

The Redundant Church

Heritage Management of the Religious-Sacred-Secular Nexus

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on three episodes in the history of one small medieval church, which was made redundant (closed for worship) in the 1930s. It explores how the religious, sacred, and secular have been managed there at key moments in its history. As a case study, Saint Peter Hungate, Norwich is richly illustrative of the negotiations that have taken place over the management of redundant church buildings in England since the nineteenth century. In 1933, for example, Hungate became the first church in the country to be put to a permanent nonreligious use, when it became a museum of ecclesiastical art, run not by the Church of England but by local government. This was a groundbreaking moment in the development of religious heritage practice. Hungate also exemplifies how significant the presence and production of the sacred are to heritage management and demonstrates the intimate entanglements that develop with both the religious and secular.¹ Before we turn to consider the first episode, an introduction to some relevant aspects of the history of UK religious heritage management may be useful to the reader.

The Development of Religious Heritage Management in England

Heritage, as a way of thinking, can be said to have developed in the British Isles as a response to the tumult of the Reformation.² Britain's Reformation

was long, so that the English Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century between Royalists and Parliamentarians were also religious wars. Iconoclasm continued and gained momentum in the 1640s and '50s as a significant part of the Parliamentary campaign to establish a Puritan settlement. Against this background of destruction, a new sense of the past began to develop when, in 1688–89, the monarchy was restored and the Church of England re-established. As the forerunners of modern historians, archaeologists, and art historians, antiquarians began to focus in new ways on historical sites, buildings, material culture, as well as texts. These early antiquarians, many of whom were churchmen, were all amateurs. They studied churches less as architecture and more as sites of historical Christian association and social and family history, where events, property, and customary rights were recorded in monuments and church documents. They narrated the history of these buildings and their parishes, binding the fractures of the Reformation and the Civil Wars into long narratives that offered a vision of continuity. Their writings and collections are still fundamental to heritage practice, but more than that, the value they placed on recording and collecting the past and, later, preserving it established the foundation stones of heritage thinking (Jokilehto 1999; Sweet 2004; Swenson 2013).

Over the course of the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical architecture began to be studied more attentively by antiquarians, for its form and style, as well as its uses. The field was given greater impetus in the late eighteenth century by the development of Romanticism, as well as a growing nationalism. Whereas before, Gothic architecture had been disparaged as barbarous and representative of monkish superstition, in the late eighteenth century it began to be valued as picturesque and potentially sublime. Gradually losing its negative associations with Catholicism, Gothic became established as the authentic native English style (as opposed to Classicism, which came to be regarded as a foreign import) (Brooks 1999).

In the same period, huge social and political changes brought by the Industrial Revolution created new challenges for the established church, the Church of England (known more informally as the Anglican Church). A breakdown of traditional social structures accompanied huge demographic shifts from rural areas to new towns and cities. In addition, the development of suburbs, with new transport systems, led to the depopulation of city centers. Many ancient rural and inner-city parishes were left with small, poor congregations, and newly populated areas might not have a church at all. There was widespread fear of de-Christianization. In addition, religious dissenters were clamoring for and securing the removal of their civil disabilities. On all sides, the Church of England seemed to be losing its position in the nation's civic and religious life. There was a crisis of both management and mission (Brooks and Saint 1995; Knight 1995).

In these circumstances, a conservative movement of churchmanship arose that looked back to the medieval church for inspiration, regarding it as continuous with the apostolic era and thus having greater religious and social integrity. It became, in complex ways, a resource for dealing with the rapid changes of the nineteenth century. This movement was accompanied by a revolution in church building and restoration. Gothic became the sign of a purer, more authentic national church, and thousands of churches were built, rebuilt, and restored in an idealized Gothic manner. New vestments, stained glass, furnishings, and liturgical practices patterned on medieval models were also introduced. This was not simply a style revival; it was a form of heritage movement, which sought to mobilize the past to change the present. The Gothic Revival, as it became known, was a pan-European phenomenon (Brooks 1999; Jokilehto 1999; Lofgren and Wetterberg 2020). Remarkably, the Romantic and picturesque vision of “a church as it should be,” essentially rural, still dominates popular perceptions and continues to influence the presentation of churches in Britain (Webster and Elliott 2000).

This revolution in church building was governed by a system of largely pre-Reformation ecclesiastical law, which was managed at the diocesan level. It was based on the principle of ensuring that buildings were fit for contemporary worship needs. Fired by a new sense of mission, renewal, not conservation, was the priority (Dellheim 1982: 112–30; Miele 1995; Pevsner 1976). Many buildings underwent what became seen as drastic “restorations” in the search to rebuild the ideal, causing loss and damage that has been calculated to have been worse than that of the Civil Wars (Cocke 1987: 190). Substantial numbers of genuine medieval features were lost, along with post-Reformation interventions. In addition, buildings that were too derelict or in places where the population had moved away were regarded as having outlived their purpose—to be redundant. In ecclesiastical law, as it then stood, churches could not be used for secular purposes. When no religious use could be found (as, for example, a mission hall or parish room), they would be dilapidated, in order that funds could be redirected to places where new or larger churches were required to serve growing populations. Dilapidation might involve simply removing the roof and letting the building rot, taking the building away completely so that the land could be sold, or reducing it to a picturesque ruin set in a churchyard garden. In managing their approximately ten thousand church buildings, of which at least eighty-five hundred were medieval, the heritage of the pre-Reformation church had become a tool of mission for the Church of England but one that did not yet imply an obligation to preserve.

