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More than 100 church projects receive funding boost to help ‘preserve national treasures’

Campaigners hailed the grants as ‘very good news’ – but warned there was still much work to be done

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The Church of England has invested a quarter of a million pounds in conservation projects as part of efforts to “preserve our national treasures”.

A total of £255,585 has been awarded to 123 projects in 34 dioceses – with the number of grants up 20 per cent on the year before – to help churches maintain and preserve significant cultural and historical items, including paintings, doors, chairs, clocks and organs.

The funds were distributed by the Church of England last year to support conservation projects in parishes, including work to preserve wall paintings, baptismal fonts, stained glass windows and rood screens.

However, while clergy and campaigners have welcomed the Church’s latest parish funding drive, there is still an estimated £1 billion black hole to safeguard their preservation and funding.

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The Rev Marcus Walker, the chairman of the Save the Parish campaign group, said: “This is very good news. So many people across the country work so hard to keep their churches up, it’s good to see the national church providing this level of support.”

The clergyman, who is Rector at St Bartholomew the Great in the City of London, and is also a member of the General Synod, the Church of England’s legislative body, added: “There is, however, much more to be done.

“With 45 per cent of all Grade I listed buildings being churches, and estimates of £1 billion of essential repairs needed to keep them standing, we are all going to have to work out how to preserve our national treasures to be able to pass them on to the next generation.”



The Grade II* listed organ at St Anne's Church in Aigburth, Liverpool | CREDIT: Nicholson & Co. Ltd

The £255,585 grants, from donated funds, were distributed by the Church of England's national Cathedrals and Church Buildings team.

The money has also contributed to the conservation of monuments, including £2,000 for the restoration of a baptismal font first installed in 1500 in the village church of Nettlestead St Mary in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

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The funds also included £35,000 for the conservation of church organs, including £7,500 at St Anne's Church, Aigburth, in the Diocese of Liverpool, for its Grade II* listed Henry Willis organ.

The organ, built in 1913, is described as the “last of its kind,” having survived two world wars and an arson attack by suffragettes.

National historic interest

Emily Gee, Director of Cathedrals and Church Buildings for the Church of England, said: “Many of these special features that have been conserved have been cherished over generations and remain deeply significant to their local communities, as well as of being of national historic interest.

“These remarkable wall paintings, stained glass, clocks, bells, furnishings and monuments are carefully maintained and looked after by teams of dedicated volunteers in church congregations.”

Grants for church conservation projects

- St Mary the Virgin Church in Stogumber, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells: £5,000 for structural monitoring and emergency conservation work of a monument to Sir George Sydenham, who died in 1597.
- St George's Trotton in the Diocese of Chichester: £1,300 for technical surveys to enable the church to move forward in a project to clean and conserve its 14th century wall paintings.
- Nettlestead St Mary village church in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich: £2,000 for the restoration of a baptismal font first installed in 1500. The font, which features "quite extraordinary carvings", was repaired after being blown apart in 1940 when German planes ditched bombs in the area while returning from a raid. The font has since suffered water damage from a leaking roof, which has now been repaired.
- Church organs: A total of £35,000, including £7,500 for the Grade II* listed Henry Willis organ St Anne's Church, Aigburth, in the Diocese of Liverpool. The instrument, built in 1913, is described as the "last of its kind," having survived two world wars and an arson attack by suffragettes.
- Stained glass windows: A total of £24,000, including £9,000 for the conservation of medieval-era windows at St Michael-le-Belfrey in York.

Ms Gee added: "Most projects will have been advised by our national Cathedral and Church Buildings team, and some will have been visited. We remain on hand to provide advice and guidance to these parish churches.

"We are delighted that we were able to increase the number of grants by 20 per cent, as well as the coverage across England. With the help of our respected and much appreciated funders we were able to fund 123 conservation projects across 34 of the 42 dioceses."

The cash injection comes after an investigation by The Telegraph, published in September, found that parishes are closing at a record rate.

Analysis of Church data revealed that almost 300 have disappeared in the past five years alone – the fastest rate since records began in 1960.

The Rev Canon Dr Giles Fraser, vicar of St Anne's Church, Kew, London, told The Telegraph he feared that the "depressing" figures indicated that the historic parish system was "under attack".



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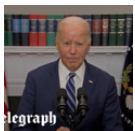
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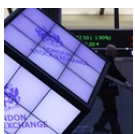
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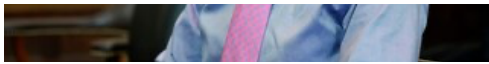


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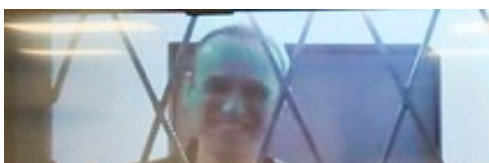
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