



## Ruined Churches

16,000 buildings. One resource



**This advice is intended to help dioceses and parishes by explaining the options available to them for dealing with ruined churches.**

### **Ruined Churches – Problem or Opportunity?**

There is no doubt that for some parishes, a ruined church can be an expensive headache; for others, they may represent an opportunity, a resource which can be exploited.

This guidance seeks to give helpful advice on a realistic approach to conservation, possible uses, conversion, and disposal of ruined churches where this is appropriate.

Ruins in general - and ruined churches in

particular - are a common and treasured feature of the English countryside and are often taken for granted; there is no doubt that they are generally considered to be a public resource, eliciting perhaps less eloquently expressed but equally valid reactions.

They are sometimes part of visitor attractions and exploited as such.

The rural ruined church is often seen as a class of folly, a whimsical reminder of a romanticised past.

Other ruined churches, particularly in towns, may be the result of disastrous events, particularly bombing in World War II, and they are often preserved as memorials, and a warning for the future.

Others are the result of other phenomena such as the Black Death, the Reformation, the English Civil War or the forces of nature.

The reaction to these is often different, but no less emotive; such monuments and sites are often loaded with multi-layered significance.



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### Introduction

This advice is intended to help dioceses and parishes by explaining the options available to them for dealing with ruined churches. There is no doubt that for some parishes, a ruined church can be an expensive headache; for others, they may represent an opportunity, a resource which can be exploited. This guidance seeks to give helpful advice on a realistic approach to conservation, possible uses, conversion, and disposal of ruined churches where this is appropriate.

### Perceptions of ruined churches

“Ruin” is a wonderfully evocative term, which has inspired many writers. In her landmark book *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953) Rose Macaulay reacted instinctively in a way with which many people would empathise:

*“I thought of nothing in particular; just to be in the presence of something*

*grand that I scarcely could grasp and to admire the ruined buildings for their own sake seemed to suffice: to attempt to recreate the ancient circumstance seemed almost a sacrilege... Now we see shattered walls, broken columns, trees thrusting through crumbling floors... All this makes for that melancholic delight we seek so eagerly and treasure gratefully in our brief passage through time”.*

Byron had earlier written (Manfred, Act III, Scene IV) in a similar fashion in a famous passage about the Colosseum, which in 1870 was the subject of one of the earliest debates regarding the correct approach to a ruined monument; we recognise the issues today. Should we leave it as it is, clean it up, or rebuild it?

*“A grove which springs through lell’d battlements  
And twines its roots with*

*the imperial hearths,  
Ivy usurps the laurel’s  
place of growth;—  
But the gladiators’ bloody  
Circus stands,  
A noble wreck in ruinous  
perfection!”*

Ruins in general and ruined churches in particular are a common and treasured feature of the English countryside and are often taken for granted; there is no doubt that they are generally considered to be a public resource, eliciting perhaps less eloquently expressed but equally valid reactions.

They are sometimes part of visitor attractions and exploited as such, as at a facility from whose advertisement the following excerpt is taken:

*“...a magnificent setting for weddings and receptions, standing in parkland with a lake spanned by a stone bridge, a ruined church and many statues and garden buildings.”*



The rural ruined church, then, is often seen as a class of folly, a whimsical reminder of a romanticised past. Other ruined churches, particularly in towns, may be the result of disastrous events, particularly bombing in World War II, and they are often preserved as memorials, and a warning for the future. Others are the result of other phenomena such as the Black Death, the Reformation, the English Civil War or the forces of nature. The reaction to these is often different, but no less emotive; such monuments and sites are often loaded with multi-layered significance.

### **Part I: Understanding ruined churches and the issues affecting them**

**The scale of the issue**  
Recent research by the CBC building on earlier surveys by the Council for British Archaeology has shown that there are between 150 and 250 ruins within the Faculty Jurisdiction (FJ), with concentrations in distinct areas, notably East Anglia. Further research is planned to refine this number further.

There are two basic types of church ruin, “flat” sites with no visible structural remains at all above ground, and those where some structure survives. Both will hence be generically referred to as

“the ruin”, but in general the more standing fabric, the greater the conservation challenge.

Some of both types are currently Scheduled Monuments, and most are listed buildings. This may throw the issues into sharper relief. There may also be designations relating to the ecological value of the site.