Although there had been scattered voices of opposition to restoration and dilapidation in the eighteenth century, it was not until the late 1870s that these began to coalesce into a movement, which focused on the merits of

preservation over restoration (Fawcett 1976; Hunter 1996). By this point, unlike in some other European countries, there was no state-led heritage apparatus either for registering or protecting the built heritage in Britain (Glendinning 2013; Jokilehto 1999; Swenson 2013). Any work in this direction was done in informal, voluntary associations or by individual amateurs. Volunteerism remains a significant aspect of British heritage management, as will be discussed. Perhaps the first, most important, step was the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1877 (Glendinning 2013: 121–28; Miele 1996). William Morris (1834–96), the designer and socialist activist, and Phillip Webb (1831–1915), architect and designer, developed a manifesto of preservation, strongly influenced by the work of the art and social critic John Ruskin (1819–1900). Church restoration was their primary target. As Morris wrote, “Our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation’s growth and hope” (Pevsner 1976: 51). While their aims were certainly not religious, their language often suggested the sacred. As the text of their famous *Manifesto* concluded, their aims were to protect ancient buildings, so that they could be handed down “instructive and venerable to those that come after us.”³

The SPAB’s early successes revealed that their views were widely shared, including among churchmen, who joined the society in large numbers. The British Parliament made a first gesture toward heritage protection in 1882 by passing the Ancient Monuments Act, which listed fifty prehistoric sites that had to be offered to the government if the owners wanted to sell them. Further legislation came slowly, accelerating after World War II (Glendinning 2013; Hunter 1996; Thurley 2015). However, the Church of England was largely exempted from legal measures, and it bolstered its claim to independence by developing its own heritage management framework. The first substantial acknowledgment of its responsibilities came in 1914 with the establishment of the Ancient Monuments (Churches) Committee, which sought to respond to ever louder criticism that the church was lax in its building control where heritage buildings and fittings were concerned. It took decades to bring the church under any kind of state heritage framework, and it still retains a degree of exemption from planning legislation, on the basis of the rigor of its own system of regulation (Delafons 1997; Mynors 2006; Mynors 2009). Most Church of England buildings are registered or “listed” by the governmental body Historic England. This system entails a measure of planning and use oversight, at both local and national levels. The church’s own legal framework has also developed considerably to direct the heritage management of its buildings. Alongside this, it has begun to pursue a considerable amount of heritage policy research and innovation, usually in partnership with heritage organizations. Driven by financial con-

siderations, a changing heritage funding climate, and a continuing desire for institutional self-determination, the church commissioned reports such as *Heritage and Renewal* (1994) and *Spiritual Capital* (Theos and the Grubb Institute 2012) on cathedrals. Most recently they have participated, as a major stakeholder, in the government-commissioned Taylor Review and subsequent pilot scheme on parish churches and cathedrals. In each case the church has encouraged an image of integration in national (state and NGO) heritage management frameworks and simultaneously a significant measure of independence from them (Coleman 2019: 123, 139; Coleman and Bowman 2018: 12).⁴

In relation to redundant churches, the main focus of this essay, the Church of England has also moved substantially. For example, under the terms of the 1968 Pastoral Measure, it became possible for the church to dispose of church buildings for nonreligious purposes, and uses such as domestic accommodation, arts centers, shops, offices, and so on have since become common. An endowed trust established by the same legislation, now known as the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), maintains some 350 churches of architectural or historical significance as heritage buildings. With limited funds, the CCT's work is supplemented by many voluntary bodies that have grown up to look after individual churches or groups of churches, whether closed or open. On closure and disposal, redundant churches become subject to state heritage governance. It is worth noting that Church of England buildings were not (and still are not) deconsecrated when they become disused for worship purposes. Consecration, in the post-Reformation Church of England, can be understood best as a service of dedication. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, the building is only set apart for the purposes of worship; it is not religiously sacred in and of itself. Although attitudes vary considerably on this point within the Anglican Church (and have done since the mid-nineteenth century), a church building is in some sense religiously sacred only in its association with worship and the sacraments. Once worship ceases, that tie is simply broken and thus deconsecration is unnecessary. As we shall see, state governance and disuse do not, in fact, necessarily extinguish the sacred potential of these buildings.

This all too cursory introduction to the UK framework of religious heritage management must serve to contextualize the case study that follows. Further details will be added as they become relevant. Two distinctive aspects to the UK system have been noted. First, the established position of the Church of England enabled it to maintain for a long time a separate system of planning and heritage governance that was subsidiary to its mission goals. The state and ecclesiastical systems are now much more closely connected. For example, Historic England retains specialists who work on ecclesiastical buildings, and they must be consulted over proposed changes.

