

St Luke's is a Grade II listed managed ruin, memorial to the casualties of war, and venue for the arts.

Suffering catastrophic damage during the May Blitz of 1941, St Luke's lay disused for many years before being transformed by a series of cultural events in the early 2000s, reopening the space to the public. An established venue for theatre, dance, classical and world music, visual art, cinema, and spoken word, as well as alternative and participatory forms of work, the site now stands as a testament to community spirit and the power of the arts to affect change.

St Luke's Bombed Out Church C.I.C. is an organisation dedicated to conserving this remarkable place for future generations and ensuring the sustainable use of the site as a space for arts, culture, community, learning, and heritage engagement.



To view upcoming events, activities and opportunities to get involved - scan the QR code

A Pocket Guide to St Luke's Bombed Out Church



Construction

In 1791, the land on which St Luke's stands, was granted to the town of Liverpool by the Earl of Derby, on the condition that it should be used for the construction of a church only. The Corporation of Liverpool commissioned John Foster Senior to design St Luke's in c.1802 and the foundation stone was laid on the 9th of April 1811. Despite this, a legal dispute regarding land to the south of the church meant that building work didn't recommence until 1826.

When John Foster Senior died mid-construction in 1827, the project was taken over by his Son. John Foster Junior added decorative, gothic-style cast-iron railings around the grounds, and enlarged the chancel for use as a segregated area of worship for members of the Corporation. The church's tower also received a cast-iron bell frame, which is regarded as the first of its kind in the world. Towards the end of the project, it was also decided that St Luke's should also function as a concert hall, which it did until 1849.

In 1831 the church was consecrated and was opened the following year. It became known as 'the doctors' church' due to its proximity to the city's leading physicians who practiced on Rodney Street.

The Blitz

During WWII, as the largest working port on the west coast, and therefore critical to the British war effort, Liverpool was one of the most heavily bombed areas outside of London. In 1941, the city was affected by a devastating seven-night bombardment, known as the 'May Blitz'. Just after midnight, on May 6th, 1941, the church was struck by an incendiary bomb causing a large fire that swept through the building. By approximately 3:36 (the time at which the tower's clock stopped due to its mechanism perishing) the fire ascended the tower, causing several of its bells to cascade to the ground. While the building's masonry shell remained largely intact, its interior and roof structure was almost entirely destroyed.

After the war, various plans were proposed, including the clearing of the site to make way for a new road out of the city. However in the 1950s, the Bishop of Liverpool suggested that the church ruins be preserved as a memorial to the casualties of WWII, and in June 1952 the church and its surrounding railings became Grade II listed. Despite this, the church's interior remained largely derelict until the early 2000s when the space was transformed by a series of community arts and cultural events.

St Luke's Today

In the years that have followed its re-opening, St Luke's, affectionally known as the 'Bombed Out Church', has become a much loved and celebrated part of the city. It stands as a cogent reminder of the effects of war, but also as a testament to the power of resilience and community action. The site provides a place to celebrate and engage with the cultural diversity of the city and offers an example of how arts and events can drive regeneration.

Alongside the growing cultural programme, there is a great focus on the creation of heritage engagement projects, the expansion of learning and participation opportunities, and the community-based development of the gardens.

