

# **SAVE OUR PARSONAGES**

## **NEWSLETTER**



**No. 16**

**Autumn 2010**



## CONTENTS

<b>Director's Review.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Membership News.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Casework.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Letters.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Articles and features</b>	
<b>Canon's Garth: A Potted History <i>Martin Vander Weyer</i> .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The Battle for Bishopscourt Melbourne and Bishops Court Adelaide</b>	
<b><i>David Wetherell</i>.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Success at Nailsea <i>Steve Tilley</i>.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Code of Practice.....</b>	<b>27</b>

**The PATRONS of Save Our Parsonages are:**

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**The Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Richard Chartres DD FSA, Bishop of London**

**The Rt. Hon. Frank Field, MP**

**The Very Revd. Dr. Michael Higgins OBE**

**Anthony Howard CBE**

**Terry Waite CBE**

Consultants: Jonathan Farnsworth (preservation trusts); The Revd. John Masding (clergy affairs); Gabrielle Higgins (legal)

The committee of SOP currently comprises:

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## **DIRECTOR'S REVIEW**

### **Clergy Terms of Service – Update**

The clergy freehold is in the process of being abolished, ending a tradition of eight hundred years, but the incumbent serving under 'common tenure' will continue to have the freehold of ownership and thus the veto on sale of the parsonage while in residence. This does not apply to priests-in-charge and other posts, so it will not end, and may even encourage, the bishops' tactic of making non-incumbent and non-stipendiary appointments, as this gives them more flexibility to sell off good parsonages. For more details about common tenure, you can read the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure and accompanying regulations on the Church Commissioners' website.

### **'Vulnerable Parsonages' Project**

You will recall that very few diocesan secretaries were prepared to co-operate with our request for information about 'vulnerable' parsonages. We took this up with General Synod, where we got nowhere, then finally with William Fittall, Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council. This correspondence also proved abortive: 'the Church is not a unitary organisation ...it is entirely for each diocese to decide how much information it wishes to disclose.' The various Church bureaucracies always hide behind the idea that they are separately constituted. He went on to say that the dioceses must reach judgments about what they treat as private. But private to whom? In our view the diocesan officials are there to serve the parishes, indeed without the parishes and the funding they get from parishioners they could not exist. Yet they are happy to deprive the parishes of the information they need in order to conduct their affairs. The situation is little short of scandalous. We will continue our struggle for freedom of information. Our patron, Frank Field, has indicated his willingness to help, and we are preparing a press release to draw attention to this matter.

### **Meeting at General Synod**

We hosted a lunchtime meeting at Church House Westminster at the February session of General Synod. Frank Field, who had kindly agreed to chair the meeting, had to drop out at the last minute but it was a very successful event. Elizabeth Simon gave a talk on the sustainability of the traditional parsonage and produced statistical evidence suggesting that the diocesan fixation that old houses were the most expensive to maintain was by no means necessarily true and that badly built post-war parsonages tended to incur greater maintenance costs than their Victorian equivalents. She called for a moratorium on any further sale of traditional houses until more reliable research had been carried out and presented to diocesan parsonage boards. After the meeting a leaflet was sent to every member of General Synod.

### **SOP Code of Practice – Update**

We reported last year that we were drawing up a new Code of Practice to try to ensure that the dioceses consult with the parishes. The core principle of our new Code of Practice procedure will continue to be that the diocese should immediately contact

and formally consult the affected parish as soon as the first suggestion arises that a parsonage has become unsuitable and should be sold. It is hoped that this will replace the Code of Practice set out at the end of this newsletter.

### **Charitable Trust – Update**

As you know, the aim of the Rectories and Vicarages Trust, the sister body to SOP, is to preserve church houses for Church use (see earlier newsletters for details). At the first substantive meeting, the Bishop of Dudley, the Rt. Revd David Walker, suggested we do some homework on initiatives such as Community Land Partnerships to see if we can develop a template to put to the dioceses as a means to helping the Church to retain its traditional houses.