They offer expertise and guidance to individual parishes, which supplements the work of the church's own system of heritage management. This was a significant focus of the "Taylor Review Pilot."⁵ Second, amateurs and independent voluntary and professional bodies continue to play an important role in heritage management at local and national levels, to the extent that some NGOs must by law be consulted before any significant change to a building is made.⁶ Thus, heritage management in the UK remains a system of cooperation, born out of networks of association, amateur and professional, mixed with robust legal constraints. We can now turn to the consideration of Saint Peter Hungate and the terms on which heritage management requires and endeavors to ensure that the sacred persists.

Saint Peter Hungate: Introduction

Saint Peter Hungate is a small late-medieval church in the City of Norwich. Situated at the junction of three streets, its tower rises up over a rich heritage landscape. For much of the medieval and early-modern period, Norwich was England's second largest city, a place of great wealth based on wool and textile manufacturing. Elm Hill, for example, to the north of the church, was a street of considerable trading activity. With ready access to the river, it became the site of the homes, workshops, and warehouses of wealthy merchants (Ayers 1994; Rawcliffe and Wilson 2004). Indeed, the church, as we see it today, was rebuilt in the mid-fifteenth century by parishioners who were some of the wealthiest people in the region. Its heritage significance lies in these historical associations and its architecture: the extraordinary angel roof covering the nave and transepts, the sheer size of its windows, and the remains of the medieval Norwich School stained glass, which once filled them (Ayers 1994: 116; Pevsner and Wilson 1997: 247).

Saint Peter Hungate is one of thirty-one surviving medieval churches in Norwich, thirty of which continued to be used by the established church (the Church of England) after the Reformation. The density of church provision in Norwich is remarkable, and significant to Hungate's story. No other town or city north of the Alps has so many medieval churches, and they have long been recognized as key not only to the city's topography but also to its distinctiveness (Betjeman 1974; Harvey 1972: 76). For example, visitors in the late seventeenth century were encouraged to climb the mound of the Norman Castle to survey the circumference of the city's walls and the towers of the thirty-six churches then standing within them. In the eighteenth century, the first comprehensive history of the city was written, which treated the churches as places of personal and civic memory, of local governance and charity, as well as of public worship (Blomefield 1805–10, vols. 3–4). In

the mid-nineteenth century, photographers succeeded topographical artists in continuing to record and publish views of Norwich's churches (Haynes 2017). Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century, these buildings had been regarded as worthy of observation, record, and historical interest for nearly two hundred years.

Furthermore, Norwich's citizens had long had a strong sense of parochial identity and investment. Beyond collective worship, from which many did dissent, civic responsibilities and rights were tied to the parish and had been both before and after the Reformation. In times of trouble, individuals might rely on the charities and poor relief, which were collected and distributed from their church. Vestries also undertook the maintenance of civic amenities. At Hungate, for example, the vestry provided and repaired the public water pump and cared for the famous tree on the street that gave Elm Hill its name.⁷ The church building, its clergy and officers, and its fixtures and fittings had long been maintained largely through benefactions and a parish rate. Church and community were closely identified. Thus, as a place to be studied and visited, and at the heart of the local community, Saint Peter Hungate had long been viewed as an inheritance to be valued and passed on. It was in these respects already heritagized *avant la lettre* in the eighteenth century. It had also long been a place of both sacred and secular amenity.

Episode 1: 1905—On the Brink of Destruction

As has been discussed, the politico-religious landscape of Britain changed considerably over the course of the nineteenth century. The Church of England was shorn of some of its privileges and civic responsibilities, largely because of the removal of civil penalties against Nonconformists (Brooks 1995). For example, from 1868, almost all its buildings had to be maintained by voluntary contributions and not by a compulsory rate on local property owners, as had been the case (Piggott 2016). In addition, the demographic and economic changes mentioned above led to the depopulation of town and city centers and the rapid development of new suburbs, linked to the city by transport systems of railways, buses, and trams. In Norwich, this meant that small parishes like Saint Peter Hungate struggled not only to maintain an active congregation but to pay for even the most basic maintenance of their decaying building as well. Theirs was not a unique problem; similar situations existed in other “over-churched” places such as York and London (Dellheim 1982: 112–30; Weinstein 2014).

By the end of the century, the condition of Saint Peter Hungate was a matter of increasing concern. Money had been found in the 1880s to fix, in the cheapest way possible, its crumbling tower, because it threatened to fall on

passersby, but little else had been managed. By 1897, the state of the building was dire. A local newspaper reported that the roof of the chancel had been covered by a tarpaulin for two years, the medieval stained glass in the east window had been removed for safety, and weekly worship appeared to have ceased because of the building's condition. As was common in these cases, the parish was united with one of its neighbors, and by the beginning of 1905, with little likelihood of sufficient funds being forthcoming or a sustainable religious use identified, proceedings got underway to declare the church redundant and for it to be partially demolished. The city's museum asked for the bells and the roof, while the font and other furnishings were earmarked for distribution to new churches in the suburbs. The churchyard was to be adapted to provide a green space in the city.⁸ In some respects, this was a routine administrative procedure, one that had been undertaken in Norwich twenty years before, when the church of Saint Peter Southgate had been made redundant and partially demolished. In the interval, however, the context in which such decisions were made had changed considerably.

