

LEICESTERSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES' TRUST *ANNUAL RIDE+STRIDE EVENT*

RIDE+STRIDE is a national event, launched for Leicestershire Historic Churches' Trust in 1990 by Janet Arthur (Christ Church, Smeeton Westerby), the current Chair of the Trust. Her five-year enthusiasm as County Organiser ensured the event's firm place in the County Calendar on the second Saturday in September. Anne Bloor (St Andrew, Burton Overy) succeeded Janet and is now the Event Treasurer. Anne's commitment and efficiency over ten years was crucial in the event's annual fund-raising increasing from £27,000 to over £40,000. Currently, the day raising around £47,000 through the County and City. Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic congregation at Market Harborough have been "star" fund-raisers, even achieving £3,000. David Knowles (St Mary in Charnwood, Nanpantan, Loughborough) has been County Co-ordinator from 2005.

The basis of the event is simple: the sponsoring of cyclists and walkers of all ages visiting as many churches and chapels in the City and County as they can from 10am - 6pm on the day. Children and families are often seen participating, and increasingly welcomers stewarding churches are sponsored. In 21 years over £735,000 has been raised. Half the money is paid direct to the church or chapel nominated by the participant, and the remainder distributed by the Trustees in repair grants to historic churches and chapels. Over 300 buildings have been supported by grants totalling nearly £400,000.

In this 21st century the event has growing importance as the demand for finance increases, costs rise, and the capacity of hard-pressed congregations, sometimes numerically small, to fund structural works becomes an intolerable burden. The Church of England is the proud custodian of some 18,000 Parish Churches in the UK, and other denominations the guardians of hundreds of religious buildings, but the responsibilities of maintaining that heritage are woefully unmatched by Government and other national funding, and other Christian denominations participating in ***RIDE+STRIDE*** often have similar burdens.

RIDE+STRIDE has a significant role in the life of the City and County and both church and chapel members and all who have a concern for seeing our heritage maintained are urged to give the event their support in participation or sponsorship. Age is no barrier: one local organiser was still helping at 93!

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