

The Parish Church of St Mary

61 St James's Street, Brighton, BN2 1PR



Heritage Lottery Fund backs restoration of historic church in Kemptown Brighton, 28 January 2015

St Mary's Church is delighted to announce that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has given it initial support for the restoration of its historic exterior.

The church has received £17,000 to enable it to investigate problems in the building's fabric and develop its application for a full grant of £228,700. The grant would see major work carried out in 2016 to restore its west-facing elevation along Upper Rock Gardens.

The red brick neo-Gothic church, which is listed Grade-II*, was built in 1878. It occupies a commanding position at the top of St James's Street, on the corner with Upper Rock Gardens, in the Kemptown area of Brighton. An active Anglican church, it is also one of inner-city Brighton's most innovative and affordable performance venues.

Priest-in-charge Fr Andrew Woodward said: 'I'm very happy that the Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed that St Mary's is worthy of restoration. Ten years ago we were threatened with closure. Now we have a bright future and every day we're finding new ways of sharing our beautiful space with the wider community.'

The grant will also lay the ground for several heritage activities in 2016, including a public art project on the scaffolding hoarding that will run the church's length on Upper Rock Gardens and a community-led exhibition about people's memories of the streets and buildings around the church, many of which were demolished in the 1960s and 70s.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: 'There is a place of worship in almost every ward, village and town across the South East region, providing a very powerful visual connection with our past. Not only will our awards secure the immediate future of these particular buildings, they will also empower congregations to find new ways to use them and new ways to engage communities in the heritage they offer.'

St Mary's Venue Manager Katherine Prior, said 'It's very exciting. A facelift for the church means a facelift for the neighbourhood, which is good news for everyone who lives and works around us. And our public art project and community exhibition will be a great way of encouraging local people to engage with each other and their surroundings.'

The church's Inspecting Architect, John Bailey of Thomas Ford & Partners, is also enthusiastic: 'It's a great privilege,' he said, 'to work with St Mary's, which architecturally is one of Brighton's fine historic churches. The HLF grant will enable us to embark on the preservation of this nationally significant building and ensure that it remains the beating heart of this vibrant part of Brighton.'

Someone who knows St Mary's well as a performance space is opera singer and teacher, Arlene Rolph, who runs singing and performance schools for children and young adults at the church. 'St Mary's,' she says, 'has been the perfect home for us to work and perform over the last year. The church is an inspiring space which really helps engage the imagination of the young singers and acoustically is a real treat to perform in. Because the people at St Mary's embrace so warmly everyone who steps inside, I feel strongly that it deserves support to restore and maintain it.'

Notes to editors

About the HLF Grant

This Heritage Lottery Fund grant has been awarded under its Grants for Places of Worship Scheme. It is a first-round pass, which enables the church to investigate and cost the necessary repairs, ahead of a second-round application for over £200,000 in funding.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

From the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, we use National Lottery players' money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about.

www.hlf.org.uk

About St Mary's Church

St Mary's is a large parish church in the Kemptown area of central Brighton, falling within the East Cliff Conservation Area. It was built in 1876–8 to designs by Sir William Emerson PRIBA, who worked mostly in British-ruled India. His most famous building is the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata (Calcutta), which was partly inspired by his admiration for the Taj Mahal.

St Mary's is Emerson's most significant building and only church in Britain. It is broadly neo-Gothic in style, but includes Oriental and Classical features that reflect the architect's career in India and also his passion for architectural hybridity.

The church stands on the site of a private chapel built in 1825-6 by local architect Amon Henry Wilds for Charles Elliott, cabinetmaker to George III. This chapel, in the style of a Greek temple, fell down in 1876 during renovations to turn it into a parish church, whereupon the new St Mary's was built.

Its soft red brick and sandstone exterior has suffered over the years from its proximity to the sea and old, misguided repairs. In October 2014, English Heritage added the church to its Heritage At Risk Register and has since supported the church's quest for funding to help with its restoration.

For interviews, filming and more images please contact Katherine Prior, Project and Venue Manager, on 07796 440670 or via katherine.prior@talktalk.net

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Attached Photos (© St Mary's Church)

1. St Mary's Church as it looked in 1905, from an old postcard.
2. The Upper Rock Gardens elevation of St Mary's today - in urgent need of repair.
3. Audience at the Great Escape new music festival at St Mary's, May 2014.



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