Where few voices had been raised in public to protest the dilapidation of Saint Peter Southgate in the mid-1880s, in 1905 there was a clamor in support of Hungate's preservation. Those who spoke up included local antiquarians but also churchmen. The rector described it as a public scandal if the church were "abolished." Similarly, the archdeacon of Norwich (the diocesan official responsible for the fabric of Norwich churches) also wrote to a local newspaper to garner support, describing the church as "an exceedingly interesting monument of antiquity."⁹ In 1905, an agenda of preservation was shared much more widely. Nevertheless, the Church of England's institutional priorities were unchanged: its mission could only be served, morally and financially, by buildings with sustainable religious uses. If money and a religious use could not be found, the building had to be dilapidated.

At the eleventh hour, a prominent and highly placed local layperson intervened. Prince Duleep Singh (1868–1926) was a man with wide antiquarian interests, a member of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society (NNAS) and the SPAB. Acting as an intermediary, he secured the interest and backing of the SPAB, who agreed to support and promote the scheme, so long as their own architect, working to the society's principles, was employed to direct the restoration.¹⁰ This was agreed and, through the promotion of the SPAB and Prince Duleep Singh's efforts, sufficient funds were forthcoming to restore the church. Duleep Singh kept a watchful eye on the architect's plans and decisions, which were also scrutinized by the diocese. The work of preserving the church was thus a partnership between the Church of England, individuals, and voluntary organizations.

However, Hungate's future had not been secured. In 1908, it was reopened for services, but it was not long before these had ceased again and other



Figure 1.1. Postcard of Saint Peter Hungate, circa 1908. © collection Clare Haynes.

religious roles were sought for the building. While ideas were forthcoming that it could be used as a parish room or mission hall, these came to nothing because provision already existed in the parish or in neighboring parishes. The only sustained use of the building that was found was as a drill hall for the Church Lad's Brigade, a national Christian organization for boys, akin to the Boy Scouts. However, by the late 1920s, Hungate was again in immediate need of repair.¹¹ No systematic program of maintenance or management had resulted from the heritage partnership, and of course, the preservation lobby had no control over the ongoing upkeep of the church's fabric. The rules of the Church of England and Hungate's financial difficulties in an over-churched city were still dictating its fate.

Nevertheless, Hungate's heritage status had changed. The significance of the building, in architectural and historical terms, had been widely asserted and accepted. It had been preserved by a voluntary community of local people and antiquarians and with the support of a national society, not by the Church of England. Hungate remained a religious space; it was not secularized as a result of this intervention. Worship did continue for a time before it was used for the promotion of ideals of Christian masculinity and prayer. An increasingly vocal and active lobby in Norwich intent on preserving the historic fabric of the city kept a watching brief on the building. So, for example, in 1929, the parish borrowed money from the NNAS to buy wire guards to protect the remaining stained glass. Under pressure it seems

from the NNAS, the bishop insisted that the Lad's Brigade was not to use the building any longer, in order to preserve the fabric.¹² Significantly, an expectation had developed that the preservation of Hungate, as a building without a suitable religious function, had become, at least partially, the responsibility not of the Church of England but of "the enthusiasts and lovers of archaeology."¹³ It could be argued that secularization took place with the expulsion of the Lad's Brigade, as the only sustainable religious use that had been found had become unsuitable on heritage grounds. Hungate's religious value would seem to have reached zero as its heritage value had risen.

Episode 2: 1933—A Way Out?

By the late 1920s, what had seemed obvious to some in 1905 became fully apparent: Hungate had no viable future within the Church of England. The City of Norwich was simply over-churched. While preservationists had come to the rescue of the Church of England since the 1870s, they had dictated their terms, and a new value—heritage value—had had to be accepted. The Church of England was caught: its legal position had not changed, but the moral authority of the heritage lobby had become impossible to ignore (Delafons 1997: 119–22). In this, Hungate's situation exemplifies the much larger crisis that was confronting the Church of England. On the one hand, it faced changes to its established status, decreasing congregations, and shifting populations, which reduced the religious value of many of its buildings. On the other, the heritage lobby was arguing, increasingly insistently, that the Church of England was morally responsible for the preservation of churches, not according to its own priorities but for the benefit of all (Binney and Burman 1977).

Nevertheless, dilapidation still remained the most likely outcome for Hungate, even with the support and oversight of local groups. Other churches in the city were struggling to stay open, and the burden of maintenance was getting heavier. As late as the 1960s, a diocesan proposal to make twenty-five of Norwich's medieval churches redundant was accompanied by the threat of demolition (Groves 2016: 50–51). In the late 1920s, however, Hungate's difficulties were perhaps compounded by the city's campaign of modernization and development, which included slum clearance. Even Elm Hill, the medieval street to the north of Hungate, now a jewel in Norwich's heritage crown, came very close to being pulled down in order to make way for new homes and businesses.

