visitor experience can be significantly improved. One of the volunteers points out:

"If they walk into a church like it used to be, they could see something and wonder. As volunteers we can try and explain what it's about."

The volunteers are enthusiastic about what they do at St John's. They enjoy the contact with the general public, and its unpredictable encounters.

"I've worked in retail for four years so I don't have a problem talking to strangers, but it's nice to see other people interested in the church and their enthusiasm, hearing what they're interested in and where they're from. And they're interested in us as well. It's not just a one way thing."

Customer service is an important dimension to the work. The volunteers know that they are the face of CCT for the visitors who drop by.

"Remember that you are representing the Trust. You're on the frontline. If you do a good job they visit other CCT churches."

Being a volunteer is definitely seen as a two way process, with mutual benefit for both the organisation and the volunteer. One of the team points out:

"They see what skills you have and what you could do for the church, and also what the CCT can do for you, because it's not a one way system, it works both ways. It gives me a challenge and something to get involved in. Being a volunteer is already on my CV."

Although they're an informal group, there is a sense of solidarity amongst the team. They span a

The challenge

The volunteers meet in the bell tower, but it's not as you'd imagine it.

There is a distinct absence of musty furnishings, ancient hymnbooks, and bell ringing paraphernalia. A refurbished, brightly lit space has been created with access via a new spiral staircase, overlooked by a twenty foot pendulum that swings gently across the south wall of the tower.

The Church of St John the Evangelist is a 17th century building, founded by a local industrialist, hidden away in Leeds' city centre.

CCT's recently established office for the north is located nearby. Their region spans the Lake District to Lincolnshire, and with an area that size, the role of volunteers is crucial. Once recruited, the next challenge is providing a perfect environment for the group to flourish in.

number of divides - age, gender, background - and are stronger for it. A new member of the team says that one of the best things about being a volunteer is meeting new people:

“I’ve been looking for a job for a while and been at home for such a long time. It’s nice to come in and work with these guys, and also meet the visitors.”

Their shared commitment to the church and to each other bonds them as a group.

“We’re all interested in the church and we share the knowledge between us. We’re generally very welcoming as a group.”

The learning

The volunteers are often in touch with CCT staff. Their key relationship is with the Volunteering Officer, who is a mixture of mentor, coordinator, and willing ear.

“You’re good at finding out what we’re interested in, and our skills, and involving us in projects.”

As with any team, communication is key. The volunteers need to be up to date with important developments - consulted as well as informed.

“You need to listen to the people on the frontline, and that’s us.”

A monthly meeting provides a chance for the team to have a chat, take part in some informal training and get an update on how projects are going. There are also plans to hold more regional get-togethers, so volunteers from different churches can meet and help each other. The last one brought together volunteers from York, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, and was a big success.

The outcome

The St John’s team of volunteers - independent, committed, and willing to speak their mind with characteristic Yorkshire verve - have plans for the future. They aim to recruit five more to bring the team up to full strength. There are lots of projects in the pipeline - exhibitions, organ recitals, carol services and refurbishing the war memorial.

A new volunteer captures this enthusiasm, when she says:



“We have a lot of ideas of what could happen. After doing ‘Light Night’ it was nice to see so many people in here, and the result was more visitors the next day. It’s quite a good space to have art exhibitions. I went to Leeds College of Art and my course leader is still there. I wouldn’t mind going and saying ‘We’ve got this place. Do you want to put an exhibition on there?’ Get some students work and get some more people in.”

St John’s in numbers

10

Size of current volunteer team

1634

Date when St John’s was founded in 1634 by John Harrison, a local wool merchant

1

Average number of days per week that volunteers give to St John’s

Bringing life to remote rural communities

The Archway Project, Lincolnshire



The response

The Archway Project started in July 2010, in response to two clearly identified needs: CCT needed a trained group of volunteers to care for the 14 churches in the local area and Lincolnshire County Council wanted to enhance its tourism 'offer' and bring visitors into the area.

When the project began there was a key holder for each church, and one friends group that was struggling to keep itself going. The time was ripe for a new way forward.