### **The nature of the issue - legal**

Determining responsibility for these structures and sites can be difficult, and often involves time-consuming research at the land registry and elsewhere to establish title. By 2013, the government’s aim is that all land will be registered, and it should be noted that obligations such as chancel repair liability will fall away if they are not registered by this date. Contact your DAC if you are unsure about this.

If it transpires that the site is not owned by any Church of England body, then the Bishop has the power to remove the legal effects of consecration if these are considered still to apply, under Article 22 of the CCEJM 1991. The presence and status of any burials should be considered at this stage.

It may be that the structure was closed as a parish church/chapel of ease by Order in Council through (now repealed)

legislation such as the Union of Benefices Measures 1923-52, in which case the structure *may* now be vested in the Diocesan Board of Finance.

The Closed Churches Division of the Church Commissioners maintain a record of former church buildings dealt with in this way and can give advice on the status of these structures and sites. The Division commissions title investigations for all cases that may come forward for closure under the Mission and Pastoral Measure (2011).

Where title has been established, the consecration of these sites and their “ownership” by the parish in which they are located is in many cases an historical and legal anomaly; many buildings were simply abandoned in antiquity and remain technically consecrated and subject to the FJ, and some parishes therefore find themselves responsible for what are in effect ancient monuments and archaeological sites.

Consecrated ruins can be a burden for parishes and dioceses, which are sometimes not able to invest resources into these buildings and sites. Occasionally, ruins are felt to convey negative messages. This can lead to deterioration of structural remains and related health and safety issues, and encroachment on or



erosion of the sites.

Where the structure or site is in Church ownership, the legal effects of consecration can only be removed through a declaration of closure under the provisions of the and Pastoral Measure (2011). The effect of this is to transfer the ownership from the parish to the diocese and excludes any surrounding churchyard until further provision is made for disposal. The various possibilities and issues are discussed in Part II.

### **Possible benefits and opportunities**

There is, however, another way of looking at ruins; as an opportunity. Ruins can also be seen as a resource which can be appreciated and used by parishes and communities for their aesthetic, historical and educational value. A sense of attachment is often felt, even when the church has been ruined for centuries, and there is always a compelling story to tell.

More prosaically, in many cases the ruin will occupy a plot of increasingly valuable land, and developers are beginning to appreciate this. In these cases, the problems will be mainly archaeological and aesthetic issues, and often the use of the site as a burial ground; the curtilage may also be poorly defined. These problems are often considerable, but not

insurmountable.

Another related opportunity is the re-use of the churchyard as a burial ground, which may have been closed or unused for centuries. Of course the churchyards of many ruins are already used in this way. This possibility has been highlighted by recent government initiatives aimed at enabling the re-use of closed burial grounds and also individual graves, again a consequence of population growth and pressure on land.

### **Aesthetic value of ruined churches**

What Macaulay and Byron meant could be defined as “Artless Beauty”, in other words, beauty as a product of happenstance, without direction or intention. Some ruins did indeed evolve this way, although a surprising number were “created” or perhaps better recreated as a landscape feature or folly.

Ruined churches and churchyards also provide a focus for community activity, with many on or near walking trails, and are a peaceful, tranquil place for quiet reflection. This community use and appreciation of rural ruins in particular, however, brings with it challenges regarding conservation and health and safety issues, which will be explored later in this guidance.

### **Archaeological, historical and architectural value**

Ruins have a central place in many different academic disciplines. The primary archaeological interest in ruins is for how they can illuminate the past. Dr Sarah May, Senior Archaeologist at the English Heritage Archaeological Projects team recently emphasised changing attitudes to ruined monuments:

*“Many traditional presentations focus on a snapshot in the life of a building - typically its earliest or grandest phase. More recently, life history approaches in archaeological theory have emphasised the importance of the full life of buildings and other sites, including when they are destroyed or change their use. The processes of destruction, decay and conservation can be as interesting as those of construction, use and elaboration.”*

In the case of ruined churches, these will present a valuable snapshot of the architectural and liturgical development of churches over the centuries, which have not been masked by later change and restoration, particularly of course by the Victorians, but also in the aftermath of the Reformation, for example.

