

THE DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

Handling problems in partnership

The Diocese of Manchester, working in partnership with English Heritage, is giving careful consideration to the future re-use of its redundant churches and the maintenance and repair of those that are priorities for mission

Manchester has one of the most important concentrations of 19th- and early-20th-century churches outside London. Most are Anglican churches of the Diocese of Manchester: around 315 parish and daughter churches. From the Commissioners' Churches of the inner city to the High Victorian churches of the suburbs, they were built in response to the dramatic expansion of Manchester as the world's centre of the cotton industry. Also notable are churches from the post-World War II period in new housing areas such as Wythenshawe.

Established in 1847, the Diocese was divided into the three archdeaconries of Bolton, Rochdale and Manchester, an area including most of Greater Manchester, largely urban but rural on the hills to the north. The churches reflect the social and religious history of the area and are often the most architecturally significant buildings in a parish. Over half are listed. They are remarkable as a building type that has mostly remained in original use, with settings and interiors little altered. This continuity with the past is now under threat.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Diocese of Manchester is facing a crisis, resulting from the over-provision of churches, falling church attendance and a backlog of repairs that parishes are increasingly unable to afford. Consequently, the number of churches being proposed for redundancy under the 1983 Pastoral Measure is increasing: 20 are now redundant and another 12 are candidates. Upon redundancy, the Diocese (rather than the parish) becomes responsible for the church and for finding a new use during the use-seeking period. Not only have viable new

uses proved very difficult to find in Manchester but also, during the use-seeking period, churches are at risk from theft and vandalism. The demolition of St Alban's, Cheetwood, in 1998, for example, followed serious vandalism during the use-seeking period, despite the Diocese spending more than £50,000 on maintenance and security once it became redundant.

Survey of churches

Against this background, the Diocese began discussions in the mid 1990s on the future of church provision in Manchester. The Pastoral Committee of the Diocese assessed the viability of parishes and prioritised their importance in terms of future mission and worship. In conjunction with this work, English Heritage commissioned Teresa Sladen, an architectural historian who had previously worked for The Victorian Society, to undertake a survey of churches in the Diocese. The Diocese and English Heritage recognised the need to work together to provide a broad picture of the current situation, taking into account pastoral issues, parish resources, and the relative importance of the church buildings. It was hoped that this work would lead to the development of a strategy for the Diocese, to ensure that resources are used in an effective and complementary way.

The survey, completed in 1997, included 315 churches, listed and unlisted. Three main issues were considered for each: architectural and historic merit, condition and the ability of the parish to fund repairs. The Diocese's own assessment of pastoral priority was provided as an appendix. The evaluation of architectural and historic merit has now been reviewed by English Heritage. Six churches have been recommended by the Secretary of State for upgrading to Grade I, such as the suburban church of St Elizabeth, Reddish, by Waterhouse. There are 13 churches recommended for upgrading to Grade II* and 17 for new listing at Grade II. There is only one de-listing and one downgrading, both as a result of fire damage. This list, which the Diocese is now considering, provides up-to-date information on the relative significance of the church buildings and also means that, for the time being, the uncertainty

Holy Trinity has an unusual World War I memorial, a list by each street in the parish of all those who fell in battle



© English Heritage



Holy Trinity, Parkfield, Middleton, by G Shaw, 1861–2, has been recommended for listing in Grade II and is among those churches not deemed to be necessary strategically for the future mission of the church in the area

caused by potential spot-listing is avoided, providing a more secure environment within which to plan for the future.

On condition, the survey revealed a depressing pattern of disrepair. Over 30% of all churches assessed were found to be in poor condition or in need of attention and this proportion rose to over 40% of listed churches in the Archdeaconry of Manchester. The survey cross-referenced listed churches in need of repair with those that are priorities for mission and thus provided a useful list of priorities for grant-aid under the Joint Scheme for Places of Worship. Some of these, like St Nicholas, Burnage (Grade II*), by Welsh,

Cachemaille-Day and Lander, have since received grant-aid. It is not all bad news; there are examples of churches, such as Christ Church, Moss Side, which are growing, helped by grants for repair. The survey also grouped those listed churches that are in need of repair but are a low pastoral priority, including St Benedict, Ardwick, by Crowther, recommended for upgrading to Grade II*. Others in this category are so important in architectural terms that their repair with grant-aid is a priority for English Heritage, although the viability of the parish remains fragile. Among these is the exceptionally important St Augustine's, Pendlebury, by Bodley.

