

TRUST NEWS

Saving The Past For The Future



A TOWERING SUCCESS FOR ST BOTOLPH'S

It's been an exciting few months at St Botolph's Church Aspley Guise where the tower restoration which began in the spring was completed in September. This work was supported by grants from BHHCT, with £10,000 in 2024 and £7,000 in 2025.

The restoration of the four-chamber tower involved replacing the lead, improving drainage, and restoring the stonework, weathervane and clockface. It took three weeks just to erect scaffolding, being one of the most complex designs the scaffolders had dealt with because of proximity to the road. The start of the tower restoration work even featured on ITV regional news.

Soon the contractors, Cambridge Stone Craft, were ready to begin, as Churchwarden Liz Armitage explains:

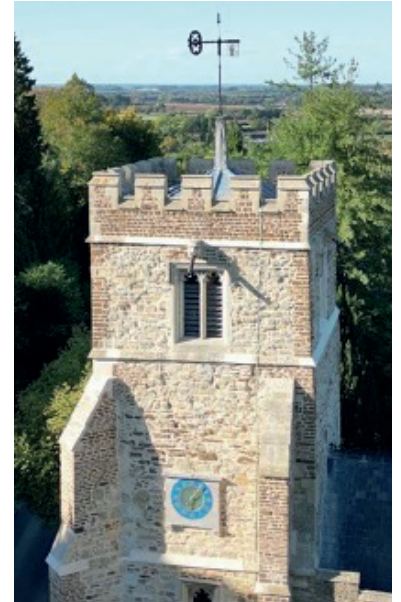
"I had never been to the top of the tower before, despite being Churchwarden for over 13 years! Internal access was via an extremely awkward opening onto the tower parapet. So, donning a hard hat, this was my opportunity to go to the top using the external ladders within the scaffolding. It was a real treat to get up there for views of the village from that vantage point. The 'plumbers' (lead workers) had started work early and stripped off the lead. Our architect, David Llewellyn, Simon Higgins, our contractor, and I, looked at the proposed design for new roof access with the lead workers and talked through how best to reline the gutters to maximise drainage. The design was coming to life."

"With warm sunny weather, work progressed at pace. Inevitably some things needed more work than expected such as the string course and East belfry window. Fortunately, the amount of stone replacement overall was less than expected, so savings there could offset some additional costs. The most important consideration was to repair everything at high levels while expensive scaffolding was in place."

The transformation included new Bath stone and a lot of pointing. In the belfry, the decorative stone window arches were refitted and slots cut in the new stone jambs to fit replacement louvres backed with stainless-steel mesh to keep pigeons out. The clock, built in the 1680s originally had one hand and was converted to a pendulum movement in the early 1700s. In the 1980s an electric automated winding system was added. There is evidence of a sundial on the granite predating the clock face.

The craftsmen did their best to limit disruption, with weekday access to via a side entrance. It is wonderful that despite the main doors being in the tower, the church remained open daily throughout the work. Congratulations to St Botolph's for successfully fundraising for this work- we are delighted to see the results.

Katrina Grant



The finished tower -it took half a litre of tung oil to restore the weathervane



The architect and contractor inspect progress on the tower roof after the old lead had been removed.



Ed Durdey, specialist in art decoration, painstakingly applies gold leaf to the clockface

Events in 2026

21 March

A Life in Ruins: talk by Andrew Ziminski

16 May

Tour of St Peter's, Berkhamsted with Trustee Christopher Green

September

Churches' Tour (see our website for updates)

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

In the Spring edition of Trust News, I wrote about the Listed Places of Worship scheme which has allowed churches to claim back the VAT on vital maintenance projects. Unless there is a u-turn, the scheme will end in March 2026. In view of this and the fact that some churches worked hard to try to ensure that they were able to reclaim VAT before the deadline, Trustees approved a round of grant applications outside of our normal cycle, awarding a total of £35,000 to five churches. My thanks to Andrew Lambourne, our Grants Secretary, for managing this fast-track process.

We still need some more pairs of hands to help with the Trust's work – publicity; fundraising; encouraging more people to join as Friends; and liaising with church applicants for grants. Please continue to consider if you could help in any way.

