



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday 6th December 2017

Protecting and Revealing the Hidden Heritage of St Alban's Church

St Alban's PCC, Highgate, Birmingham wins National Lottery Support

St Alban's PCC, responsible for the Grade II* listed Victorian Gothic church of St Alban the Martyr, Highgate, just south of the city centre of Birmingham, has been awarded initial support* for the project "Revealing St Alban's Hidden Heritage". We aim to secure the long-term future of the building and make its outstanding interior and local history more accessible to the people of the West Midlands and beyond.

Development funding of £28,000, made possible by players of the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund Grants for Places of Worship programme, has been awarded to help us complete the work needed to apply for a major full grant next year.

THE PROJECT

Our project will

- renew the roof and do other high-level repairs
- improve the main entrance to the building with step-free access and glass doors for a more welcoming appearance and interior visibility even when the church is closed
- make the building, its historic contents and the history of the parish accessible to a wider public with new interpretive materials and a programme of open days, guided tours, educational events, concerts and recitals.
- train volunteers as tour guides and building stewards.

The estimated total cost of the programme is over £560k and we're seeking £250k from the Heritage Lottery Fund and raising more than half ourselves from legacies, donations and other small grants.

THE CHURCH

Opened in 1881 on the corner of Conybere Street and Stanhope Street in Highgate, Birmingham, the church of St Alban the Martyr was designed by John Loughborough Pearson, architect of Truro Cathedral. His columns and vaulted stone ceiling make the interior of the church a cathedral-like space with a fine acoustic for both church music and concerts, quite different in ambiance from its red brick exterior.

In 2016 Historic England placed the church on its Buildings at Risk Register: the condition of the roof was a major factor in this decision: "the terracotta tiled roof has passed the point of repair and needs to be replaced urgently". Some small sections of the roof were renewed in 2016 with the support of £85,000 from a Heritage Lottery Fund Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund grant (GP-15-03127) and our current project aims to complete the work.

The church houses historic artefacts including a fine altar-piece with five panels by Birmingham Arts and Crafts artist Kate Bunce set in a beaten copper surround by her sister Myra. A Birmingham Civic Society Blue Plaque on the exterior commemorates Kate.

Other historic artefacts include vestments worn in Warwick Gaol by Fr Richard Enraght, vicar of Holy Trinity, Bordesley, the mother church of St Alban's (closed 1970). He was imprisoned for reintroducing traditional

ritual practices in the Church of England, which were made illegal under the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 (since repealed).

THE HISTORIC CONTEXT

The historic and religious context is vital to the interpretation of the material heritage. The Church of England parish of St Alban & St Patrick, is a historic inner-city Anglo-Catholic parish. Its origin was in a religious and educational mission to the church-less people in the high-density slum housing of the new industrial suburb of Highgate. This mission started in 1865 by priests James and Thomas Pollock. These brothers were inspired by the Oxford Movement, which believed in bringing the Gospel to poor areas of large cities where there were no schools, no churches, little sanitation and much disease. Their first small church, opened in 1865 in Leopold Street also served as a temporary school. The link between church and education continues to this day through the role of the present vicar as chaplain of Ark St Alban's Academy on Conybere Street, a Church of England secondary school – with a majority of Muslim students – which is the direct descendant of the schools opened by the Pollock brothers.

The overall objective of the project is to make available to the people of Birmingham and beyond the glorious heritage contained within St Alban's church and place it in the context of the social and religious history of the parish from the start of the Pollocks' mission in the 1860s to the present day.

Commenting on the award Fr Gerry Sykes, newly appointed vicar of the parish said: "It was very encouraging to arrive at St Alban's church and see how much the PCC and church wardens have achieved towards this grant during the interregnum. St Alban's church is an amazing building filled with a treasure of heritage and I am pleased that the PCC and wardens have done so much towards preserving St Albans; to make its heritage available to wider audience; and to help this hidden jewel in Birmingham to become more widely appreciated by the public."

ENDS

Notes to editors

About St Alban's PCC

St Alban's PCC (the Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Alban and St Patrick, Highgate, Birmingham; Registered Charity 1169941) is the governing body of the Church of England parish of St Alban and St Patrick, in Highgate Birmingham. St Patrick's Church, also built as a result of the mission of the Pollock brothers, opened in 1896, closed in 1964 and was demolished in 1966 as its site on Frank Street was close to the path of the new Belgrave Middleway. The parishes were united in 1973.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

* Grants for Places of Worship programme applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed. The Grants for Places of Worship programme closed for new first-round submissions in August 2017.

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about – from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #HLFsupported.

Further Information

For further information, images and interviews please contact St Alban's PCC through info@saintalban.co.uk, churchwarden Dr Christopher Smith on 0121 471 1301 or vicar Revd Dr Gerry Sykes on 0121 440 0404. Further information is also available on our website: <http://saintalban.co.uk/>