Instead, Hungate was saved again by an unprecedented alliance of anti-quarians, the City Council, and the diocese, who gathered to support the conservationist cause. Their co-operation, as well as its result, was new not

just in local but in national terms. It arose from the overlapping circles of society, civic volunteerism, and business that are characteristic of a small city like Norwich (Pendlebury and Hewitt 2018). Despite tensions between them over their priorities in the past, between modernization and conservation, this group found common cause and produced a plan to put Hungate to an entirely new use: it was to be the first museum of ecclesiastical art in the country. The idea may well have been inspired by a trip to Paris that Frank Leney, the curator of Norwich's main museum (the Castle Museum), had made in 1921 with the Museums Association (a national body founded in 1889). It is likely he visited at least one of the city's churches that were put to different uses after the French Revolution, such as the Musée des Arts et Métiers.¹⁴

To find an ecclesiastical museum might seem a small shift in purpose now, as we are used to the idea that churches can be made into homes or restaurants, circus schools or art galleries, but in the 1920s this was a radical departure (Saxby 2016). The civic authority was to lease the church, keep it in repair, and manage it, subject to one or two minor restrictions, according to its own lights. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the body responsible for the Church of England's financial and property matters, was persuaded that a liberal interpretation of the current legislation could be interpreted to cover the plan, and after five years or more of negotiation, planning, and fund-raising, the Saint Peter Hungate Museum of Ecclesiastical Art was opened finally on 27 June 1933. The event was widely heralded in the local and national press. For example, an editorial published in *The Listener*, a magazine of cultural record, offers an insight into how significant the plans for Hungate were recognized to be:

An interesting and highly practical solution of the problem of utilising city churches in areas where there are too many, or where the population has moved, comes from Norwich, where the Church of St. Peter, Hungate, is to be transferred to the City Corporation for use as an ecclesiastical museum. Within the boundaries of the City of Norwich are something over fifty churches, many of them planned on the most ambitious scale. As the city becomes more and more of a business centre and workers tend to live on the fringe, a number of these churches (as is the case in London and other big cities) are naturally becoming redundant. The churches, many of which stand on land which has increased in value, all too frequently fall into the hands of the house-breaker to make way for palatial blocks of offices. Every big city has many ecclesiastical treasures which cannot satisfactorily be exhibited in the churches to which they belong. A building such as that in Norwich, in which they can be shown successfully in their traditional surroundings, will therefore be serving an excellent purpose. As an alternative to demolition there must be many uses to which these buildings can be put to provide practical justification (if that be needed) for saving them, and

their use, too, for a purpose such as that in Norwich must serve to invest them with a new interest in the eyes of many to whom perhaps they have become so familiar as to be barely noticed.¹⁵

The precedent that Norwich was setting for much wider uses of redundant churches was patently clear to the writer, but the choice of the phrase “traditional surroundings” begs a question that has been raised already: was such a transformation perceived as secularization? We can begin to address this by exploring what some of the participants in the process thought about what they were doing.

At the opening ceremony of the museum, the bishop of Norwich, Bertram Pollock, gave a remarkable speech. He is reported to have begun by saying:

There are three avenues, commonly speaking, which lead men and women to God. . . . These three roads are the ways of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. We may look upon them as ultimate realities. . . . The contemplation of beautiful forms in nature and in art quickens our appreciation of beauty, and our devotion to it; Goethe said one ought to behold one thing of beauty every day. So are we drawn to God, who is the source of beauty, and once again we are led upwards to worship.

I do not . . . consider that this little gem of a church is being divorced from its original purpose when it is being constituted a repository of ecclesiastical art. Let us not say to ourselves, “The city-dwelling population is so much reduced that these churches can go. What a capital idea to find some use for a derelict place of worship.” We will rather hope that in a new way it will do some of its former spiritual work. We will ask that it may be still a House of God, teaching the things of God through the eye if no longer through the ear.

At the end of his speech, in a piece of drama, rich in symbolism, it was reported, “The Bishop vacated the chair and the remainder of the ceremony was presided over by Col. Bulwer.”¹⁶ Bulwer was a significant intermediary in the scheme, a Norfolk lawyer, landowner, and antiquarian, who sat on the Museum Committee of the Town Council. For the bishop, nevertheless, the museum was a place that still had a religious function, albeit one now directed by the secular authorities.

For the Lord Mayor of Norwich, Henry Holmes, who also addressed the audience on that day, something slightly different was happening. After describing the groundbreaking nature of the project and how it had come to pass, he observed in conclusion that “in time, this building should become a rich treasure house . . . , for let it never be forgotten that it was the Church which fostered every form of true art in the past.”¹⁷ For the mayor, then, this was a historical endeavor, one rooted in the past and entirely secular—it was a museum of art. These two visions of the new museum may seem, at first, to be at odds.

A different perspective on Hungate's transformation was offered by someone else present that day: Eric Maclagan, the director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, who had long been a supporter of the scheme. In 1934, attending another opening at Hungate for an exhibition of ecclesiastical pewter, Maclagan gave a speech, in which he argued:

In adapting [the] church so perfectly as a museum of ecclesiastical art Norwich has set an example. . . . It might be true that the church was not serving precisely the purpose for which it was destined by its pious builders, but it still testified to the glory of God, just as it did when it was used as a place of public worship. Museums were not places which were to be regarded as wholly secular and divorced from the honour of the Creator.¹⁸

Maclagan was a practicing Christian, the son of an archbishop, as well as a leading figure on the Central Council for the Care of Churches (the Church of England body founded in 1917 charged with advising on restoration and reordering). For Maclagan, like Bishop Pollock, Hungate was still a religious building, but as a museum professional, he was also heir to a tradition of thinking of museums as, in some sense, sacred places. Just as Pollock had quoted Goethe, Maclagan may well have had his ideas in mind or those of the English writer and critic William Hazlitt (1778–1830), who also wrote a great deal about the new art galleries of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Both Goethe and Hazlitt engaged with museums as places “consecrated to the holy ends of art,” albeit from different religious positions. Maclagan’s formulation of museums as not “wholly secular” seems perhaps closest to Goethe’s recognition of a museum as capable of producing an emotion “akin (to that) . . . experienced upon entering a House of God” (Goethe, quoted in Duncan 1995: 14–15; Cheeke 2007). The museum was a place to experience the sublime.

