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**Protecting and Revealing the Heritage of St Alban's Church:
St Alban's PCC, Highgate, Birmingham wins National Lottery Support**

St Alban's Parochial Church Council, responsible for the Grade II* listed Victorian Gothic church of St Alban the Martyr, situated in an area of high social deprivation just south of Birmingham city centre, has been awarded £222,000 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, this grant will enable the Church Council to:

- Protect the building by renewing the roof and making high-level repairs to walls and windows.
- Adapt an existing side entrance to provide common step-free access for wheelchair users and ambulant visitors alike, compliant with the Equality Act.
- Make the interior of the church visible and accessible to a wider audience through a continuing, public programme of regular open days, guided tours, educational events, concerts and recitals.
- Make the architectural significance of the building, its furnishings and its historic context accessible to a wider range of people with different backgrounds and levels of engagement through new interpretive materials.
- Recruit and train more volunteers to staff open days and other events.

The work on the building will start in March 2020.

This award follows a previous grant to St Alban's PCC, also made possible by players of The National Lottery. In 2016, the Church Council received £85,000 from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund, to renew the first fifth of the church roof.

Quotes

Commenting on the award, Fr Gerry Sykes, vicar of St Alban's Church, said "We are excited to have received support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. This will not only secure the future of a spectacular Victorian Church, it will also allow us to make the history of our area, including the radical social action of church and chapel, known to today's diverse local community and especially the youth of Highgate."

The church architect, Richard Lamb of Hook Mason, acknowledged the importance of The National Lottery Heritage Fund support for the urgent and critical works required at this important historic church: "Their continued support is vital for heritage buildings generally and churches in particular, which have substantial cultural and community significance."

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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. The present parish was formed in 1973, when separate parishes of St Alban and St Patrick were united following the closure and demolition of St Patrick's Church, Frank Street.

About the Church of Saint Alban the Martyr

Originally known as St Alban's, Bordesley, the Church of Saint Alban the Martyr stands on rising ground at the corner of Conybere Street and Stanhope Street in Highgate, Birmingham. It was constructed between 1879 and 1881. Its architect, John Loughborough Pearson, designed St Alban's at the same time as Truro Cathedral. The interior is quite different in ambience from the red brick exterior, with soaring stone columns and a high cathedral-like vaulted stone ceiling. This gives it a fine acoustic for both church music and concerts. The tall ornate tower and spire originally planned were never built; instead the distinctive saddle-back tower visible from the Belgrave Middleway was added in 1938, to the design of Birmingham architect E. F. Reynolds. In 1984 modern ancillary buildings were added to the north east where they have minimal visual impact viewed from the street. These include a hall, kitchen, toilets and a 'cloister' entrance passage providing access both to the hall and to the church. It is this that will be modified to provide wheelchair-friendly access through a new lobby without detriment to the historic fabric of the building.

A Building at Risk

In 2016 Historic England placed St Alban's Church on its Buildings at Risk Register, recording: "the terracotta tiled roof has passed the point of repair and needs to be replaced urgently. The C20 extensions are also in poor condition and in need of repair. Rainwater goods need attention and there is work to be done to the perimeter of the apse because the external ground level is higher than the internal level." The ground level at the east end of the church was lowered in 2016/17 with the aid of a bequest to the church. This new National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, with other funds, enables completion of the roof renewal.

Arts and Crafts Furnishings

The church houses a fine altarpiece ('reredos') with five painted panels by Birmingham Arts and Crafts artist Kate Bunce mounted in a beaten copper triptych surround by her sister Myra. Installed in 1919, it had been promised by the sisters in 1909 in memory of their father John Thackray Bunce, for many years the influential editor of the *Birmingham Post*. A Birmingham Civic Society Blue Plaque on the exterior commemorates Kate Bunce.

At the east end of the church is a stained-glass window by Henry Payne, a leading member of the Birmingham Group of artist-craftsmen at the Birmingham School of Art, installed in



1904. It is flanked by two windows by Stourbridge-born Sidney Meteyard, another member of the Birmingham Group, added in 1926.

Also notable is a set of six brass candlesticks, each nearly a metre high, made by the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft in 1903. These were designed by Arthur Stansfield Dixon, founder of the Guild, who was churchwarden of St Alban's from 1899 to 1907.

The Historic Parish Context

The parish originated from a religious and educational mission begun in 1865 by two priests, James and Thomas Pollock, to the newly developed suburb of Highgate, then a mixture of industry and poor quality, high-density on the edge of Birmingham. The first small church, opened in 1865 in Leopold Street, also served as a temporary school. The link between church and education continues through the role of the present vicar as chaplain of Ark St Alban's Academy on Conybere Street, which is the direct descendant of the mission schools. Born in the Isle of Man and educated in Dublin, the Pollock 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.

The area was redeveloped in the 1950s and 1960s with most parishioners relocated elsewhere in Birmingham and the terraced back-to-back and courtyard housing replaced by high-rise blocks and maisonettes. Some of these have in turn been demolished, replaced by town house designs, while others have been refurbished. New immigrants from many parts of the world have moved into the parish, including an increasing number of refugees and asylum-seekers. The parish is the 82nd most deprived of the 12,443 parishes of the Church of England and in need of regeneration; some new housing is currently being constructed in the parish and more is planned.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **Inspire, lead** and **resource** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk.

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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/>.