



St James Church, Toxteth, Liverpool

‘Heritage and Hope’ Faith led Regeneration

Vision Statement

The vision of the St James ‘Heritage & Hope’ project is to transform a derelict Grade II* listed Church building into a welcoming and usable space, for the benefit of the local community. It is to inspire people to re-discover the hidden heritage held within St James, to celebrate its history, diversity and character, to benefit from its rich cultural heritage, bringing hope to a new generation.

The wider impact of the ‘Heritage & Hope’ project is that the restored St James in the City Church, continuing to work in partnership with Liverpool Diocese and Liverpool City Council, will form the cornerstone of the ongoing regeneration of this part of Liverpool.

Project Summary

Built in 1775, St James Toxteth, a Grade II* listed building has lain derelict and redundant, in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust from 1972 – 2010 and is on the English Heritage at Risk Register, (number 1209882)¹ because a long term sustainable solution could not be found for its restoration.

In 2010 the building was transferred back into the hands of Liverpool Diocese who planned to secure the financial future of the building by growing a large congregation who would be committed to rediscovering the heritage of St James and developing a significant programme of community engagement.

This three pronged approach of heritage, community activity and a thriving worshipping congregation is, we believe, not only the best but perhaps the only viable future for St James. These three aspects are so interrelated that if any of the three flounders the whole project is at risk of failing.

In essence, the community has expressed a need for the restoration of the church and a healthy interest in the wide range of heritage and community activities planned. The restoration of the heritage is likely to attract the major share of grant income, to provide a modern and workable

¹ See copy of entry in Historic England Buildings at Risk Register – also refer to BBC TV programme scheduled to be shown on 02.12.13

space for the project, with the growing worshipping community providing the volunteers and the long term revenue to ensure its future sustainability.

To date, the team have been successful in rediscovering the rich heritage of St James which has been lost in time, dispersed for safe keeping, or even stolen during its redundant phase. The significant heritage elements of this project are listed below.

1. Our appreciation of the heritage on offer within St James has been informed by research and documentation by local historians. The information gathered provides valuable insights which help to bring the story of St James to life for visitors of all ages and abilities.
2. The artefacts, dispersed when the church was closed in 1972 include a Royal Coat of Arms and the Churchwarden's Wand Rest (affectionately known as the Lord Mayor's Sword Rest) both of which are currently being stored in NML, in need of specialist restoration. We would like to seek out and retrieve a Memorial Reading Desk & Chair given in memory of a local man and two children who perished in the sinking of the Titanic, the St James WW1 War Memorial & War Memorial Reredos, other Reredos Panels, the Holy Trinity WW1 War Memorial housed in St James, the Churchwarden's Wands and the Bishop's Chair, all of which went missing whilst the Church was closed. Church Silver, the Altar table, a Plaque in memory of Rifleman H P Clarke who fell in 1915, given by his fellow shipwrights from Cammell Laird Shipyard and a Plaque about an Altar cloth given in memory of the daughters of Rev W. J. C. Cole, have all been retrieved.
3. We have begun to re-discover the history of the area in which St James sits. In 1775, when the Church was built, the area was a thriving new town named Harrington, outside Liverpool, a much sought after residential area. The land was given by the Earl of Sefton and the building funded by 26 property speculators, who also had an interest in the proposed property development for the new town, which subsequently failed. Now the area surrounding St James is known as Toxteth, currently one of the poorest area in the United Kingdom, with a much troubled and well documented past.
4. Research has revealed the wider interests of those who contributed money for the building of the church, some of whom had links with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Their stories can be found on memorials around the church and further explored through records.
5. We have grown to appreciate the architecture of the building and the innovative engineering involved in the provision of Cast Iron Columns to support the galleries. The Churches Conservation Trust favoured the proposals from the Diocese not to develop the inside of the building, but to keep the clear, simple design intact. This also found favour with Historic England and has proved to be of interest to architecture and engineering students from the both Liverpool and John Moores Universities who have already visited to assess the building and suggest ways in which it can be restored. We have been in touch with RIBA to explore including St James in their Architecture Heritage trails and have been advised that RIBA Guides will be interested to visit with a view to bringing others in the future. We are also in the process of contacting other NW Universities, to offer them opportunities for groups to visit.
6. We continue to explore links with the families of the estimated 9,000 people buried in the graveyard. The records of burials are intact, as are the headstone inscriptions. The headstones were laid flat in 1901 when the graveyard was laid out with paths, flower borders and grass as a formal garden. We receive requests about specific people and both Paul Young and Amanda Taylor have helped their relatives to access information. In November 2013, when the BBC were filming at St James for a programme on English

Heritage 'Buildings at Risk', Louise Minchin, BBC 1 Breakfast News presenter discovered that her great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Edward Grayson, is buried in St James graveyard. The account of his death in a duel in 1804 is recorded on one of the memorial tablets.

7. The original WW1 War Memorial, which was made of wood, went missing whilst the church was closed. A local historian, Amanda Taylor, wanting to track down information about a family member has been instrumental in tracing information about the 62 men named on it and has found and retrieved a plank of wood from the original memorial from a wood-yard in the Midlands. She has developed a Blog (<http://thewarmemorial.blogspot.co.uk/>), with an average 900 'hits' a month in the first 18 months, a website and a facebook page, where she documents details she has found. The original plank will be incorporated into a new memorial so the men involved are never forgotten. This rich heritage was celebrated in a well attended WW1 Heritage day on 5th July 2014.