There is also often





undisturbed underground archaeology, most obviously burials where these exist, but also the remains of earlier phases of the church and related features and structures or indeed earlier use of the site. These sites are often designated as Scheduled Monuments for these reasons.

### **Environmental/ ecological value**

New approaches to the conservation and management of historic buildings within nationally important wildlife sites have been piloted by the Church of England, English Heritage and the National Trust, amongst others, in recent years. The CBC booklets “Wildlife in Church and Churchyards” and “The Churchyards Handbook” give basic practical advice.

A national ‘living churchyards’ campaign promotes sympathetic churchyard management for wildlife. A DIY Information Pack has been produced which gives good advice on surveying, preparing management plans, management techniques and where to find help and advice.

The pack is available from the project “Caring for God’s Acre”, which provides advice and a forum regarding the ecological value of churchyards. As it states on their web site:

*“Churchyards are very special places because they often contain a rich diversity of plants and animals.... Grassland is often flower rich and in some cases acts as a refuge for rare or uncommon wildflower and fungi. There may be distinctive and veteran trees of great historical and cultural significance.*

*Churchyard stonework provides a home for a mosaic of mosses and ferns and is a major habitat for lichens; many being rare and only recorded in churchyards. The walls often have fine wall vegetation, having taken years to colonise. Large and small mammals, birds both resident and summer visitors, insects and butterflies, amphibians and reptiles such as the slow worm find shelter and food within churchyard habitats.”*

Care must be taken, therefore, to ensure that conservation of the fabric does not compromise the ecological value of the ruin and site.

### **Processes of decay of ruined churches**

Once a church is ruined, whether deliberately in recent years or as a result of abandonment or damage in the distant past, it becomes vulnerable to decay at a faster rate than when it was still roofed and wind- and water-proof, as ruined walls are subject to the full

effects of weathering from all sides. Decay is often a long-term process but it can lead to partial or total collapse. Causes of decay include wind, rain and frost, which can wash out mortar and erode masonry.



*The effects of uncontrolled erosion*

Birds, animals and insects burrow into and undermine ruined walls, and vegetation can undermine foundations and lever walls apart. The roots of trees can run inside the core of walls, and climbing plants penetrate and cloak masonry.

These natural developments are of course not just a problem; they may be of considerable significance in themselves, and may in fact contribute to the beauty and interest of the ruin; as we shall see they may even sometimes protect it.

### **Modern approaches to conservation**

Conservation (EH 2008) is the process of managing change to a significant place in ways that sustain its heritage values for people today and in the future. Assessing the condition of ruins and appropriate action is a

matter that will always require the advice of an experienced conservation professional.

For most of the 20th century all forms of vegetation were automatically removed from walls, especially from ruins, which might be characterised as the “Ministry of Works approach”. Although attitudes are changing, much vegetation is still routinely removed. This is no longer acceptable without an audit of the ecology of the site, to determine if this would be damaged by such removal; and indeed, if the ruin itself might be damaged.

Once this has been done, there are basically three ways to deal with encroaching vegetation; advice should always be obtained as to which option is the best. Whichever is chosen, the consequences for the ecology and archaeology of the site and the stability of any fabric, as well as health and safety issues, must be assessed before any work is undertaken.

### **Option 1: Kill and remove it**

The traditional method. If it has been ascertained that this is the best method in each case, the stems are usually cut and poisoned using biocides. Only after these have withered should any attempt be made to remove them from the masonry, otherwise this

can cause damage, and even then it may not be possible to wholly remove some roots without a measure of rebuilding.

### **Option 2: Trim it**

EH has recently argued that rather than being destructive, much vegetation on walls, for example ivy, might well be benign or even protective, although this is unlikely to be the case with flint and rubble walls, which are relatively permeable. Ivy can be a picturesque adornment for ruined walls and may indeed protect the masonry from the elements, but its roots can open up joints and crack apart walls. In addition to this, wind forces on the foliage of such vegetation can lever sections of wall apart.

Such vegetation, if managed rather than removed, will require careful pruning to reduce wind resistance. Cutting it back can lead to the vegetation, particularly ivy, rooting into the wall if it is not done carefully.

