

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Positive local management and repair/maintenance
Name of project/group:	SPAB Maintenance Co-operatives Project (MCP)
Location:	National
Duration (if applicable):	2013-2016 (3 yrs) + legacy of guidance and info on web

Short description of project:

The Maintenance Co-operatives Project (MCP) is an innovative initiative to connect, encourage and support the dedicated volunteers across the country who are responsible for the up-keep of England's historic places of worship. It is the successor to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Faith in Maintenance project, which ran for five years from 2007 and delivered 150 maintenance training courses to around 5,000 volunteers.



The SPAB Maintenance Co-operatives Project Logo

The MCP project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is running from October 2013 until December 2016, focusing on five key regions: the North East, Cumbria, Lincolnshire, Hereford and Worcestershire, and the South West.

Project staff work with SPAB contacts and partners in church and conservation organisations and the local community to develop Maintenance Co-operatives, which are independent groups of volunteers who undertake regular preventative maintenance of their buildings to avoid costly damage and deterioration.

The MCP team provides free training for each group and suggests a schedule for regular working sessions. In addition, the project also has a strong community aspect, the overall aim being to motivate and mobilise volunteers so that they can continue this kind of work after the project has ended.

What would have happened without this project/group?

Without this project, places of worship across SPAB's five regions would continue to fall into disrepair, and wardens/stewards would continue to feel isolated and overwhelmed by the range of maintenance issues at their buildings.

One of the key results of the project is that those responsible for historic places of worship are more aware of the importance of regular maintenance, and understand how lack of maintenance can have a serious impact in a relatively short time. In Herefordshire & Worcestershire, for example, working parties have cleared blocked downpipes, weeded gullies and cleared silt traps.



Co-op volunteers clearing a blocked drainage gully (Photo: SPAB).

In the South West, the project has supported not just capacity-building, but also capacity-sharing. Having received training, the Melbury 'Gutter Gang' has begun to apply its expertise across a wide area, giving confidence to volunteers by sharing skills and knowledge across 16 places of worship. Similarly, Lincoln volunteers who attended training on housekeeping and object conservation are now helping other churches in the city to keep their historic interiors clean and well maintained.



Volunteers undertaking a baseline condition survey at St Bartholomew, Appleby, North Lincs (Photo: SPAB).

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The Project runs until the end of 2016, but has already fulfilled the majority of its objectives. The project team is working with a wide range of national and local partners to fulfil these objectives by:

- Creating a minimum of 25 local Maintenance Co-operatives to share good practice and help each other to take care of their buildings.
- Training volunteers so that they can confidently look after day-to-day maintenance issues. This training is shaped in direct response to the needs expressed by volunteers. In Lincoln, for example, volunteers have asked for training on open churches and tourism, whereas a group near Boston have asked for technical advice on topics such as dealing with damp and re-pointing.
- Supporting the recruitment of additional volunteers to help look after the places of worship in each Co-op. In Kidderminster, for example, the lead volunteer has recruited a group of 13 people to help with the maintenance at his church, including members of the local community who do not attend the church for worship.
- Sharing good maintenance practice with the wider community through training events and meetings and through the creation of technical advice and guidance on the project's website (www.spabmcp.org.uk).

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

A full evaluation will be undertaken following the project's completion in December 2016, but interim evaluation already identifies a large number of achievements:

- The establishment of 18 Maintenance Co-operatives, with a further six in development
- Delivery of a wide range of training events that are well regarded and are meeting the needs of attendees, leading to positive impacts on their knowledge, understanding and confidence, and on the maintenance of places of worship.
- The technical toolkit on the project's website is regularly added to, covering new topics in response to requests from Co-op members and event attendees
- Evidence of immediate improvements in the condition of places of worship. When a Dorset working party found drainage issues, for example, a small group went back later with spades and a pressure washer, locating and unblocking 3 drains which the Churchwarden thought had not been cleared for 25 years.
- Evidence of general interest in the Maintenance Co-operatives model, and explicit interest from volunteers in being part of a co-operative. At a recent Lincolnshire maintenance course, for example, all attendees said that they would like to join a Co-operative, including two church wardens from North Norfolk who were happy to set up an independent group.



Lincolnshire volunteers enjoying a grants workshop in Horncastle (Photo: SPAB).

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

Starting a brand new project is never easy, and as the first year of this project was essentially a development phase, we have achieved much in a short timescale. Running the project over 5 years rather than 3 years would have helped build awareness about the project and what it has to offer in the early stages. This timescale would also have enabled it to fit in with church routines based round quinquennial inspection.

In one area SPAB redefined the region to better reflect the boundaries of church organisations: 'Dorset & Somerset' became 'South West'.

The project is, of course, working across geographies which have different capacity, resources and needs. While this is presenting challenges to delivering consistently across each area, it also provides opportunities to develop a range of co-operative models for the future.

Finally, whilst the project has delivered a wide range of training events, progress has varied both within and across the project regions, with some groups preferring a more traditional programme of training that they can attend and others being very specific about what they need. All events have, however, received excellent feedback from attendees.



Volunteers learning about lime mortar (Photo: SPAB).

What is the future for the case study?

This project will finish at the end of 2016, but we will leave behind a lasting legacy of local maintenance Co-operatives, who will continue to work together to help each other maintain their local places of worship and who will transfer their skills to others within their communities. The project will also leave a legacy of best practice and technical advice, which groups from across the country will use to set themselves up as new maintenance Co-operatives. The project team have already had several requests for advice on setting up groups in areas outside SPAB's five regions, including a group in York which is currently in development.

In addition, the project's toolkit and advice is already being used by others across the country. A Conservation studies MA student from the University of York who attended a baseline survey training day for the North Manlake Co-op in North Lincolnshire, has used the survey template for a project at Grimsby Minster. The project's glossary was also used by volunteers undertaking assessments of Grade II listed buildings in York for Historic England's Grade II Heritage at Risk pilot project.

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer Services Department:

Telephone: 0370 333 0607

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk