

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Work undertaken by a BPT in Woolwich, London SE18
Name of project/group:	St George's Garrison Church, Woolwich
Location:	Woolwich, South East London
Duration (if applicable):	First contract started March 2012, mosaic contract completed July 2015

Short description of project:

The project, led by Heritage of London Trust Operations (HOLTO), aims to conserve the remains of the Garrison Church of St George. This Grade II listed church was built in 1863, designed by Thomas Henry Wyatt and has important connections to the Royal Artillery. The building was badly damaged by a V2 flying bomb in 1944, leaving a roofless ruin with fragments of the richly decorated interior.

The main aim of the project was to secure the most fragile elements of the church's fabric (including the VC memorial depicted in a mosaic of St George and the dragon, and other fragile decorative features in the east end), and to protect the fabric from further loss through decay and water penetration. In addition, the project aimed to increase public access to the site and engage the surrounding local communities through a programme of activities.

The Heritage of London Trust, a London-focussed Building Preservation Trust, established in 1993, operated as the professional client, organising the project and securing the funds to meet the project costs. The Trust negotiated the transfer of ownership from Defence Estates, and established a close working relationship with the Artillery as the principal stakeholder. Relationships were also established with the local council. HOLTOP project organiser, Laura Norris, appointed the professional team and oversaw all aspects of the project.

The project was split into two contracts: mosaic conservation, and the canopy roof and the west end kitchen and WC works. Project costs totalled just under £700k, and were met through grants from the following: Heritage Lottery Fund; Historic England; Monument Trust; Veolia Foundation; MOD; Royal Artillery; John Paul Getty Charitable Trust; and the Pilgrim Trust.

The final elements of the project were completed in July 2015, but further phases of repair and conservation works may be funded in the future. For now, the focus is on establishing a Friends Group who will deliver a programme of activities for the local community, undertake maintenance and oversee it running as a venue for corporate hires.

What would have happened without this project/group?

Without the project, further significant decorative elements of the church building would have been lost before being understood, and fabric would have continued to decay. It would also not be open to a wide section of the public.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The objectives were achieved by persisting with the fundraising to secure the total project costs and by negotiating an uplift in the HLF grant, and maintaining good dialogue with all funders, and the key stake holder, the Royal Artillery.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

A canopy was erected over the apse and the decorative elements and mosaics have been recorded, cleaned, and consolidated. With the large modern canopy over the east end, the site has attracted unsolicited interest from local people keen to use it for their own activities, such as children's games and theatre productions. It is becoming a local resource, and with clear interpretation planned, the building's past as well as its more recent history, will be better understood by all.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

The main challenges of the project were:

1. Securing funding for a Grade II listed building (rather than a II* or I)
2. Some funders viewed the church as a ruin rather than a traditional church building despite the fact it remains consecrated and is a place of memorial

What is the future for the case study?

Once the Friends Group has been established and operations have been launched, the Heritage of London Trust Operations will seek out its next project. The project experience has been shared through visits to the site, many from students studying historic conservation, and through open days. The completion story was released to the press, and appeared in the RIBA journal in August 2015. The project will be profiled on the Trust's new website in due course.

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