We can pursue this further by considering the ways in which the museum studies scholar Carol Duncan used both Goethe and Hazlitt in considering museums as places of secular ritual. She observed, *inter alia*, “the beneficial outcome that museum rituals are supposed to produce can sound very like claims made for traditional, religious rituals . . . such as a sense of enlightenment, or a feeling of having been spiritually nourished” (Duncan 1995: 13). The potential of museums to act in this way was recognized early in the history of public museums. Soon after the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars, critics such as Quatremère de Quincy began to notice, and in his case, regret, that art and its museums had the potential to be secular substitutes for religion (Cheeke 2007). In works of art being removed from their sacred settings and moved into the museum, they were torn from their functions and “the beliefs that created them” (Cheeke 2007: 115). It is in this light that we might choose to regard the phrase “traditional surround-

ings” in *The Listener* editorial above. Indeed, when the museum idea was first mooted, the argument was made that the church would be a more “appropriate” place to exhibit “sacred” objects than the city’s own museum in Norwich Castle.¹⁹ The building’s religious past offered a more authentic context in which to view the objects. So, for Maclagan, Hungate was perhaps doubly sacred, as church and museum. Of course, these two denominations of the sacred are not identical, nor do they necessarily have the same referent, as will be discussed.

It is surely significant for our understanding of the heritagization of religious buildings that while Hungate’s heritage status was confirmed by its transformation into a museum, its religious value was also seen to increase. From a building without function, without future, it had been made to speak again of religious matters. This was despite the fact that in management terms, it had been transferred to the control of a secular authority. It is worthy of notice that each of the managers in the process—bishop, mayor, and curator—invoked, in quite different ways, the sacred.

Episode 3: 2007—Hungate Medieval Art

For nearly seventy years Saint Peter Hungate was used as a museum (Haynes 2021; Young 1975). In 2001 it was closed, against some opposition, because of local government budget cuts. In a letter to the leading regional newspaper, one of the local councilors involved in making the decision argued that low attendance figures and the need to update exhibits and facilities were the main factors.²⁰ It seems that Hungate was less well regarded than it had been, and in straitened times funds were not available to support four museums in the city. The Hungate collection, which had been built up over the previous sixty years from donations, purchases, and loans, was divided up among Norfolk’s museums, and some objects were returned to their lenders. Others, including some rare medieval religious textiles, were retained by the museum service for safekeeping because the parishes to which they belonged were unable to take care of them.

The building, which in 1995 had been vested in a new independent trust, the Norwich Historic Churches Trust (NHCT), did for some time receive support from the City Council; however, yet again, it faced another period of uncertainty (Groves 2016). After a number of short-term uses, a voluntary trust was founded to lease Hungate from the NHCT to use as a center to encourage engagement with the region’s rich culture of medieval art. The church’s fate was again in the hands of volunteers, albeit now constrained by state conservation legislation, the requirements of the NHCT’s lease, and the terms of their insurance. Hungate Medieval Art opened in 2007, a name

that seems indicative of further secularization, as the church's dedication to Saint Peter was omitted. After a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Hungate opened by focusing on stained glass and offering lots of information, including trail leaflets, about medieval art in Norfolk's churches. They hired a member of staff to manage their offering. Unfortunately, the money ran out, and so they had to depend entirely on volunteers and donations, both to manage and run the building and its activities.

Contemporary art shows as well as historical exhibitions began to be offered. Most of these, but not all, responded to the theme of medieval art in some way, and the volunteers have also mounted small shows about the history of the parish and the church. In 2017, for example, *Vanishing Point* featured photographs of World War I landscapes and the stories of some of the men who fought in them and *Epoche: Suspension of Judgment* was displayed, a single-work art show of a large installation made of threads suspended along the length of the nave. The following year, a historical exhibition about the famous medieval family the Pastons, who contributed to the rebuilding of Saint Peter Hungate, was held. In 2019, the HERILIGION project put on a historical exhibition and a series of four contemporary art exhibitions responding to the project's research questions, called *Sacred and/or Secular*. Each of these exhibitions came about through the working of overlapping circles of the University of East Anglia, Norwich University of the Arts, and heritage bodies in the city. Most of the trustees and volunteers study, work, or have worked at one of these institutions. Again, it is worth noting the circles of association and volunteerism that are essential to heritage management in the UK. Alongside these exhibitions, Hungate Medieval Art's other activities have continued: visitors coming to see the building for its own sake, educational outreach activities, as well as participation in heritage festivals, such as the national scheme of Heritage Open Days.