In September, I was delighted to attend a service to celebrate the completion of work at St. Botolph's, Aspley Guise, which the Trust had grant-aided. Particularly pleased because the congregation at St. Botolph's had included Alan Philpott, the founding Secretary of the Trust, John Macario, the first Documents Manager for the Bike 'n Hike and still includes Peter Lomax, the founding Membership Secretary. It was good to catch up with Peter and his wife, Barbara, whom I hadn't seen for some years.

More recently, I had an encounter with Barclays Bank. The Trust makes its payments online now and I am usually the second signatory. For some reason, the bank's system had

decided that a £10,000 payment of a grant might have been a scam and had blocked me so that I couldn't get online!

So I had to 'phone. After getting through the 'press this button, press that button' process, I was put through to a man who was very pleasant but put me through a long interrogation. He asked me all about what processes we have in place to ensure that when we get a request for payment, it is genuine. I explained how we handle grants and how we have personal contact with applicants through our Area Rep visits. We know the work to be carried out and whether the architect's certificate or invoice requesting payment, covers that work. After half an hour on the 'phone, he restored my access!

The surprise, though, was that, as our conversation came to a close, he offered that he was a church worker and he understood the issues about the care of church buildings. His final words were: 'Bless you for all that you do!' Very unexpected and brought tears to my eyes.

Back down to earth – if you would like to get in touch with any questions, comments, ideas, please email chairman@bedshertshct.org.uk

Madeline Russell



JOIN OUR TEAM!

We are looking for more voluntary help in the following areas:

- **Publicity** – raising the profile of the Trust and use of social media
- **Fundraising** – including help with our major fundraiser, the Bike 'n Hike
- **Grants** – liaising with and supporting church applicants
- **Encouraging and widening our group of Friends, both individual and corporate**

Please contact: chairman@bedshertshct.org.uk explaining your interest and how you would like to help.

MAGICAL MUSIC IN WONDERFUL WARE

Our concert on **4th October in aid of the Trust and St Mary's Church**, Ware was a fantastic treat. The Galliard Trio - Andrew, Martin and Alec - gave a terrific performance. Early Variations by Beethoven and a 20th century piece by Madeleine Dring were playful and fun. And we had English Folk-song from Vaughan Williams, a Slavonic Dance from Dvorak and Elgar's Sea Pictures.

St Mary's is such a beautiful space for concerts, framed by slender Gothic columns and sweeping arches and giving the finest sound, according to the Trio. The evening ended with wine and other refreshments served by our Chairman Madeline Russell and her husband and fellow Trustee, Archie.

We greatly appreciate the Trio's offer to play and help contribute to the Trust and Church and for making it such a wonderful evening. We are very grateful to St Mary's for hosting, for their help before and on the day, and we have made a donation to the Church. Finally, special thanks to those of you who came - we absolutely depend on the support of all our Friends and Corporate Members.

David Bevan, Events Secretary



The Galliard Trio

TWO FRIENDS' EVENTS TO BOOK NOW

A Life in Ruins

An illustrated talk by acclaimed stonemason, conservator and author, Andrew Ziminski will take place on Saturday 21 March 2026 at 2pm, St Mary's Church, Stotfold (SG5 4NE). Andrew will explore the history of church-building in the British Isles, with a focus on Beds and Herts.

Andrew has worked on many of our finest buildings and monuments, from cathedrals, eg, Salisbury and St Paul's to a Megalithic burial chamber. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a William Morris Craft Fellow.

His most recent book is *Church Going*, (October 2024). "A lively and loving anatomy of church architecture ... Every seat and stone has a story to tell. Ziminski tells them with aplomb, leading us through parish church graveyards, up spiral staircases and to the tops of spires and towers, uncovering what has been hidden" (The Times, Books of the Year).

800 years of St Peter's, Berkhamsted

Saturday 16 May 2026

Trustee and heritage expert Dr Christopher Green will give a talk and guided tour as he unravels the hidden history of Berkhamsted's ancient parish church. Since retiring, Christopher has worked as a geoarchaeologist and has an interest in medieval metalwork. He is a past Chair of the St Albans Diocesan Advisory Committee.