### **Option 3: Use it**

EH and others have been experimenting with grasses as “soft capping” to prevent deterioration of the crowns of walls. This absorbs water and insulates the wall head, which can also “breathe” and dry out. The grass overlapping the edges also provides a natural drip, protecting wall faces. As in Option 2, ivy, elder and other vegetation may also

be benign and protective if carefully managed. This approach may be more effective than applying, for example, mortar and/or tile (or as in the past, often with disastrous results, cement) capping to the crowns of walls. Soft capping is still at the experimental stage and advice should always be sought on the best method in each case.

### **Consolidation and repair**

The exposed masonry may need to be restored, whereby care must be taken to use visually and structurally appropriate and sympathetic materials. Poorly chosen materials and solutions can make the problems worse. The CBC booklet *Stonework - Maintenance and Surface Repair* provides practical advice, but it will always be necessary to get advice on each specific case through the DAC.

A proportionate response is recommended. In some cases where there is considerable penetration and disturbance and the cohesion of fabric and architectural details is irretrievably compromised, it may be preferable to record what is there before reducing the fabric to a sustainable state.

One should also consider that investing considerable resources into restoring one ruin which might have been



used for maintaining several might be counter-productive and unsustainable. EH (2008) puts this so:

*“Para 121: Sometimes, the action necessary to sustain or reinforce one heritage value can be incompatible with the actions necessary to sustain others... contrived solutions requiring intensive maintenance are likely to be difficult to sustain.”*

This is a complicated and often controversial case-specific problem with no hard and fast rules, and advice must always be sought on the best solution, in the first place from the DAC.

### Health and Safety issues

Unconsolidated and uncared for ruins can quickly become dangerous in the ways described above, and many ruined churches are on the English Heritage and local authorities' *Buildings at Risk* and *Heritage at Risk* lists. In addition to this ruined churches often attract vandals, which can hasten this process. Signs and anything but the most robust fencing are unlikely to deter such people from entering the site. PCCs who neglect the maintenance of ruins could in some circumstances be held liable for injuries to visitors (including trespassers) under the Occupiers' Liability Act

(1984).

If the ruins are listed (but not scheduled) local authorities may compel them to carry out repairs and can even compulsorily purchase them. If the ruin is scheduled, the parish should approach English Heritage (see Management Model 2 below). All these aspects should be borne in mind in the following discussion of possible management models.

### Part II: Models for management of ruined churches

The best way to ensure that a ruined church is properly maintained is to make use of it. Three models will be suggested, most ruins will fall into one or more of these categories. The models are:

- 1 - Closure and alternative use
- 2 - Management Agreements
- 3 - Keep and use them

There may of course be scope to combine these approaches.

### Model 1: Closure and alternative use

The (superficially) easiest way forward for a ruined church which has been found to be owned by a Church of England body will be for **parishes** to ask for the ruin to be formally closed as a place of worship, that is to

remove the legal effects of consecration through a scheme under the Mission and Pastoral Measure (2011). This brings it within the secular jurisdiction, but leaves it in the first place in the ownership of the **Diocese** through the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF).

While removing responsibility from the PCC of the parish church within whose parish the ruins lies, a declaration of closure may lead to an uncertain future for the ruin, since there are only four options under the PM:

- A. Alternative use
- B. Vesting in the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT)
- C. Demolition
- D. Vesting in the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) as a controlled ruin

Only the building is closed by the Mission and Pastoral Measure Scheme, the churchyard remains vested in the incumbent (although the maintenance responsibility of a closed churchyard may have been assumed by the local authority). However, all or part of the churchyard may be included in any subsequent disposal authorised by Church Buildings Disposal Scheme under the Mission and Pastoral Measure.



Full guidance on this process is provided by the Closed Churches Division of the Church Commissioners, on their website at: <http://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/pastoralandclosedchurches/closedchurches.aspx>

### Option 1A: Alternative Use

Following a declaration of closure, the Diocese will seek to dispose of the ruin through its Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and the Closed Churches Division of the Church Commissioners and informed by the advice of the Council's Statutory Advisory Committee and local and national planning policies.

One option is to transfer ownership to a neighbouring landowner. In some cases, however, there may not be an obvious landowner, or the landowner may refuse to take responsibility for the ruin, often the case when the site is on farmland. In these circumstances the diocese may have difficulty disposing of the ruin.