So, eighty-five or so years after it was last used for public worship, what kind of institution is Hungate now? Not subject to any control by the Church of England, governed instead by the requirements of state heritage preservation legislation, as well as those of its landlords and the NHCT, and managed by a group of heritage volunteers, Hungate may appear, at first glance, to be a secular organization. However, when we look closer, certain details of the practices of management and the responses of users suggest that the building retains a dual identity, that it remains both sacred and secular and indebted to the religious.

This is perhaps most obvious in the operation of a largely unspoken system of decorum at Hungate, which acknowledges the building's past as a place of Christian worship. Thus, the trustees observe their own feelings, and the possible sensitivities of visitors, in choosing programming. While there

was not the means to examine beliefs, attitudes, and responses scientifically during the HERILIGION season (spring–summer 2019), it was striking how often visitors invoked a sense of what was appropriate or not. One work in the final show of *Sacred and/or Secular*, which was placed at the east end of the building, caused some unease because of an interpretation that visitors might have made of its form.²¹ Shaped with a deliberate ambiguity, the figure could appear from a distance as a pair of legs widely splayed, apparently drawing attention to the genitalia. A closer viewing revealed a complicated lack of realism, which seemed to propose, in addition, a pair of shoulders with a head pushing down or up through the floor. In addition to the exhibition leaflet, a text was provided for the guidance of volunteers, which offered an interpretation of the work and encouraged closer examination, in order to allay the anxieties that were expressed or at least to complicate them. The book in which visitors may leave comments (only a tiny proportion actually do) provides some further evidence of Hungate’s interior being policed by some on the basis of it having a continuing religious identity. A visitor described a sound work as “cacophonous” and “not conducive to meditation,” while another described the final visual exhibition as “a fitting use for this lovely church.” Commenting on the same exhibition, one visitor, expressing sentiments that were shared by several others, wrote that the church was very “peaceful and beautiful. The statue at the altar is offensive and should be removed.”²²

Significantly many of the trustees, volunteers, artists, and visitors expressed, both in writing and verbally, a recognition of the sacred, as well as a sense of spiritual uplift that they gained from being in the building and from some of the exhibitions. One spoke, for example, of Hungate as a place of “spiritual resonance” (anon. personal communication). These responses are perhaps not always distinguishable from reactions to its past use or its long history, although visitors do speak of the aesthetic qualities of the building or the works of art: the beauty of the space, its architectural form, the quality of the light, and the stained glass. These kinds of responses have been surveyed at “living” (or open) cathedrals and churches in Britain in relation to tourism, but the analysis can be hampered by a rather rigid, if graduated, dichotomy between the secular and the religious (Hughes, Bond, and Ballantyne 2013: 211; however, see Coleman and Bowman 2019). Such an approach is not applicable in accounting for what happens at Hungate, as evidence of any religious response to Hungate is negligible. Rather we might consider a much broader sense of the sacred as being relevant. As Isnart and Cerezales put it, “[As all that is] separated and protected from . . . daily life by an acknowledged interdiction . . . sacredness lies at the heart of society, as a foundational linking force that is not essentially religious, but is more generally



Figure 1.2. Interior of Saint Peter Hungate, 2019. © Philip Sayer.

social and distributed among various fields of human life” (2020: 3; see also Knott 2013). We will return to this point shortly.

The building does nevertheless continue to speak, through its architecture and iconography, of its Christian past. The Church of England’s guidance on the closure of churches and their future uses now recognizes this, declaring:

Central to the Christian faith is the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the restoration of humankind’s relationship with God through Christ. Any consideration of suitable alternative uses (for church buildings) must be placed in this context. Moreover, ecclesiastical buildings and consecrated places bear enduring public witness to the faith and values of the Christian community.²³

As we have seen, this is clearly the case at Hungate, as visitors judge Hungate’s exhibitions not in terms of the stated aim of encouraging engagement with medieval art, but largely in the use of the building as a historic religious space. However long ago it was that it was last used for religious services, that past lingers and determines the present. It could thus be argued that heritage at Hungate sustains or buttresses religion now, just as it did in 1933.²⁴

Another interpretation is possible: that it is not Christianity that is being borne up precisely, but a looser, more capacious sense of the sacred. It is Isnart and Cerezales’s “foundational linking force” that is still being guarded and produced at Hungate and sought by visitors. Heritage is not iconoclastic, neither destructive nor ultimately substitutive; it requires the signs of the past to be present for the sake of that fundamental and, one could argue, sacred heritage value—authenticity.²⁵ The religious past is appropriated, and the sacred tacitly unbound from the grasp of religion. Religion is part of the story the building must tell, neither denied nor affirmed but always present as an image or a memory.

The sacred encouraged by the heritage management system can even appear as a close simulacrum of religion. The building is set apart, managed, and maintained for edification and communion, with practices that adhere to a shared sense of decorum, purpose, and understanding. It is sacred and it has its affects: spiritual transcendence, a heightened sense of meaning, or, to refer to the famous poem by Philip Larkin (1922–85), “Church Going,” a kind of “seriousness” (Larkin 2016). However, these are the characteristics of the *secular* sacred (i.e., both secular and sacred) that is complexly indebted to the religious past and certainly in some relation to the religious present but distinguishable from it. Does heritage sacralize or simply provide the means to acknowledge the sacred, if on changing terms? It is certainly true that in its spiritual, rather than religious or secular, value to the individual and community, it can easily be misunderstood as in some sense quasi-religious (Huss 2014; Isnart and Cerezales 2020: 3–7).

