

SAVE

PRESS RELEASE

NEW PUBLICATION

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LONDON'S CHURCHES ARE FIGHTING BACK



A new report by SAVE Britain's Heritage shines a spotlight on London's places of worship, identifying those churches most at risk from decay and neglect, celebrating successful rescues, and looking to the challenges ahead. The report features stunning new photography.

London's Churches are Fighting Back features 30 case studies, including 19 important churches at risk. These include the Victorian 'tin tabernacles' of Hackney and Kilburn (one of which was recently for sale on eBay, but remains vacant); the Middlesex Hospital Chapel, Westminster, currently marooned at the centre of a huge cleared redevelopment site; and St Saviour's in Poplar, a forlorn shell after suffering a fire in 2007. (For further examples & images, see below).

As cuts in public spending continue to bite, London's churches face enormous challenges over the next decade. But this report also provides a celebration of recent success stories and much-needed hope for the future. In 1985 SAVE published the devastating report *London's Churches are Falling Down*. 30 years on, only one of the featured buildings in that landmark publication remains at risk - a remarkable reversal of fortunes. This latest report revisits these once crumbling Goliaths and tells the story of their rescue against all the odds, recounting how they have found new congregations or new uses, brought back to life by much-needed grants.

Marcus Binney, SAVE's President, says 'As a result of energetic clergy and loyal congregations, as well as sustained campaigning by SAVE and other heritage organisations such as the Victorian Society - and increasingly English Heritage itself -the number of churches being closed or demolished has sharply declined.'

'Successive predictions of mass closures of churches in London have so far proved unfounded. In 2010 just three schemes for redundancy were approved in the Diocese of London, two to other Christian congregations, and one for partial closure.'

'One of the most heartening examples is the Union Chapel in Islington, built to seat 1,650 and threatened with demolition. Thanks to imaginative and determined effort by enthusiastic locals who formed the Friends of Union Chapel in 1982, the chapel has remained open as a working church, an award-winning events venue and a centre for those who are homeless or in crisis.'

'Another longstanding case, St Stephen's Rosslyn Hill, has been rescued from terminal decay and repaired with the help of major grants. It is now open to the public on regular open days and used for community events.'

'With costs of maintenance rising and thefts (especially of lead from church roofs) on the increase, these buildings face a difficult decade, but this report shows London's churches survived the recession of the early 1990s and with continued determination and resourcefulness can survive the hard years ahead.'

SAVE has long been at the forefront of the battle to protect historic churches from demolition and needless closure. In 1977 SAVE published its first catalogue of Churches at Risk to coincide with the exhibition Change and Decay at the Victoria & Albert Museum, curated by two SAVE founders, Peter Burman and Marcus Binney. The exhibition toured the country for three years. Since then SAVE has published a clutch of further reports focusing on endangered places of worship, from Nonconformist chapels in the north of England to the great Regency and Victorian churches of Brighton.

NOTES TO EDITORS

An Ideal Gift for Christmas:

London's Churches are Fighting Back *is a report by Edmund Harris for SAVE Britain's Heritage*. 120 pages with over 150 fresh full-colour images. Available now priced at £15 or £13 for Friends of SAVE. The report can be ordered on line at www.savebritainsheritage.org or direct from the SAVE Office. (You can become a friend of SAVE for just £25 a year).

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

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PRESS

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**A selection of London Churches 'At Risk' from SAVE's report
(Photos: Matthew Andrews)**

Evangelical Church, Shrubland Road, Hackney (1858)

Recently for sale on eBay, this rare surviving 'tin tabernacle' is empty and vulnerable.



Guards' Chapel, Chelsea Barracks, Kensington & Chelsea (1860)

Back from the brink: this chapel was facing demolition until it was listed in 2010. A strong candidate for restoration as a church but its future remains unclear. This is the only remaining Victorian garrison church in central London and boasts a superb tiled and mosaic floor.



Holy Trinity, Cloudesley Square, Islington (1826)

Landmark Islington church built to the designs of Sir Charles Barry, and described as a reinterpretation of King's College Chapel, Cambridge. Now in a poor condition – the iconic turrets of the west façade are covered in blue netting to catch falling masonry and inside, yet more netting collects debris from the decayed roof trusses.



Holy Trinity, Mile End, Tower Hamlets (Begun 1834)

Empty since the 1980s, it is now in need of emergency works to make it weathertight.



Langthorne Hospital Chapel, Leyton, Waltham Forest

Empty and boarded up for 12 years, but still in a decent state and could make an ideal home for a community facility – currently owned by the local health authority. Originally built in 1840 to serve the West Ham Union Workhouse.



Licensed Victuallers' Chapel, Asylum Road, Southwark (1827-33)

Empty since 2002 despite a campaign for conversion to a community centre. A Greek revival chapel originally built as an almshouse for retired employees of the brewing industry. Badly damaged in World War II and never fully repaired. Needs a sympathetic new use.



Middlesex Hospital Chapel, Mortimer Street, Westminster

Left isolated and vulnerable, sitting at the centre of a cleared site at the heart of London. Wonderful mosaics and marble revetments, executed between 1891 and the 1930s, cover the walls and ceiling – a treat currently denied to thousands of potential visitors.



St John on Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets (1826-28)

Well-used but funds urgently need for stonework repairs and water damage. One of only three churches designed by the great Sir John Soane.



St Lawrence's, Brentford

The most venerable church in the area, with medieval remains, it has been empty since 1961 and is at immediate risk of rapid deterioration. The main body of the church was rebuilt in the 1760s, and remodelled in 1875.



St Michael & All Angels, Stoke Newington, Hackney (1883-85)

A healthy congregation but funds urgently needed to remedy severe structural problems.



St Saviour's, Poplar, Tower Hamlets (1873-74)

Declared redundant in 1976 and gutted by fire in 2007, this superb gothic church continues to deteriorate. It is one of the few landmark buildings left in an area badly bombed in World War II.

