

## CHURCHES DIVERSIFY

high-profile exhibitions, recitals and literary events popping up all over the region. In Leeds, Holy Trinity Church has ploughed the seam further and launched a dedicated arts centre, hosting exhibitions, plays, concerts and arts workshops. In Manchester concert promoters keen to challenge expectations are harnessing churches across the city.

“Sometimes a venue needs to be something special to interest the artist and the audience,” says Chris Horkan of folk and Americana promoter Hey! Manchester, “and with some places you get the impression they were almost waiting for your call. Obviously you have to reassure staff you aren’t going to trash the place...”

Hey! Manchester put on Mark Eitzel and Aidan Smith at St Margaret’s Church in Whalley Range, Manchester. Fellow promoter Now Wave has brought the likes of Beachouse to Manchester Cathedral, The Walkmen to the Central Methodist Hall and Wooden Shjips to Salford’s St Philip’s.

“We’ve actually been doing this since 1825. Churches have always supported live music – but perhaps not always of this kind,” says Reverend Andy Salmon of St Philip’s and Sacred Trinity.

“There’s often a deep spirituality to music, which is enhanced when it’s performed in a setting like ours.

“At both churches people are very supportive and see allowing concerts as a good thing. We have fantastic buildings and want to share these and become more visible within the community, and we want to encourage creativity.”

“Churches have always been the centre of their community and hosting activities that seem to belong in the secular world isn’t new,” says Eleanor Course of the CE Diocese of York. “In medieval times churches would often host markets. Secular activities help people get to know the church and congregation, and help the church serve its community better.”

England’s places of worship are ideally positioned to provide facilities communities might otherwise lack. In Cloughton in East Yorkshire the village’s need to maintain its post office was met by St Mary’s Church, while Holy Apostles in nearby Scarborough hosts the Rainbow Project, an accommodation, benefits, employment and rehabilitation centre. St Mary’s Church in Sheffield has even diversified into business services, with hi-tech conference facilities.

“Wider use of places of worship can broaden their support and bring in money for upkeep, which might make the difference between survival and closure,” says Nick Chapple, places of worship adviser for English Heritage.

Course adds: “It can be expensive to maintain some church buildings, and hosting activities can be a source of income, but the motivation to hold secular activities depends on the church. I don’t think there’s a threat to churches that don’t diversify into new areas if they are serving and responding to community needs.”

In 2008 English Heritage launched a £1.5 million scheme to help worshippers maintain and develop their own churches. In many cases, though, the congregation has already left the building. Since 1970, 30 Anglican churches have closed each year, prompting questions of whether



and how ex-places of worship should be preserved. Many are put to community or cultural uses, like Warter’s St James’s, which won £600,000 of Lottery and European funding and was re-born as the Yorkshire Wolds Heritage Centre a decade after its proposed demolition. The wildlife habitat in its former churchyard has attracted such rare breeds as David Hockney, whose 40ft painting of its trees is currently on display in York Art Gallery.

In Leeds, redundant St Margaret’s Church was bought by a Christian charitable trust and is being restored as the arts centre Left Bank – part-funded by English Heritage. “The rationale is to preserve an amazing grade II listed building, and make the space available to local people and creatives from all disciplines,” says Vik Banks, one of two part-time staff. “We still need hundreds of thousands for essential development, and progress is slow, but the response to the building keeps us going – almost

### Spreading the word

Hey! Manchester - [www.heymanchester.com](http://www.heymanchester.com)  
 The Rainbow Centre, Scarborough - [www.therainbowcentre.org](http://www.therainbowcentre.org)  
 Left Bank, Leeds - [www.leftbankleeds.org.uk](http://www.leftbankleeds.org.uk)  
 The Monastery, Gorton - [www.themonastery.co.uk](http://www.themonastery.co.uk)  
 English Heritage - [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)  
 National Churches Trust - [www.nationalchurchestrust.org](http://www.nationalchurchestrust.org)  
 Churches Conservation Trust - [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk)  
 Historic Chapels Trust - [www.hct.org.uk](http://www.hct.org.uk)  
 Friends of Friendless Churches - [www.friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/CMSMS](http://www.friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/CMSMS)  
 The Ecclesiological Society - [www.ecclsoc.org](http://www.ecclsoc.org)  
 Jewish Heritage UK - [www.jewish-heritage-uk.org](http://www.jewish-heritage-uk.org)  
 Society For the Protection of Ancient Buildings - [www.spab.org.uk](http://www.spab.org.uk)  
 Society for Church Archaeology - [www.britarch.ac.uk/socchurcharchaeol](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/socchurcharchaeol)