In the course of the project, 51 volunteers were recruited. The thing that appealed to the volunteers is the heritage value of the churches. One new volunteer, who lives seven miles away from the church, came across the project almost by accident.

"I spotted this church on a walk and was drawn to it. I saw that it was a charity looking after it. I'd been retired nine months and had been in construction all my working life and the company I worked for did lots of heritage buildings. I thought I'd get involved and give something back."

The Archway experience has confirmed the need for a relevant volunteering model that fits the requirements of this very rural area. One of the volunteers stresses this:

"The approach for the rural and the urban has to be different. You can't have 'one model fits all'."

Prior to the Archway project, tentative steps had been taken to develop a new way of working. The support generated by the project has allowed

The challenge

The fourteen churches that participated in the Archway Project are dotted around rural Lincolnshire in the hinterland of Louth. Some of them can't be accessed by road.

If you visit St George's at Goltho¹, your trip will involve a trek across a muddy field, until the red brick 16th century building emerges into sight from a coppice of trees.

Caring for these often isolated churches presented a real challenge for CCT.

¹ The discussion with the Archway volunteers took place in Goltho, a day before the church was struck by lightning and largely destroyed by the resulting fire.

this to start to flourish. An Area Volunteer now oversees the practical needs of all the churches in the area, which are divided into ‘sub-clusters’, each looked after by a local volunteer team. Two sub-clusters currently exist and another is being developed.

With this ‘roving’ model, it is crucial that someone takes the lead, but it’s also important to build in some flexibility:

“He organises this roving group, which is brilliant in a situation like this, where a group of like minded volunteers - and it won’t be the same group every time - get their brushes and pans out, and go to churches where there isn’t a basic volunteer group.”

The learning

Training is essential if a volunteer team is to flourish, and the Archway project has been able to offer this. Informal opportunities for volunteers to meet and discuss their experiences are just as vital as more formal training courses. Listening to the views of volunteers and understanding what they are prepared to give up time for is essential for developing a constructive training programme.

Support is provided for the team both by the CCT Volunteering Officer and by the other volunteers themselves. With such a geographically large area to cover, the more responsibility that can be shared with the volunteer team, the better.

For the volunteers recruited through the project, a key strength was the flexibility of the support that was on offer. Effective communication provides a critical lifeline to what is happening on the ‘patch’, and new technology can work well for an often older demographic:

“Email keeps you in the loop. It may not necessarily be for you, but it lets you know what’s going on elsewhere. A telephone call - you have to be there to answer it; an email - you can pick it up six hours later.”

The outcome

A larger, more effective, volunteer workforce means that more events can be put on - whether craft fairs, tours, concerts, exhibitions, or tea parties. This in turn draws more visitors to the area. Based on an impact model pioneered by Visit

Britain, it is estimated that over the three years of the Archway project an additional £210,000 was brought into the East Lincolnshire economy. This would not have been possible without the work of the volunteer team.

The Archway volunteers are an adaptable group, working sometimes on their own, sometimes in groups. They do however feel part of the overall CCT team and recognise the limitations of CCT resources, and that staff time is spread thinly across the country. This means that where possible they share work that would previously have fallen to staff. In many cases, all that CCT needs to know is that the event is being taken forward competently by volunteers.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of these rural Lincolnshire churches. Trekking down lanes and across fields, they maintain a level of care for churches and an enthusiasm for the history that lies behind them. The strength of the team lies in its diversity and its ability to draw in people at their own pace. As one volunteer puts it:

“I think it’s important to acknowledge that the volunteer pool is not all the same sort of person. It’s a real variety. Some people will be involved all the time, other people will be there just once a year. The whole network is necessary but not all at the same time. They all play their part.”

Archway in numbers

14

Number of churches in East Lincolnshire participating in the Archway project

51

Numbers of volunteers recruited through the project

£210,000

Economic contribution to the local economy by the project

A place of peace

St Peter's Church, Preston Park, Brighton



The challenge

The volunteers gathered around the table are unequivocal:

"You have to be aware that people have been worshipping here. There's an atmosphere that comes out of the walls."

St Peter's, an 800 year old church, stands in the grounds of Preston Manor in the leafy suburbs of Brighton. It's best known for its fourteenth century wall paintings; their ghostly outlines include a gruesome depiction of Thomas Becket's murder.