Sometimes it may be appropriate for the ruin to be passed to a trust or other local or national body for the purpose of looking after it.

### Conversion

Some ruins are capable of conversion, but the sensitivity of these sites in

terms of archaeology and burials can be problematic. However, with the current pressure on land, particularly for building houses, dioceses have noted an increase in interest in ruined church sites from developers.

In recent years there has also been growing recognition that such development may in many cases be the best way to provide a sustainable future for such sites, and a realisation that not every ruin is of such archaeological, architectural and historical significance that such development is unthinkable. English Heritage (2008) remark in this context:

*“Para 135: ...Retaining gutted shells as monuments is not likely, in most cases, to be an effective means of conserving surviving fabric...nor is this approach likely to be economically sustainable. In such cases, it is appropriate to restore to the extent that the evidence allows, and thereafter to apply the policy for new work”.*

Dioceses might undertake a review of their stock of ruined churches with an eye to such possible development.

Example 1: Brockhampton Holy Trinity Diocese of Hereford. This was a simple 15<sup>th</sup>-century church with 16<sup>th</sup>- century tower

and south porch. The date of ruination is unknown, but the church walls, although overgrown, remained. Prior to closure, the Diocese obtained planning permission for residential use and marketed the building with the benefit of that. The church, listed Grade II, was closed and appropriated to residential use by a single scheme under the Pastoral Measure in 1998, sale followed later that year.

Example 2: The tower of the Medieval church at Thundridge (Diocese of St Albans) is within a moated enclosure which is a Scheduled Monument. This isolated ruin is near to walking paths and has been regularly affected by low-level vandalism.



Thundridge Old Church

The Medieval tower is all that remains of the church which once stood here, but the underground remains of the rest of the church survive, and there are burials since the early medieval period within the well-defined churchyard. There have been various schemes to build a dwelling onto the tower, which have obvious archaeological and aesthetic implications. However, such solutions



may be the only realistic long-term option for securing the future of such exposed ruins.

### Option 1B: Vesting in the CCT

Although vesting in the CCT has been used in the past, this option is unlikely to be available for the future, given the financial stress on this body. Examples of vested ruins are often towers, sometimes within churchyards with replacement churches, or where there was more than one church.

Example 1: York St Lawrence-without-the walls (Diocese of York), where a large Victorian church was built to replace the ruined Medieval church. This was demolished except for its tower, and vested in the 1970s in the Redundant Churches Fund, now the CCT.



York St Lawrence old and "new"

Example 2: Devesting of ruins from the CCT sometimes happens, and the CCT is presently looking at its entire stock. This first took place in 1987, when the ruins of Rickman's church (just the tower) at the Birkenhead Priory site were transferred to the local authority, which

intended to make it the focal point for a broader attraction. The CCT is looking to use this option more widely.

### Option 1C: Demolition

This will rarely be an option, as most ruins will be protected by designation in some way due to their architectural and archaeological significance.

The option may arise following damage, for example by storm or fire, which renders the structure dangerous and uneconomic or impossible to repair or consolidate. Reduction of dangerous parts of ruined churches, where recording rather than consolidation is the only option, may also sometimes have to be considered, as already noted. In every case the option of demolition, partial or total, must be informed by independent professional advice on condition and the feasibility of repair.

### Option 1D: Vesting in the DBF as a controlled ruin

Maintaining a controlled ruin will be a possibly permanent burden on the DBF, as ruins require constant maintenance and protection, particularly in the light of recent Health & Safety legislation.

This option is usually only a temporary solution, but it is also possible to pass the care and responsibility of the ruin to a trust or

"friends" group set up for that purpose (this can also be done within the FJ, see Model 3).



Is deliberate ruination as practiced into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century therefore a realistic option for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, or a failed experiment of the past which should no longer be contemplated? English Heritage (2008) comments in this regard:

Para 135 "...abandonment, including the removal of roofs... is not likely, in most cases, to be an effective means of conserving ancient fabric... nor is this approach likely to be economically sustainable."

It is a common misconception that reducing a church to a shell is an easy option, and a permanent solution to the problem of a church which is no longer required for regular worship. While it may be fairly said that a ruined church will be somewhat cheaper to look after than an intact one, it is not cost neutral or unproblematic. Such an action would be considered as partial demolition (see Option 3 above), and is now likely

to encounter strong resistance.

