Churches in England cared for by Trusts

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WORD SLIDES ONLY – THE TALK WILL HAVE PICTURES!
What is a Trust?

• Organisation entrusted with resources for a particular task
• Run by ‘Trustees’ who must follow the terms of the Trust
• Task may be a charitable, not for profit one
  – In our case, caring for a church
  – May be a registered charity
• Continuity and permanence
  – IF Trustees can replace themselves
  – IF there is sufficient money
Background

- England – population about 54m
- Church attendance low (about 15% attend once or more per month), dropping
- Roman Catholic church
  - about 1m worshippers per week
- Free churches
  - about 1.3m worshippers per week
- Church of England (CofE) (branch of Anglican communion) – subject of this talk
  - about 1m worshippers per week
  - ‘State’ church
  - inherited existing church buildings at Reformation in mid-16th century
  - has majority of historically important churches
  - about 8,000 rural churches, many of them medieval
  - no church tax, no routine funding from the State (except VAT refund)
  - paid for by ‘parish’, in practice those who go to church
  - much love for church building in rural areas
  - slow rate of closure (less than 30 per year)
Types of Trust caring for CofE churches

CLOSED CHURCHES
• Multi-building Trust
• Single-building Trust (local)

OPEN CHURCHES
• Single-building community Trust (local)
Multi-building Trusts (closed churches)

- Five multi-building Trusts
  - Churches Conservation Trust (343) – State and CofE, majority rural churches
  - Friends of Friendless Churches (18) – independent, national, rural
  - Norwich Historic Churches Trust (18) – some local government involvement
  - Norfolk Churches Trust (13) - independent, regional, rural
  - Ipswich Historic Churches Trust (4) – some local government involvement

- Characteristics
  - Some preserve buildings (‘curatorial’), some look for new purposes
  - Some have a strong membership base
  - Some set up local groups for individual churches

- Finance
  - heavy dependence on small number of large funders
  - general pressure (recession)
  - funders less interested now in curatorial model
Single-building Trusts (closed churches)

- No central list – hard to find
  - number unknown – certainly more than 40
- Very local – set up by community initiative
- Reasons for foundation vary (stop development / keep valued building)
- May own or lease building from diocese
- Usually deconsecrated. Uses vary, but typically:
  - ‘Curatorial’, but willing to modify space to make it usable (e.g. toilets)
  - hold a few services per year (popular)
  - use building for fund-raising for operating costs (e.g. concerts, talks)
  - may rent building out as a community space
- Capital sums raised by grants; no money put aside for future repairs
- Does purpose slowly change (from ‘keep building’ to ‘use building’)?
- Small number fail, most seem to continue
- Main problem is finding Trustees to continue the work
Single-building Community Trusts (OPEN churches)

• New idea: two examples known to me (may become more popular)
• Community-run Trust responsible for upkeep of entire building
• Congregation contribute money to Trust to use building for worship
• As a result:
  • financial uncertainty and some costs transferred to Trust
  • Trust has use of building (?nave) when not required by worshippers
  • wider public engagement with building / more income streams
  • organisation in place to do major fund raising if ever necessary
• Some theoretical issues, but no evidence that they have yet occurred
  • control of the weekly timetable
  • differing views over modification of the building
  • sustainability of the Trust, particularly if costs rise
• Modern voluntary version of the original compulsory community-financing arrangements ???

Historic Religious Buildings Alliance | a group within the Heritage Alliance