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Sexism still determines the instruments we play

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Save our churches

Different newspapers chose to highlight different buildings in their coverage of [Historic England's Heritage at Risk 2023 register](#), published last week. To me, however, it was a statistic, not a building, that leapt out. Of the 4,871 entries on the register, no fewer than 943 are places of worship.

There are 14 churches deemed at risk in one London borough alone (Camden) and another eight in neighbouring Islington. But the biggest shock in this corner of northwest London is the appearance on the list of Edwin Lutyens's grandiose St Jude's Church in Hampstead Garden Suburb: a part of the capital full of people who are not only affluent but usually fiercely protective of their area's special architectural merits. If St Jude's can't be properly looked after by its locals, you think, what hope for England's other 942 crumbling churches?

It's an urgent issue. Congregations are mostly shrinking and ageing. By themselves they can't maintain ancient buildings requiring specialist craft skills. Yet churches are often the oldest and most beautiful structures in their areas. Their spires have been landmarks for centuries. Their tombstones chronicle families through generations. Let them crumble and we let England's history crumble at its most intimate and local level.

There's a role here for a dynamic and imaginative organisation that will boldly identify fresh sources of funding — local and national, public and private — and devise ingenious new ways of sustaining churches in good condition. Sadly, it's hard to imagine that organisation being the Church of England.