In addition to this, health and safety concerns dictate that leaving a ruin to its own devices may not be a safe approach, particularly where there is easy public access to the monument. Several churches which were deliberately ruined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are now proving problematic as their fabric deteriorates. *Little Livermere St Peter, abandoned in the 1950s, had become unsafe*

Deliberate ruination for this purpose is therefore no longer considered a way forward in most cases, for these reasons and because of the art historical and architectural features which would be lost. Generally speaking, this option has rarely worked well, as in the following examples.

Example 1: Little Livermere St Peter (Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich) was deliberately ruined in the 1950s, the roofs removed and the furnishings and fittings dispersed. The photograph below shows the interior just before ruination.

Clearly an important “Strawberry Hill” late Georgian interior was lost. Stabilising the inaccessible and now overgrown ruin (see above) had since become a serious problem, which the DBF had to pay for.



*Little Livermere St Peter – the lost interior*

Negotiations continue towards the transfer of the ruin to the local estate as a landscape feature.

Example 2: A number of small rural churches in the Diocese of Ely were deliberately ruined in the 1950s. They are now in a problematic structural condition, which reduces the potential for development and alternative use. This solution would not be advocated today.

### **Model 2: Management Agreements and Grants**

A solution which may become increasingly attractive is the use of Heritage Management Agreements in partnership with local authorities and English Heritage. This allows community use of these ruins for research, educational, and leisure

activities, with the local authority collaborating with the parish in their care.

### **Scheduled Monuments**

“Scheduling” under the Ancient Monuments Act (1979) refers to the legal system for protecting nationally important archaeological sites in England. Its aim is to preserve significant examples of the archaeological resource for the educational and cultural benefit of future generations. Scheduled monuments are designated and added to a ‘Schedule’ by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under powers contained in the 1979 Act.

Once a site is scheduled, consent must be obtained from the Secretary of State for any works that affect it, with the exception of those noted under class consents (see below). English Heritage regional offices play a central role in advising the Government and owners on individual applications for consent and can offer management advice. As explained below, grants are sometimes available to help maintain scheduled monuments, and built structures may be eligible for *historic buildings grants* to assist with repair or consolidation work.

## Heritage Management Agreements

There is provision not only under s24 of the 1979 Act for grant aid for the preservation, maintenance and management of monuments, but also under Section 17 for EH (or a local planning authority) to enter into a management agreement with the occupier (and also the owner) of any monument, or nearby land. This provides a mechanism for pro-active management through both capital works (eg repair, fencing) and maintenance.

Like management agreements for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI, see below), there may be provision for compensation for income foregone, usually as a result of ceasing to plough a field monument. English Heritage normally require provision for public access. Scheduled monument consent for works which are included in a Section 17 agreement is automatically granted by Class 8 of the Class Consents Order 1994.

## Heritage Partnership Agreements

The recent Penfold Review (2012) has recommended the introduction of voluntary statutory management agreements known as Heritage Partnership Agreement (HPAs) for complex or multiple sites as an alternative

management regime to the heritage consent system. One category being considered is sites in dispersed locations of a single or similar asset type under single ownership or management, which could include ruined churches. This legislation has not yet been brought forward.

## Biodiversity management and grants

With the increasing emphasis on the environment and biodiversity at a national level, local authorities and communities are increasingly looking for sites that can be actively managed for habitat and biodiversity purposes.

The recently released National Performance Indicator set, which is used by local authorities to determine their own priorities, contains an indicator to increase the number of sites managed for biodiversity purposes. Not all authorities have to adopt this indicator, but it further raises the profile and potential for these sites.

Any site may have potential for bio-diversity, either as an open space (churchyard), ruin (bats and nesting birds). Sites in urban areas may be of especial value. As a matter of course, any proposed intervention or use of a ruin or flat site should be preceded by an eco-audit to assess the known position and potential of

the site, and this may lead onto further development as a suitable site.

Some sites can be designated, and the range of options ranges from SSSIs to Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites. Each status has its own criteria, level of protection and options. It may well be possible to attract funding for the suitable management of such sites. In the first instance, contact should be made with the wildlife officers at the local authority who can advise on the possibilities.