For the members of St Peter's Friends Group, the church is primarily a place of peace.

"It's a very important and significant building for a lot of people. I think a lot of people just don't go to services, but it doesn't mean to say that they don't still have a faith."

When the church was closed for worship in 2006, the friends group formed to answer the question that they'd all been worrying about: how can we keep St Peter's alive?

The response

The current committee of eight is the nucleus around which a wider group of local volunteers get involved. There are currently 74 households who are signed up as members of the friends group. This structure - a committee supported by a wider group of less formal volunteers - works well for them.

"We all enjoy each others' company. You're better off with eight people who get on really well, and then fan out to others. A committee who support each other is vital."

The committee members have each taken different routes to their involvement. What they share is a real enthusiasm for the church. As the Chair comments:

"I'm very passionate about the church and about what it has meant to the community over centuries. I want to do whatever I can to conserve it."

They run a programme of events throughout the year. Starting in May with their major annual fundraising sale, there is also an archaeology day in June along with CCT's midsummer tea party. Later in the year, is the heritage open day, and the 'Big Draw' - a national arts event for children. The year rounds off with the annual carol service.

The patronal festival in June is particularly enjoyed. A committee member says:

"It's just lovely to have the church full of people singing the old hymns, with the doors open and the birds singing. It's what the church was for."

St Peter's also serves as a venue for outside groups and performers. Recent bookings have included jazz concerts, art exhibitions, and a harp

and steel pans performance. Memorably there was also a trapeze artist, direct from protesting at the Newbury bypass.

The church is a real haven of peace - one that is open every day of the year. It even welcomes visitors on Christmas day. One of the committee reflects:

“The church has been here for a very long time and we want it to stay here, to be open for other people. It’s a very significant place at the heart of what was the village.”

That the small band of volunteers keeps this important building alive is appreciated by the many who visit it.

“One of the most satisfying things about being a member is the delight that other people show. People often write in the book ‘thank you for keeping it open’.”

The learning

The team benefits from a real mix of talents, meaning that it can turn its hand to a variety of tasks.

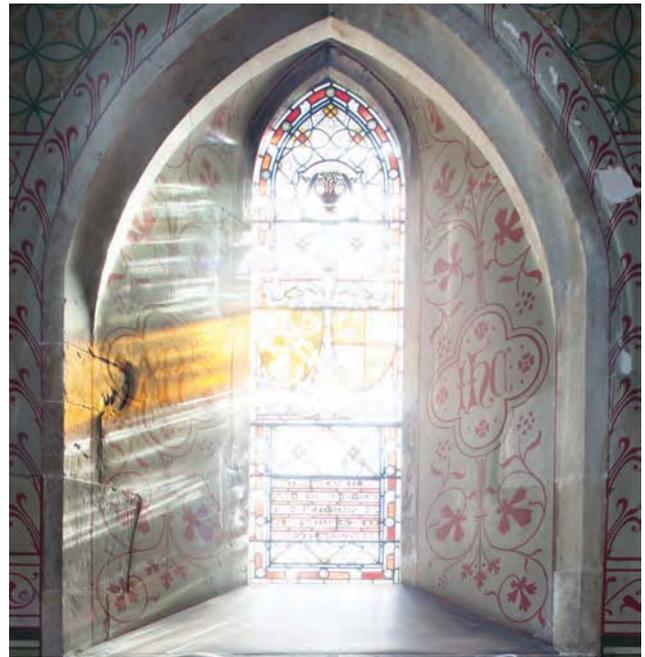
“I suppose it comes down to us all having individual strengths. When we have a group of us here cleaning, and someone comes through the door to look at the church, Hazel will be the one down there talking about the history of the church. Whereas I’m thinking I’m here to clean! We’ve got a good web of strengths and skills.”

As well as this support from members of the friends group, it’s also about finding your place within CCT itself. Friends groups all over the country have not always been aware of the financial investment made by CCT in their churches. One committee member was clearly taken aback by the actual level of financial commitment from CCT.

“When I first joined I was absolutely amazed at the amount of money CCT had spent on doing the lights and making it all water-tight.”

