

APPENDIX H

REPORT OF THE HISTORIC CHURCHES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. CURRENT SITUATION

1. The unexpectedly animated debate at the 2002 General Synod emphasised the concern that had already been expressed in resolutions of the 2001 Cork Diocesan Synod, about the perceived burden that our inheritance of old buildings puts on the Church.
2. It is considered that the issues relating to the larger Cathedrals do not need addressing at RCB level. These buildings are usually at the centre of local civic life and the scale of the conservation issues relating to them generally require tailored and individual courses of action to be devised and followed through. The problems that need addressing and help are at the parochial level.
3. This on-going apprehension has been crystallised in the Republic by the recent enacting of comprehensive legislation to protect the country's architectural heritage - Part IV of the Local Government (Planning & Development) Act 2000. This legislation derives from the obligations of Ireland's 1997 ratification of the 1985 Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, drawn up by the Council of Europe and signed in Grenada, Spain.
4. This legislation enhanced the powers of Local Authorities and increased the obligations on the owners and occupiers of 'protected structures'. The designation of buildings as 'protected structures' while the responsibility of Local Authorities, derives from the classification system of the National Inventory of the Architectural Heritage (NIAH), currently being compiled on a county by county basis by Dúchas - the Heritage Service - since the election part of the Department of the Environment.
5. The NIAH is far from complete, but it should be assumed that every church of the Church of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland will be recommended for designation as a protected structure, not least because in many places they are the oldest buildings surviving still in continued use.
6. In Northern Ireland the listing procedure is long established, completed and generally understood. Works to a listed building, in addition to needing planning permission, also require 'listed building consent'. However under the Planning Order (NI) 1991, Part V section 44(8), the requirement for 'listed building consent' does not 'apply to works for the demolition, alteration or extension of an ecclesiastical building which is for the time being used for ecclesiastical purposes or would be so used but for the works.' This Ecclesiastical Exemption from secular historic building control is far more extensive than in the rest of the United Kingdom. In Scotland Ecclesiastical

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Exemption only applies to internal works. In England and Wales it only applies to those churches deemed to operate effective internal systems for controlling building alterations.

6. **Part IV, (Architectural Heritage) Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 2000**

The obligations of this legislation commence once an owner is notified that it is *proposed* to designate his/her building a 'protected structure'. The owner shall ensure that the structure or any part of it is not and does not become endangered. Nothing may be done to the building both inside and out as well as to its curtilage that would affect its character, without planning permission having first been obtained.

7. Due to the constitutional protection afforded to the Churches to manage their own affairs, the statutory regulations relating to consideration of proposals affecting the Interior of a Place of Public Worship have yet to be agreed between the Churches and the Department of the Environment. Discussions between the Churches and with the Department are ongoing and may be affected by the result of an action currently being taken in the High Court by the Roman Catholic Church on this issue (concerning a church in Edenderry).

In time, all Local Authorities will have Conservation Officers on their staffs whose responsibilities will lie solely with the on-going implementation of this legislation.

2. **GRANT AID IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

To help the owners of 'protected structures', state funded grant aid is currently available from three sources:

- i) Local Authority Conservation grants. Administered annually. Up to 75% of proposed expenditure to a max of Euro 12,000. Grant must be drawn down within the calendar year of date of approval. Only paid on completion of works.
- ii) Heritage Council grants. The Heritage Council is an independent statutory body, set up by the Heritage Act 1995, and financed by an annual block grant from the Department of Finance. Grants allocated annually in advance. Up to 75% of proposed expenditure must be drawn down within the calendar year of approval. Staged disbursement if bridging finance is a challenge. Conservation Plans generally required if the building is large, before grant aid would be considered, to ensure that all aspects of the conservation of the structure have been considered in a structured way.
- iii) The EU co-financed Conservation Grant Scheme for public buildings (2000-2006), provides support for 'not for profit' bodies (which includes the churches) to upgrade buildings of significant architectural and heritage merit which are in public ownership or open to the public generally. Details from the

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Urban and Village Development Section of the DOE. Administered annually by the Department of the Environment, with grant paid on completion of works and only within calendar year of approval.

