

The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) has, in recent years, found innovative ideas to provide revenue for these interesting old structures – Champing (camping inside a church) being one brilliant idea which was featured in the Autumn 2016 edition of this Newsletter and which they are expanding to include more venues.



Church of All Saints at Aldwincle, Northamptonshire: available for "Champing"

ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE

Finding uses for ancient churches is always a problem after the worshipping community has left. How can we keep these superb buildings, with interiors which resonate with history? Recently, some historic churches have been revitalised by importing a new vibrant congregation from another successful church seeking to evangelise and expand. But that does not solve the problems of most redundant churches.

Another is to put accommodation pods inside historic churches, which provide all 'mod cons' but do not compromise the ancient structure, and will in some instances still allow the congregation to worship. These do not come cheap (although it is said that cost will diminish as more pods are sold) but will enable the host Parochial Church Council or heritage body to charge significantly more than Champing will achieve. And pods will, hopefully, expand the range of people able to enjoy these lovely buildings and also perhaps increase the general interest in their conservation.

So when Trustees of West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust and partner Trusts recently visited St. Swithun's Church, Worcester (a visit enabled by our Trustee Mark Balkham, who is the consultant architect for developments at St. Swithun's) it was interesting to learn that this church (which has been redundant as a parish church since the mid-1970s) has a lively support group which is planning to provide, not only complete refurbishment of the structure and interior, but also has firm plans to turn the church into a performance and arts venue.

St. Swithun's, which was vested to CCT in 1977 as a church no longer used for regular worship, is Grade I Listed and sits at the heart of Worcester City. It has an outstanding Georgian interior and was built in 1734/36 probably on the footprint of an earlier church which may have been destroyed by fire.



St Swithun's Church, Worcester

The architects were the Woodward of Chipping Campden and it has the furnishings of its time with box pews

and a spectacular ornate three decker pulpit which rises very high and has a huge tester suspended from the ceiling. Only slightly younger than the church is the organ of 1795 by Grays of London which sits above the western gallery which is on square fluted pillars. As a reminder of its roll in the past, as a civic church, we can still see the Mayoral ceremonial chair which has a sword rest.



St Swithun's Church, Worcester

As part of our visit we were allowed to venture up the narrow spiral steps leading to the roof of the tower. Sadly, Mark did not have the right key to allow us access through the trapdoor onto the roof (maybe another time) but on our way up we saw the ringing loft and above that the bells, which are apparently some of the oldest in the country. One of the bells is heard daily as it rings the hours for the church clock. Visitors are challenged to listen to the noonday chimes which ring out over the city and which St. Swithun's chimes share with those of the Cathedral and other city churches.

Our visit was a delight and it is so encouraging that this beautiful city church is to be conserved and reordered to provide a new and exciting use for the foreseeable future. We wish the CCT and Friends of St. Swithun's every success with the work to be undertaken and for its uses to come.

Mark Balkham and Philip Adams