The outcome

The local Volunteering Officer is the link between the friends group and CCT. They are currently



working on a joint bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a major upgrade to St Peter’s. It’s an exciting project, with plans to clean the medieval paintings, add a welcome desk, improve the interpretation of the building, work on the exterior of the church and install heating. The bid is for £50,000, with the friends group contributing 10% of the overall cost. St Peter’s, like many of CCT’s churches, changes on a daily basis - from hosting a community group, to a budding social enterprise, as well as being part of a national charity. It is a challenge which the friends group appears to relish.

For the people that love it, the main thing is spreading the word about the place of peace that is St Peter’s.

St Peter’s in numbers

365

Number of days per year that St Peter’s is open to the public

39,100

Number of visitors in 2013

50

Thousand pounds to be applied for from HLF

A venture in community regeneration

All Saints' Church, Benington, Lincolnshire

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The challenge

All Saints sits just off the main road from Boston to Skegness in rural Lincolnshire, tucked in behind the Admiral Nelson pub. The church was closed to the public in 2003, and at that point this village of 460 was left without its longstanding community hub. Some of the former congregation founded the Friends of All Saints, and a few years later the Benington Community Heritage Trust (BCHT) was born.

The Vice Chair of the Benington Community Heritage Trust looks back:

“When the church closed, I was concerned that if we were to allow the church to literally fall down, it wouldn't appear that the village has got much going for it. The church closed, the shop closed, we had a butchers shop that's now closed, the school closed and merged with another village. It became a concern of mine that we were literally allowing everything to fall apart.”



The response

The medieval exterior of All Saints church, shrouded in trees, conceals a rather exciting secret. The church is on its way to being a locally owned community facility for the whole village and its surrounding area. This major heritage and community regeneration initiative is supported financially by the Heritage Lottery and has project management assistance from The Churches Conservation Trust.

To help get this exciting project off the ground, the BCHT employs a Development Manager. It's

a big job, with tasks including the development of a programme of activities and events, the recruitment of volunteers, as well as shaping ideas for the future of the project. There is a real energy about the plans to re-awaken All Saints: conservation will maintain the historic building; learning will reach out to young people and adults; participation will draw in a team of volunteers.

The learning

Long term, the hope is to encourage local services back into the village, including a cafe in the church. There is also scope to create jobs. Above all, it

is about re-kindling a sense of pride in the local community.

Volunteers are central to what goes on at All Saints, and there are three distinct groups: the friends group – the ‘original’ volunteers; those on the BCHT; and those who have joined recently to help out with activities and events.

The Vice Chair of BCHT sees the friends group as the link to the community.

“They’re the group that are good at getting people to things. They’ve got the feelers out to the local community. They run sausage and mash evenings, they run jazz nights. Basically they’re the voice of the people of the village.”

He is slightly more self-deprecating about the BCHT, underplaying the huge amount of time and energy they have already put into the project.

“A group of us got together and formed ourselves as the Community Heritage Trust to try and hold it together basically. We had no experience at all. It was just a matter of putting out feelers everywhere, to see who was out there and could give us some assistance.”

As a group, the next challenge is managing the regeneration project. The Development Manager, meanwhile, has been making the most of her local contacts and following a ‘taster day’ in January, she has succeeded in recruiting 14 volunteers.

These new volunteers are already filling the six main roles needed – tour guide, church and churchyard maintenance, research and interpretation, education and schools work, botanical surveys and staffing of events. Recruiting volunteers is all well and good, but it’s only the first step. Training is vital.

“We had a day here in Benington and then we went over to Lincoln Cathedral. We had a tour around there and were given some tips by the tour guide on how to deliver a good tour. It was really enjoyable.”

Looking further afield, the team have established relationships with local organisations including the neighbouring open prison and heritage skills centre.

“Once you get these links going, it’s surprising what other links there are out there. Over a period of time we’ve learnt not to be frightened about

approaching people, not be frightened about having a go at it basically.”