The event starts at St Peter's (HP4 2AX) at 10am with coffee: the tour starts at 10.30am. Christopher has written a fascinating history of St Peter's, published to commemorate the 800th anniversary in 2022. Afterwards, you may wish to join us for a pub lunch at 12.30pm: details of this will be sent by email when you book the tour.

Tickets for each event are: £8 for Friends, £10 for other guests to include tea/coffee.

BIKE 'N HIKE 2025 - FAB FOUR HIT GOLD

It's early days yet to know how well we have done in September's Bike 'n Hike – although early indications are promising – so I'd like to tell you about four BHHCT stalwarts, all well over the biblical threescore years and ten, and how they took part this year.

Their different activities highlight the flexibility of the Bike 'n Hike, which enables everyone to choose something which sets them a personal challenge and will encourage sponsorship.

With the help of family and friends, former Chairman, Richard Genochio was pushed in his wheelchair around Therfield and Kelshall. He enjoyed seeing the rolling hills of North Hertfordshire and said that it meant a great deal to him to be able to continue to support the Trust's work.

Nicholas Tufton took to his electric bike and covered 39 miles, visiting 21 churches in the Buntingford area and surviving a thunderstorm at the end! Nicholas has been involved with the Trust since its beginning in 1991 and has taken part in every Bike 'n Hike on behalf of his church at Barkway.

Another longstanding Friend of the Trust, who has been both Area Rep and Area Organiser and who is very well known in the Hertford area for his work as a councillor, is Peter Ruffles. Peter started by supporting eleven churches in Hertford and Ware by quickly visiting by car. He then spent the rest of the day on buses, using his bus pass. His target was one church in as many large towns as he could and he clocked Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, St. Albans, Watford, Harpenden, Luton and Stevenage. Added to the morning's visits – nine towns in all and eighteen churches!

Former Grants Secretary and still Area Rep and Area Organiser, Archie Russell, met brother-in-law Geoff Stimson in London. Geoff had worked out a route in the area between St. Paul's Cathedral to the west and St. Botolph without Aldgate to the east. They visited 31 churches and walked ten miles!

'Threescore years and ten' is a quote from Psalm 90: 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow;'

I rather think that for our four stalwarts, their strength is labour and some fun! Perhaps rightly tinged with a little satisfaction. The churches they support – St. Mary the Virgin, Therfield; St. Mary Magdalene, Barkway; St. Andrew, Hertford; and St. Leonard, Old Warden - have all raised over £2,000. Gold certificates all round.

Madeline Russell



FOLLOW AND LIKE US ON FACEBOOK @BEDSHERTSHCT

IT PROFITS HUMANS TO BE HUMBLLED UNDER THE VASTNESS OF THE GOD OF THE HEAVENS

Tom Sander, our Trustee and Rector of St. Giles-in-the-Fields in London, has recently taken a sabbatical. He chose to spend much of it by flying out to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, and cycling back to London! He wrote the following on his return.

I didn't really know how I would feel, arriving back in London after two months as a travelling pilgrim. The sudden appearance of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral after passing Bank station came as special moment of connection, not only with a place, but with a theme which had emerged on my travels – the dome of the heavens.

Domes have formed part of the religious architecture of the East and West for thousands of years and they were a familiar companion on my journey. I began outside the vast gold domed cathedral of Tbilisi, I arrived in Istanbul (a city of many domes) about a month later having cycled into Turkey and along the Black Sea. From there I went off into Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany, The Netherlands and finally via ferry to Harwich and then London. Around three thousand miles, twelve flat tyres (I stopped counting at twelve), hundreds of cups of coffee and more bread than is strictly healthy. I lost count of the number of domes!

The dome has been central to much of the architecture inherited from the Roman world. Until the conversion of Constantine, Christians met in a mixture of private houses and other spaces; the idea of dedicated buildings for worship didn't really exist until the 4th century. But after the enfranchisement of Christianity and the huge social and economic freedom that came with it, there was a desire to set apart physical spaces for Christian worship and, unsurprisingly, these adopted the form of important Roman buildings. Indeed many Roman temples were simply re-appropriated for Christian use (the Pantheon in Rome is a good example).