*The Diocese of
Manchester*

Difficult decisions

English Heritage faces difficult decisions on grant-aid priorities, as the size of the Joint Scheme budget has proved to be insufficient to meet all the legitimate needs, particularly given the high percentage of grant needed to make these repairs manageable for the congregation. This is compounded where parishes struggle to find matched funding. The survey found that many parishes are barely viable and face the stark choice of either paying their parish share to the diocese or funding maintenance and repair. Most cannot afford to do both.

Although the survey was not intended to be at the detailed level of *Diversity and Vitality: The Methodist and Nonconformist Chapels of Cornwall*,¹ published recently, its purpose was similar: to provide an informed context for discussion and decision-making. We very much support the Diocese's strategic approach and its efforts to tackle individual cases. Given that Manchester's problems are not unique, but part of a national trend, we hope that a similar approach can be adopted by other Anglican Dioceses and by other denominations.

There are simply too many churches supported by too small congregations. Radical solutions will be needed to secure a future for the best buildings, considered in the light of full understanding. It is possible that new ecumenical partnerships and facilities for the wider community, funded from a variety of sources, may be the way forward for some buildings. Where all efforts to find a new use fail, however, it is inevitable that we will face difficult decisions on demolition, under the procedure operated by the Church Commissioners. English Heritage looks forward to contributing to the current review by the Church of England of the Pastoral Measure 1983. □

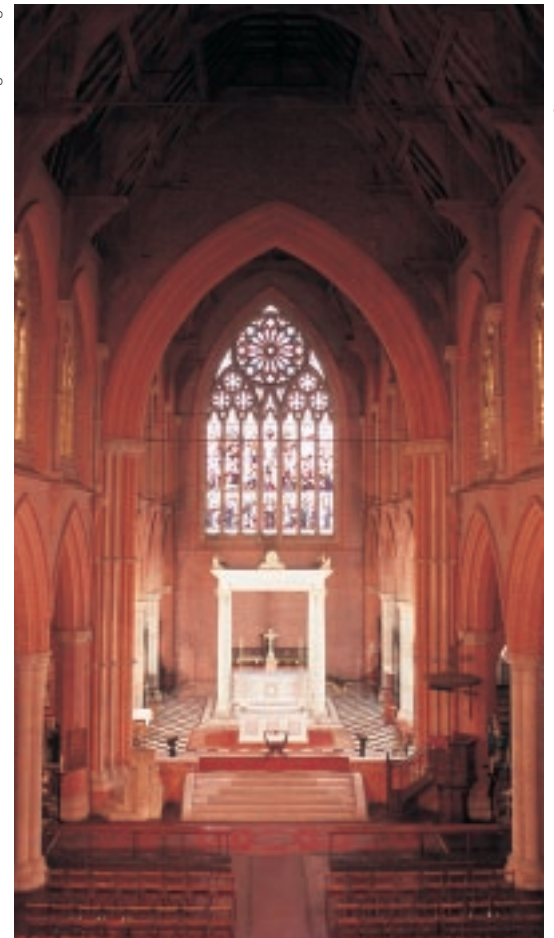
Marion Barter
Historic Buildings Inspector
North West Region

1 The survey of chapels in Cornwall will be reported on in the next issue of *Conservation Bulletin*. For details about obtaining copies, please ring 01872 323603.

Interior and exterior of St Benedict, Ardwick, 1880, by J S Crowther. Recommended for upgrading to II, it is among those churches of a lower priority for mission. The Diocese cannot envisage it having a place in its future strategy*



© English Heritage



© English Heritage