The outcome

It’s all hands on deck for the Open Day at All Saints. The energy in the church is palpable. The project is a unique opportunity – one that the trustees of BCHT are grasping with both hands. They debate with consultants (and with each other) about running the proposed cafe as a franchise. Whatever happens, the coming few years will be a great chance to see what works.

The day concludes with presentations about the plans for the building. Mums, dads, and toddlers are seated around tables in the nave. Diagrams and pictures are projected onto a slightly rickety screen perched atop a couple of pews. The chair of the trustees explains three important goals.

“The key priorities for the BCHT are to give to the people who are running today’s event a clear direction of what the Trust and the village is looking for, to stay motivated, and to try and encourage others to come on board.”

His parting comment says it all.

“It would be a shame to see the old lady not used, because it’s a fantastic building.”

Benington in numbers

14

Number of new volunteers recruited since January 2014

225

Number of households in Benington

56

Number of car parking spaces planned

5

Number of BCHT trustees

Community associations

St Nicholas' Church, Brockley, Somerset

.....



The challenge

Locally, it's known as the Smyth-Pigott pew.

In fact it's a vaulted room with its own fireplace and private entrance located in the south transept of St Nicholas' Church. In past centuries it was where the lord of the manor and his family could sit, surveying the lower orders occupying the nave below. Today it is more likely to be where you pick up your food order after the annual lecture organised by the local friends group.

The church has a 300 year association with the Pigott family, dating back to the 17th century when Thomas Pigott bought Brockley Court, the local manor house.

Brockley is in the south west of England, with only 280 on the electoral roll. With very little in the way of community space available, St Nicholas Church has always played an important part in village life. As is often the case, adapting to the needs of the village is an ongoing challenge which evolves as the community changes.

The response

The Friends of St Nicholas started life in 1988, and still contains one original member. The current committee is made up of 10 people, and is supported by a further 43 who help out when they can. The current chair describes this two tier model like this:

"They're happy to remain on the periphery. They're happy to provide refreshments and electricity. They are supporters."

The friends understand that any group of volunteers working together requires someone to drive and focus them. The current chair has been in the post for 20 years and is still as passionate as ever. A colleague says:

"It's so dependent on individuals. You need a leader with fire in his or her belly."

The friends organise a rich blend of faith-based and secular events.

"The parish is too small to support a village hall, so our church is effectively the village hall."

One of the highlights of the year is the Brockley lecture. Taking place in September, this has now been running for seven years. An eminent lecturer is selected by the committee to cover a topic ranging from the court of King James II, the pre-Raphaelite painters, the mechanics of memory, to the phylogeny of plants. As a committee member says about this last one,

"He talked about the sex life of orchids and everybody listened! He just talked about plants really. It was wonderful."

Up to 90 tickets for the lecture are sold each year, with profits split between CCT and the friends



group. The ticket price includes supper with wine. In order to manage the hungry hordes they have developed tactics which involve guests forming a queue that snakes out through the Smyth-Pigott pew, into the churchyard, and back in the main church door. The food is all locally sourced and prepared.

The learning

Proud of their success, the friends are aware that a lot of their strength lies in the strong relationships they have cultivated, which branch out further than their immediate volunteering team.

The local rector is a great supporter. She comes to committee meetings on a regular basis, and involvement in the friends group is now seen as part of the job role. A member comments:

“It was one of the requirements of the new rector that they had to be sympathetic to the church.”

Furthermore, they see their relationship with CCT as a partnership. There are strong working ties between staff and volunteers. This sense of shared enterprise is helped by the friends being aware that what they do is valued by CCT.

“We’re made to feel that Brockley as a church is important. You feel that Brockley is the only church that matters at the time.”

The outcome

St Nicholas’ Friends Group is upbeat about the plans for the future of the church. The installation of toilets is at the development stage and moving forwards. A timed lock for the church is being considered to balance security with a desire to see the church open to the public. Lecture dates are already in the diary until 2016, and the guide to the church is going to be updated.

Thomas Pigott would have approved.

St Peter’s in numbers

10

Number of people on friends group committee

43

Number of local friends

100

Number of email addresses used for advertising the annual lecture

280

Number of people on electoral roll

Looking to the future



These nine case studies demonstrate that CCT has learnt a lot about volunteering over the past few years. It has, in effect, transformed itself from an organisation concerned primarily with ‘bricks and mortar’ to one with a strong focus on people. In particular, there are four qualities that stand out.