## Environmental Stewardship schemes

Where ruins, either standing or flat sites, are located in farmland and in private ownership, they may attract interest and support under Environmental Stewardship schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship, operated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

These programmes assess the importance and potential of a landholding against a list of criteria to build up a picture of the area. Historic environment (i.e. archaeology) is one of these criteria. Wildlife and biodiversity is another, and this should also be considered. In these cases, it is important to ensure that knowledge of the ruin is in the public domain, usually through the



appropriate Historic Environment Record.

Other grants may be available from the Landfill Tax Credit, Heritage Lottery Fund, local authorities, charitable trusts, local and national heritage groups and amenity societies.

Example 1: Ashley-cum-Silverley, where ruins of two churches within the same parish, one a flat site, the other a tower, were managed by Cambridgeshire County Council as a community and educational resource, and the subject of an archaeological survey project. English Heritage and the Council provided resources to clear and consolidate the sites. However, this agreement recently ended and the site is now beginning to deteriorate again. Such schemes need long-term commitment if they are to succeed.

Example 2: The early 18<sup>th</sup>-century tower within the churchyard of the Victorian church at Ringley (Diocese of Manchester) is now looked after by the local authority.



*The old church tower at Ringley*

The tower incorporates material from the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century chapel, the first building on the site, which was rebuilt by Richard Lane in 1826. The chapel was demolished except for the tower when the “new” church, seen in the background, was built in 1854. It is now used as a clock tower, and preserved as part of the Ringley Conservation Area.

### **Model 3: Keep and use them**

This model will generally be used for ruins within the curtilage of churches and/or churchyards which are still in use for worship and/or burial; or for ruins which are still used occasionally for services, or to which there is a strong local bond. Again, grants for conservation and to aid community and educational use of ruined churches may be available from the Heritage Lottery Fund, local authorities, heritage groups and amenity societies.

In some circumstances local communities or interest groups can help by setting up voluntary “Friends” societies or other voluntary groups to help look after the ruins.

Example 1: Pontefract All Saints (Diocese of Wakefield): The church was ruined in the English Civil War; during recent renovations a cannon ball

was found still embedded in one of the walls.

It was re-used with a new church built within the shell in 1831, expanded in the 1960s. Recently an ambitious project has been started to build a new worship space and community centre within the ruined walls.



*Pontefract All Saints  
– church within ruin*

Example 2: Buckfastleigh Holy Trinity (Diocese of Exeter) was totally gutted by fire after an arson attack in 1992. It has been consolidated and vested in the DBF as a controlled ruin, and a new church built in the town itself. This was partly due to the extreme isolation of the church site, outside the town on a hill. The ruined church has been the subject of an archaeological survey and excavation project. Holy Trinity continues to be used for occasional services and by the local drama group. A group of volunteers curate the ruin and churchyard as an attractive open space for the community,



capitalising on the superb views of Buckfast Abbey.



West Raynham, St Margaret  
with new altar

Example 3: The ruined Medieval church of St Margaret in West Raynham (Diocese of Norwich) has been consolidated with an English Heritage grant and brought back into occasional use for worship with an open air altar. It is very well maintained by the village community.

### Legislation relating to ruined churches

Mission and Pastoral Measure (2011)

Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure (1991). Article 22 can be used to remove residual legal effects of consecration where the site is no longer in Church ownership.

Ancient Monuments Act (1979).

Occupiers' Liability Act (1984).

**CBC and English Heritage publications**  
*Wildlife in Church & Churchyard*. Church House Publishing, 1995.

*Churchyards Handbook* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) Church House publishing, 2001.

*Stonework - Maintenance and Surface Repair*. Church House Publishing, 2001.

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### Useful contacts

Caring for Gods Acre Web  
site:  
[http://www.caringforgods  
acre.org.uk/](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/)

Cathedral and Church  
Buildings Division,  
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Smith Street London  
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[http://www.churchcare.co  
.uk/](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/)

Details of Environmental  
Stewardship can be found  
on the DEFRA website  
[https://www.gov.uk/envir  
onmental-stewardship](https://www.gov.uk/environmental-stewardship)

Front cover picture of  
Dunwich leper chapel by  
Henry Davy 1824