The above state funded heritage building grants together with the income of Diocesan funds dedicated to building maintenance means that there is a matrix of funds available for the repair of historic churches. However it is certainly daunting and difficult for anyone not familiar with the architectural heritage sector bodies and their procedures to successfully co-ordinate both the access to such monies and the commencement and completion of necessary works.

It should also be noted that FÁS still operate limited training programmes relating to historic buildings in public use. The availability and usefulness of these schemes varies greatly around the country.

3. GRANT AID IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The main sources for funding for churches are as follows:

- 1) Heritage Lottery Fund Grants to Places of Worship in Northern Ireland
Given only for urgent repairs to the fabric of the building. Grant aid up to 75% of eligible project costs, up to £100,000. Applications considered twice a year.
- 2) Historic Buildings Grants administered by the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment. Only Grade A and B+ ecclesiastical buildings are eligible and can receive a 33¹/₃ % grant for eligible works.

Details of other sources of funds can be found in the Directory of Funds for Historic Buildings in Northern Ireland, produced in Oct 1999 by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society in association with the Environment and Heritage Service of the DoE. An updated and revised edition is to be published in 2003.

4. CHURCH BUILDINGS

1. The great bulk of the Church of Ireland's inheritance of church buildings derives from the vigorous building programme of the Board of First Fruits (circa 1712 - 1830) executed post the Act of Union during the first quarter of the 19th Century. These buildings are generally simple gabled ended halls attached to tall towers often topped by battlemented parapets. They were built of lime mortared rubble (undressed) stone with a lime rendered finish. Dressed stone work is generally confined to the gable copings, doorways, window and belfry surrounds as well as the tower string courses and crenellations. Windows were of clear glass in often elaborate wooden tracery.
2. The current maintenance problems of First Fruits churches nearly always derive from past well intentioned but ultimately futile application of 'modern'

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building materials and techniques combined with a neglect of towers due to their height.

3. Later in the 19th Century, there was a second significant phase of church building and modification, especially in the expanding suburbs of Cork, Dublin, Belfast and Londonderry. Generally of dressed stone with stone mullioned windows and steeply pitched roofs, these buildings have also suffered from the inappropriate use of modern building materials - most notably Portland cement*.
4. The one small structural problem often seen manifest in mid 19th Century churches is the slight displacement of the cut stone gable footstones, due to the invariably steep pitches of their roofs.
5. In urban environments, a common and more profound problem can be the exaggerated weathering of stone and brick due to atmospheric pollution.

5. GENERAL MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS FOUND IN CHURCHES

Walls

- i) Use of Portland cement mortars both in repointing and rendering lime mortared walls resulting in the induction and trapping of moisture - most obviously made

* *Lime mortar and Portland cement mortar have superficially subtle but nevertheless crucially distinctive qualities.*

Lime mortar (used for the building of the great medieval cathedrals and right up until the invention of Portland cement at the end of the 19th Century) has two cardinal characteristics after it sets: it retains a degree of plasticity and it allows the passage of moisture. The former attribute means that lime mortared buildings minutely expand and contract between summer and winter. The latter attribute allows a cycle of moisture absorption and evaporation to occur on and in from the outer surfaces of lime rendered and pointed walls. The mortar always provides a conduit for the continuous escape of moisture from within the walls of a building.

Portland cement mortar sets by chemical reaction, and is hard, brittle and strong under compression. It is generally impervious to water moisture. If a Portland cement mortar is applied to a building built of lime mortar, either as pointing or as a render, problems arise. The inherent subtle inter seasonal flexing of the lime mortared building will cause minute cracking to occur in the hard but brittle Portland cement pointing or render. These cracks, by capillary action, will actively suck in moisture from the surface into the body of the walls from where it cannot escape back out by evaporation. So it travels in through the lime bedding mortar of the walls to evaporate from the inner surface of the wall and into the inside of the building. Hence the problems of surface salts, paint peeling and worse - dry rot. The building cannot 'breathe'. Consequently the result of the invariably well intentioned application of Portland cement to lime mortared buildings is nearly always damaging and the opposite of what was intended.

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manifest on the inside recesses of window openings. (See above under Section 3).