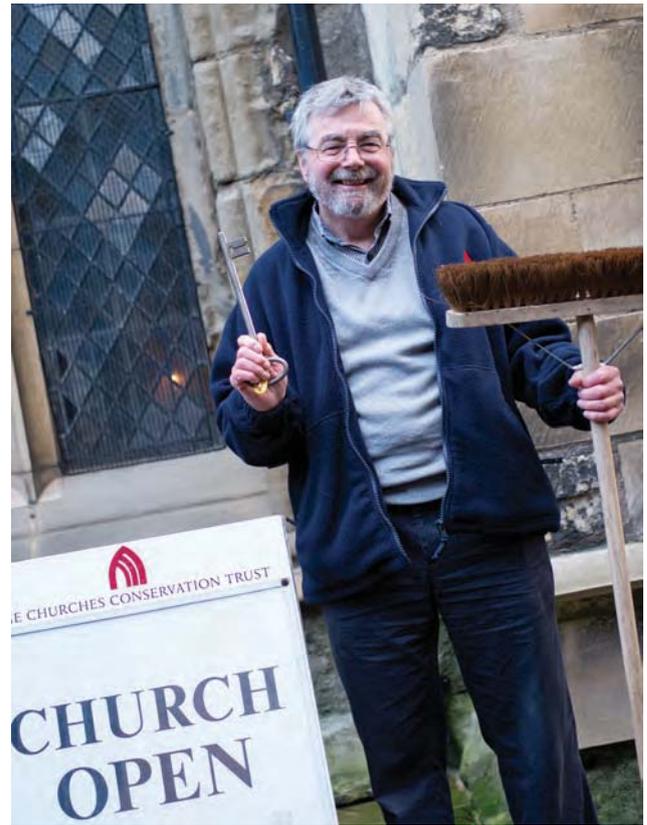
Connected to communities

CCT’s volunteers are intimately rooted in local communities, with many of them being able to trace family ancestry back a number of generations. Even where people have come to the organisation from outside the community, the nature of CCT’s work (informed by the history, geography and heritage of the area) means that there is a strong sense of localism. As a result, CCT volunteers are well placed to encourage community activity. There is a growing recognition of CCT’s role in strengthening communities, and these case studies provide a number of examples of volunteer activity which has helped to breathe life back into villages and towns. The fact that

government departments and other national charities are beginning to recognise this function speaks volumes about the work of CCT.

Support for volunteers

Volunteering can occasionally be an isolated experience - even when part of a team - as people work in small groups to maintain often remote churches. However, support comes from many different sources: fellow volunteers provide a sense of solidarity and team bonding; volunteers from other CCT churches offer important peer support; local partners, ranging from schools to businesses, make their own contribution. However, the prime means of providing information, advice, and encouragement is through CCT’s staff - in particular the Volunteering Officers.



The sacred and the secular

In local volunteer teams, there is a fascinating blend of the sacred and the secular. Whilst the setting is clearly religious, the motivation to support a CCT church often comes from elsewhere. It is frequently more about heritage and community than religion. That said, the one infuses the other, and it is not uncommon to find volunteers acknowledging the complex relationship between faith and community. It is a powerful mix.

Partnerships

Partnerships - whether with local businesses, schools, heritage organisations, or community groups - lie at the heart of the volunteers' connection to local communities. A key partnership is with the Church of England, and both CCT and the C of E are aware of a mutual interest in working together at local, diocesan, and national levels. CCT is also starting to appreciate that its work has resonances with a range of sectors not immediately obvious in the context of historic churches. Increasingly, the learning from its practice will benefit organisations working in the broader arts, heritage, tourism, community development, and volunteering sectors.

Next steps

In 2015, CCT launches its strategic plan for the coming three years. Its aspiration is that 'volunteer teams with the right skills and following an agreed plan will run open churches, and that these should be sustainable and meet a high visitor standard'.

As CCT embarks on this next stage of its journey, the evidence of these nine case studies indicates that it is well placed to achieve this.



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