The advancement of Christianity into these spaces sought to affirm that there was only one Triune God of the heavens, under whom we live and move and have our being. These soaring spheres represented to the onlooker the dome of the heavens and invited them into a relationship with the divinities who dwelt therein.

I encountered perhaps the most famous and effective building specifically constructed to communicate these themes at the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Completed in 537AD, it included the first pendentive dome, a massive achievement which not only offered a blueprint for future churches but, having been converted into a Mosque after the fall of Constantinople, shaped the architecture of Islamic worship spaces as well.

While it is hard to pull out a unifying theme from my time away, these domes of the East and of the West yielded a simple one: that we are all under the heavens. It's an obvious thing to say, but then we're probably all guilty of focusing too much on the here and now, the material environment around us and our desire to change and profit from it. To gaze upwards into the vastness of the cosmos is to remind ourselves of a different, biblical vision of heaven and earth.

I've always liked the description of the heavens as a tent over the world, the stars simply holes in the canvas allowing the light of God to shine through. It profits humans to be humbled under the vastness of the God of the heavens, his love and his reach into the life of the world through the Son and the Holy Spirit. The greatest thing we can come to know is God and his love for us.

This is not a ground-breaking thought, I admit: 'Vicar goes on sabbatical and arrives home to affirm that God is important.' There were other thoughts of course, some of which I daresay will come out in sermons over the next year, but the overarching thought of my time away was comfortingly simple: God is in the heavens, and we are all under him.

With every blessing, Tom



Contact us

Chairman: Madeline Russell, chairman@bedshertshct.org.uk

Hon Secretary: Revd Canon Lynda Klimas, general.enquiry@bedshertshct.org.uk

Treasurer: Trevor Groom, treasurer@bedshertshct.org.uk *Grants Secretary:* Andrew Lambourne, grants@bedshertshct.org.uk

Join Us: membership@bedshertshct.org.uk *Editor:* Katrina Grant, trust.news@bedshertshct.org.uk

Trust News is published by Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust www.bedshertshct.org.uk

Printed by Gpex www.gpex.co.uk

Registered Charity number:1197228

BOOK NOW

YOUR INVITATION TO TWO FRIENDS' EVENTS:

Tickets for each event: Friends £8, other guests £10.
Please complete the booking form overleaf and email/
post it to our Events Secretary. Electronic payment
accepted.

A life in ruins - with Andrew Ziminski

Saturday 21 March 2026, 2pm

Hear about the
fascinating history
of church-building
down the ages in
an illustrated talk
by stonemason
and author,
Andrew Ziminski.
Refreshments will be
served.



Location: St Mary's Church, Stotfold, 61 Church Rd,
Stotfold SG5 4NE

800 years of St Peter's Church, Berkhamsted

Saturday 16 May 2026, 10am

Find out about the history of St Peter's with a tour
and talk by Trustee Dr Christopher Green. Tea/coffee
served on arrival. Afterwards we plan to have lunch at
a local pub: details of this will be sent when you book
the tour.

Location: St Peter's Church, Berkhamsted HP4 2AX.

**Please complete the booking form overleaf and
either email or post it to our Events Secretary.**

BOOKING FORM

I WOULD LIKE TO BOOK
THE FOLLOWING TICKETS.
FRIENDS OF THE TRUST £8;
OTHER GUESTS £10.

Event	No. of Friends	No. of other guests	Total £'s
Sat 21st March 2026 A Life in Ruins Andrew Ziminski book by 1st March			
Sat 16th May 2026 800 years of St Peters Berkhamsted Dr Christopher Green book by 21st April			

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____

EMAIL _____

TELEPHONE _____

To pay electronically,

transfer the amount above from your bank to:
The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Historic Churches
Trust, Sort Code: 20-05-73,
Account No. 43234452

Add the banking reference TALK and your surname eg TALKSMITH

so we can identify your payment.

Tick this box ☐ to confirm that you have
transferred the amount above.

Or send a cheque payable to Beds & Herts Historic
Churches Trust.

Send your booking form:

by email to events@bedshertshct.org.uk or by post to
Events Secretary, Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust,
21 Waterloo Rd, Bedford MK40 3PQ.