- ii) Lack of ‘French drains’ along the bases of walls, where outside soil levels have become higher than the level on the inside of wooden floor joists, leading to decay.
- iii) Lack of Damp Proof Membranes (eg lead) under cut stone gable copings. Or worse the replacement of these stone gable copings with a solid cast concrete coping which invariably cracks and so admits moisture.

Windows

- i) Generally an inadequate once a generation (25 years) painting instead of a consistent 8 to 10 year cycle leading to rot and decay especially of footings and sills.
- ii) Unventilated external glass plating installed to protect stained glass from storm damage. Results in trapping of moisture and large diurnal temperature variations leading to the weakening and distortion of the lead window tracery. Rusting steel grids protecting windows which severely stain cut stone sills and tracery.
- iii) Inoperative window openings. Hence little or no ventilation of the interior spaces.

Roofs

- i) Inappropriate lead flashing to gable coping where roofing material has been replaced.
- ii) Replacement of original gutters by plastic or seamless gutters, resulting in inadequate capacity and falls and hence blockage. Replacement down pipes of inadequate diameter and hence capacity.

Towers

- i) Lack of easy access up through towers leads to lack of safe inspection of tower roof drainage.
- ii) Disintegrating belfry windows leading to significant rain ingress. Blocked drainage from belfry floor results in significant decay and hence impeded access to tower roofs and bell cradles.

The above is a summary of the most common maintenance problems of the general run of Church of Ireland churches. They are not particularly difficult to deal with. However, most people in the building industry, from suppliers to contractors to architects, do not realise the unintended effects of applying current building practice and materials to early 19th Century buildings. The result has often been the

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compounding of problems rather than their solution. In such circumstances it is understandable why congregations and clergy quite logically conclude that the care and maintenance of their churches is like a labour of Sisyphus.

6. PROPOSED ACTION

I – Church Conservation Adviser

It is proposed that the RCB appoint and fund a Church Conservation Adviser.

The remit of such a person would be as follows:

- i) To tender technical advice, on request, to parishes where they have perceived maintenance problems with their church building.*
- ii) To source specialist advice if the problems prove to be of a more profound nature (e.g. stone decay).*
- iii) To advise parishes on how to source funding and if necessary to liaise with the grant giving bodies.*
- iv) To liaise with Local Authority Conservation Officers and where necessary with Dúchas, the Heritage Service, regarding proposed alterations to a church.*
- v) To develop database of ecclesiastical buildings and state of buildings portfolio.*
- vi) To develop database of best practice of the conservation and adaptive re-use of church buildings.*
- vii) To develop doctrine of beneficial use in consultation with statutory and other ecclesial bodies.*
- viii) To collate and distribute relevant material to Dioceses and liaise with diocesan architects and diocesan architectural/building committees.*
- ix) To furnish a twice yearly report to the RCB.*

The following could be considered the requirements of the person appointed:

- i) An appropriate postgraduate qualification.*
- ii) Hands on experience of repair of old buildings and the use of appropriate technologies.*
- iii) Experience and knowledge of the relevant grants and the requirements of the grant aiding bodies. Familiarity with the concept of conservation plans an advantage.*
- iv) Knowledge of and familiarity with the parochial and diocesan structure of the Church of Ireland.*
- v) Knowledge of and familiarity with the current legislation and statutory regulations pertaining to the conservation of the architectural heritage.*

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The Committee recommends

A provisional, part time appointment be made for two years on the basis of two days a week, pay negotiable, with travelling and office expenses reimbursed as per current clergy rates.

II – Irish Landmark Trust

The Irish Landmark Trust, 25 Eustace Street, Dublin 2, which has charitable status, has an well established reputation in the adaptive re-use of small redundant/derelict buildings of architectural merit for low intensity use as holiday lets.

It is proposed that the RCB and the Irish Landmark Trust conduct a jointly funded project feasibility study on two redundant rural church buildings - one situated in Northern Ireland and one in the Republic- as demonstrative examples. The study's purpose would be to test the viability of using the two buildings as worked examples of how church buildings, no longer required for public worship, can be adapted for reuse in a sensitive way which still respects their ecclesiastical significance. Such examples would be important for informing planning officers, conservation officers as well as select vestries and congregations as to the principles and possibilities of such an approach.