

## CASE STUDY

# ST GERMANS PRIORY, DIOCESE OF TRURO

[www.stgermansparishes.com/st-germans](http://www.stgermansparishes.com/st-germans) // [www.facebook.com/StGermansPriory](https://www.facebook.com/StGermansPriory)

Population: 4,301 (2011 Census)

This Grade 1 medieval priory church, classed as a major church, is on the site of the first Saxon cathedral of Cornwall and close to the River Tamar, the border with Devon. It's a challenging site on the side of a steep slope in a large village, sharing a boundary with the stately home of Port Eliot. The house and church used to be a flourishing monastic port in the middle ages, occupied by Augustine monks.

Popular as a venue for a variety of cultural, musical and community events, it is still the local parish church in St Germans in South East Cornwall, but its rebirth into the Priory was formalised in January 2013 when it came under the stewardship of the St Germans Priory Trust.

In 2011, the future looked bleak for St Germans Parish Church and the church was threatened with closure. With a dwindling congregation, the PCC was struggling to keep up with maintenance and repairs, let alone make it a warm and welcoming resource for the local community and visitors alike. There was a significant danger that it would eventually deteriorate to the point that it became unfit for use. This was averted with the support of the Bishop of Truro, The Rt. Revd Tim Thornton, and the Church Buildings Council (CBC), who backed local volunteers in developing a project, through a novel lease arrangement, to adapt it into a sustainable resource for wider use. The aim is, over time, to develop the building into a welcoming visitor attraction and a centre for education, culture and community as well as retaining it as a place of worship.

It is currently run by the St Germans Priory Trust in close cooperation with the local PCC. The Trust has leased the Priory from the Diocese of Truro and the PCC retains specific responsibility for the chancel. The two organisations work together to manage the day to day requirements of running such a large resource.

The Trust took charge of the capital works programme and aspire to make the Priory 'fit for purpose'. They were successful in obtaining two small grants in 2015; from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund to undertake some emergency work on the extensive roof and from the Headley Trust to repair the South Porch. Work remains ongoing to maintain the building in a stable condition. St Germans Parish Council also provided funding for a part-time development officer for a limited period which has been instrumental in securing a greater number of events. With the help of the PCC, the Trust also invested in toilet facilities; providing 2 compostable external 'woodland' toilets as a temporary measure which has proved to be very popular.

The congregation numbers remain small. The Trust still has a number of risks and are finding it very challenging to raise funds for the major project that they wish to develop. This sees the introduction initially of basic facilities like running water, sewerage, kitchen facilities and heating and then high quality resources to enable events to be 'staged'. The Trust remain undeterred in working towards their goal.

The Priory already provides:

- a unique tourist and visitor destination in Cornwall. Groups of all types regularly book tours;
- a unique learning environment for schools, colleges and all types of groups and individuals;
- a focus for historic and archaeological research;
- remarkable acoustics; it is a regular venue for concerts and recordings;
- opportunities to learn about the origins of Christianity in Cornwall and the chance to start the newly launched, 125 mile Cornish Celtic Pilgrims Way through Cornwall to St Michael's Mount;
- regular Church services, baptisms, weddings, funerals and memorial services;
- a community space. It is in regular use as a venue for concerts, craft fairs, auctions, cinema nights and theatrical events. It is used by the local community and school for gatherings. It has strong potential as a location for film and TV productions.

Port Eliot hosts a major art and literary festival every summer and the Priory is fully engaged with this, hosting a number of spectacular concerts in the evenings of all music genres. In 2016 and 2017, St Germans Priory hosted a number of diverse events including a choral evening by a Dutch Choir, a well known local Jazz Quartet, a 3-day Christmas Market, performances by the East Cornwall Bach Choir, the Megavissey Male Voice Choir, Burraton Male Voice Choir and the Truro Cathedral choristers. The annual History and Archeological Group Conference was held in the Priory and a number of local fund-raising initiatives.

Speaking on behalf of the CBC, Dr Joseph Elders said he had been “amazed” at the church’s beauty, adding: *“The CBC’s involvement is to catalyse community spirit and to help provide a focus for spirituality, culture and art, tourism and community use. St German’s Trust should be shared by many – not just the worshipping community – and put back at the centre of the community where it belongs.”*

With support from researchers including the CBC, St Germans Priory Trust have written up their story so far. The process is about maximising their learning as well identifying insights and approaches that could be useful and transferable to other churches in rural, suburban and urban settings. Trustees are happy to offer their model and approach alongside their insights and learning as part of training and support to colleagues across England at a diocesan and parish level. Please do be in touch.

