

**PRESS RELEASE FROM THE NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST**  
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## **Grade II\* Listed St Mary the Virgin church in Great Brickhill shares in £1 million grant to fix roof**

The temporary roof at St Mary the Virgin in Great Brickhill, Buckinghamshire is failing. Without urgent action, the church could have been forced to close its doors.

The felt covering on the roof was put in after the church suffered a series of devastating lead thefts between 2014 and 2016. All of the lead was taken and so the church put in a temporary covering of felt until it was ready to apply for a permanent covering of terne-coated steel.

The felt is now failing; at times of heavy rainfall, buckets are needed throughout the church to collect the water. The fabric of the church is put at risk every time it rains.

The church building is used not only by the congregation for worship, but also by village community groups and the local Church of England school. If the roof is not repaired soon, then all these activities – including church services – would be forced to stop.

Thankfully, help is on hand. The much-loved Grade II\* Listed church is one of 18 to share in a £1 million urgent funding pay-out from the National Churches Trust.

The £30,580 grant will help the church to the roof and the ceiling, enabling the church in its efforts to stay open and to thrive.

**Claire Walker, Chief Executive of the National Churches Trust, said:**

"I'm delighted that the National Churches Trust is able to support St Mary's church to get funding for urgent roof repairs. This will safeguard unique local heritage and keep it open and in use for the benefit of local people."

"Whether seeking quiet reflection, access to community services or a place to worship, the National Churches Trust helps hundreds of churches each year and with the support of local people, keeps them thriving today and tomorrow."

**Phillipa Cook, Great Brickhill PCC Secretary and Project Coordinator, said:**

"Further use of our lovely building has had to be put on hold until the church has been made watertight. In carrying out the roof repairs, it will mean we will no longer have to put buckets out each time it rains!"

"A number of ceiling panels are at risk of collapsing; one already having done so. Each time it has rained during this incredibly wet period, further damage has been caused to the ceiling panels and also to the walls. Any delay in replacing the temporary covering of felt with terne coated steel would have increased the possibility of having to close the church and suspend all services and activities.

The award from the National Churches Trust meant that we will be able to not only install the permanent roof covering and make the church watertight, but also repair the internal damage. The church will then be returned to the state that the community worked so hard to achieve when it undertook the full roof restoration project in 2007."

**How the grant will help the church**

A total roof refurbishment in 2007 cost £350,000. St Mary's suffered multiple thefts of lead - all the lead was taken by 2016. The funding will facilitate urgent permanent repair of the terne coated stainless steel roof plus associated ceiling repair.

**More about the church**

The Parish Church of St Mary-the-Virgin dates from the 13th century with later additions and is a Grade II\* listed building.

The church's south aisle and chapel were erected in 1460 and the north aisle and chapel were added around 1500. In 1865, the church was heavily restored, the exterior being faced with the local greensand rubble with limestone dressings.

The church features a variety of stained glass and memorials to the Duncombe, Barton and Pouncefort families.

### **£1 million pounds of urgent funding for local UK churches**

The £1 million was made possible thanks to a £500,000 donation from a private donor to the National Churches Trust, the UK's leading independent charity helping churches, chapels and meeting houses remain open and in use.

With increasing numbers of churches facing closure, a heritage hero has helped raise £1 million to pay for urgent repairs at 18 historic churches across the UK. The 18 'Last Chance Churches' all had one thing in common: they were in desperate need of funding to keep their buildings open and serving local people.

This incredible gift led to an outpouring of wider support – with more than a thousand ordinary people, businesses and trusts matching this donation and raising more than £1 million for struggling churches.

#### **Claire Walker, Chief Executive of the National Churches Trust, said:**

"Churches are the beating hearts of communities. It is estimated they provide £55 billion a year in social good. If a church is not weatherproof and watertight, there is only so much they can do. Making vital repairs to these 18 iconic churches means that they will be able to stay open and in use for the benefit of local people. Food banks, warm spaces, community cafes and other vital services that are a lifeline for the community will now be kept open."

"All of these churches have communities that depend on them and were desperate to stay open. One of the churches we've helped – the oldest Catholic Church in the Valleys – has had to close 25 per cent of its church and can no longer run a warm space due to the failing roof. This money is making a tangible difference to local communities right across the UK. Every church that is kept open keeps a community alive."

"This campaign provides proof that the public think that the UK's historic churches, the services they provide, and their heritage are worth investing in."

### **Pioneering a new way that churches could be funded**

The UK has some of the most historic and beautiful churches, chapels and meeting houses to be found anywhere in the world. But more will close, ripping away vital community services, and destroying local heritage, if urgent action is not taken to fund repairs:

- In England, there are now 900 places of worship on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register – with 53 more added in 2023.
- In Wales, 25 per cent of historic churches and chapels have closed in the last decade.
- The Church of Scotland is actively planning to close as many as 40 per cent of its churches.

Private philanthropy has an increasingly important role to play in helping to keep historic churches open and in good repair.

#### **Thanks to the generosity and imagination of a dedicated supporter of church heritage, we are delighted to pioneer how this can be successfully done through our match-funded 'Last Chance Churches' appeal.**

There is an opportunity to generate more private donations through tax relief or other financial incentives. In France, President Macron recently launched a plan to provide €200 million for repairs to historic churches over four years, with new tax incentives that effectively quadruple the value of private giving.

In the UK, ways to increase private giving to church buildings could include a state matched funding scheme, with the value of donations doubled.

#### **Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the National Churches Trust, said:**

"The UK's churches include nearly half our most important historic buildings. At present the burden of caring for this heritage falls almost entirely on local people - the same people who run an astonishing array of community services.

"This is not sustainable, and it is clear that the future of thousands of buildings will be at risk unless we move quickly to a new approach. Our campaign has shown the potential for match funding and philanthropy to play their part in responding to the growing crisis.

"We now need the next UK Government to act and to introduce a matched funding scheme that galvanises different sources of funding and secures these incredible buildings for the future."

**ENDS**

**IMAGES:**