Conclusion

Neither “wholly secular,” as Eric Maclagan put it in 1933, nor indeed never wholly religious, as was noted in the introduction, Hungate is a sacred place now, as it has always been. We must conclude that Hungate has never been secularized if by that word we imply an opposition to all forms of spirituality. Over the past hundred years, Saint Peter Hungate has retained its designation as a building of historical significance and aesthetic value; it remains a “sacred monument,” as the SPAB put it. Set apart and protected, the building retains the power to enchant, and the works of art that are introduced to it may do too (Haynes 2020). It also remains entailed to the religion that built and sustained it, as its architecture and ornament speak of the past and resound with religious associations. Hungate’s “church-ness” has been preserved, and present-day visitors are still offered, as they were in 1905 and 1933, an image of the religious sacred, albeit an attenuated one. The ways in which Hungate has been managed, as church, museum, and art center, with continuous and decorous acknowledgment of its original religious function has ensured that. Furthermore, visitors continue to be offered a space in which they can pursue, if they choose, forms of religious or spiritual transcendence. Without this, of course, its authenticity could, in one sense at least, be denied.

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NOTES

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1. The idea of a nexus was devised before the publication of the work by Isnart and Cerezales (2020) on the religious heritage complex, to which the reader is referred.
2. This chapter focuses on the Church of England, and it must be noted that England and Britain are not interchangeable terms. The other nations of the United Kingdom have separate systems of heritage management and church-state relations. There are, nevertheless, strong similarities between them.

3. “Manifesto,” SPAB, 1877, <https://www.spab.org.uk/about-us/spab-manifesto> (accessed 8 September 2020).
4. See also “The Taylor Review: Sustainability of English Churches and Cathedrals,” HM Government, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-sustainability-of-english-churches-and-cathedrals> (accessed 8 October 2020).
5. “Taylor Review Pilot: Final Evaluation,” HM Government, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-taylor-review-pilot-final-evaluation> (accessed 8 October 2020).
6. “Amenity Societies and Other Voluntary Bodies,” Historic England, 2020, <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/publicandheritagebodies/amenitysocieties/> (accessed 8 September 2020).
7. *Churchwardens’ Accounts and Vestry Minutes of St Peter Hungate, 1789–1890* [ms.], Norfolk Record Office, PD 61/32, Archive Centre, Norwich.
8. Tillett MS 21 (n.d.), *St Michael at Plea and St Peter Hungate*, Norfolk Heritage Centre, MS 396, Millennium Library, Norwich.
9. Tillett MS 21 (n.d.), *St Michael at Plea and St Peter Hungate*, Norfolk Heritage Centre, MS 396, Millennium Library, Norwich.
10. Tillett MS 21 (n.d.), *St Michael at Plea and St Peter Hungate*, Norfolk Heritage Centre, MS 396, Millennium Library, Norwich; *St Peter Hungate*, n.d., SPAB archives, London.
11. *Parochial Church Council Minutes of St Michael at Plea and St Peter Hungate, 1926–1940*, Norfolk Record Office, PD 66/89, Archive Centre, Norwich.
12. *Parochial Church Council Minutes of St Michael at Plea and St Peter Hungate, 1926–1940*, Norfolk Record Office, PD 66/89, Archive Centre, Norwich.
13. *Vestry Minutes of St Peter Hungate, 1904–1905*, Norfolk Record Office, PD 66/61, Archive Centre, Norwich.
14. *Cuttings relative to St Peter Hungate*, n.d., Bolingbroke Collection, Norwich Heritage Centre, Millennium Library, Norwich.
15. *Acquisition by the Corporation of St Peter Hungate Church for use as an ecclesiastical museum*, 1936, Norfolk Record Office, N/TC 52/35, Archive Centre, Norwich.
16. *Cuttings relative to St Peter Hungate*, n.d., Bolingbroke Collection, Norwich Heritage Centre, Millennium Library, Norwich.
17. *Cuttings relative to St Peter Hungate*, n.d., Bolingbroke Collection, Norwich Heritage Centre, Millennium Library, Norwich.
18. *Cuttings relative to St Peter Hungate*, n.d., Bolingbroke Collection, Norwich Heritage Centre, Millennium Library, Norwich.
19. *Acquisition by the Corporation of St Peter Hungate Church for use as an ecclesiastical museum*, 1936, Norfolk Record Office, N/TC 52/35, Archive Centre, Norwich.
20. Felicity Hartley, “Decision Was Far from Easy,” *Eastern Daily Press*, 14 February 2001, 5.
21. For a discussion of *Sacred and/or Secular* and the works of art that were displayed in the series, see Haynes 2020.
22. *St Peter Hungate Visitors’ Book*, 2019–, Hungate Medieval Art, Norwich.
23. “Code of Recommended Practice, Mission and Pastoral Measure,” Church of England, 2011, https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/mission_and_pastoral_measure_2011_-_volume_2.pdf (accessed 25 October 2019).

24. For the closely related idea of “sacred residue,” see Beekers 2016.
 25. For a useful discussion of authenticity in heritage management, see Jones 2009.

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