### **Publicity, Publications and Events**

Last year SOP and the Georgian Group held a second joint tour, this time in the West Country where we visited the fine rectory at Trent, Dorset, by kind permission of the Rector, Henry Pearson, who gave a thoroughly enjoyable tour of his house and the village as well. Like the previous year's event, it was well attended by the Georgian Group (though less well by our members) and they thanked us for providing an exceptionally attractive venue. We contacted all those of you who are on our email list to invite you to the event; regrettably our resources simply do not stretch to notifying all of you by letter, so I urge those of you who have email addresses and have not yet given us your details to do so immediately please.

Our press coverage this year included Current Archaeology which featured SOP in an article, and The Times, which reported our comments on the sale of bishops' palaces in the context of Rose Castle, Carlisle. The Shropshire Star reported our comments on Ludlow (see casework). In June Jennifer and I represented SOP at the SAVE Britain's Heritage Book Fair, which featured talks by Dan Cruikshank, Marcus Binney and Ptolemy Dean, an event which brought us new members.

### **‘The Old Rectory’**

My book *The Old Rectory* was published in October last year by Continuum (ISBN 978082646581). It got off to a flying start when our patron, the Bishop of London, looked forward to its forthcoming publication in his speech to the Rectory Society, adding: 'I find gossip from the muniments room delightful!' Many thanks to those of you who helped me with my research, and you have been acknowledged in the book. It has had a number of reviews, notably in The Spectator, Country Life, the Daily Telegraph and Church Times, where it featured at no.1 on their best sellers list! I also gave a talk about the book and some of the parsonages it featured at the Words By The Water book festival in Keswick, Cumbria, aided by some of the fine colour slides of Anthea Jones, which are in the book. I was also able to talk about the work of Save Our Parsonages. I would welcome your comments on the book and any other information you have about historic parsonages.

### **Patrons Consultative Group**

My first year as a member of the Patrons Consultative Group, the national committee which works for the benefit of private patrons and their rights, has certainly proved educational for me. The present plight of patrons has strong links with that of our parsonages and I think my membership of that committee has encouraged links with SOP and cross-fertilisation of ideas.

AJSJ

## **MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND COMMENT**

### **AGM**

This year's AGM will be at Withyham Rectory in Sussex by courtesy of the Revd Adrian Leak. The invitation together with the minutes of the 2009 AGM is as usual on the separate sheet enclosed with this newsletter. Please reply whether or not you can come as apologies will be recorded.

### **'Supporters' and Standing Orders – Update**

I'm delighted to say that many more of you are now paying by standing order and I urge the rest of you to do so without delay. The renewal of subscriptions by members who do not pay by standing order requires a lot of administrative work for which we are ill-equipped. Not only that, but regular income means we can be much more confident in the state of our finances and that enables us to plan more events - we are currently thinking of a conference for next spring. We have also reminded those of you on standing order who are still paying at the old rate that the current subscription is £15.

### **Donations**

Special thanks are always due to those of you who have kindly made donations or enhanced your subscriptions. Particular mention this year should be made of Anthony Bartleet for £150, and Tanya Hawley for £100 for which we are most grateful.

### **CAF Cheques**

Once again, a reminder that CAF cheques **cannot be banked by SOP**.

### **Addresses**

I asked above if all members could please ensure we have your email address. It is equally vital that you notify us of all changes of address; mailed newsletters continue to be returned to us marked 'not at this address.' We always try to follow this up but it is usually very difficult to trace members under those circumstances.

**Members' expertise**

We badly need a marketing and a media relations manager for SOP. Could somebody please volunteer!

**Website**

Our website, which the Revd Jeremy Hummerstone very kindly administers for us, has been reformatted. Have a look at it. You will also find a number of interesting references to us if you search the internet under 'Save Our Parsonages'.

**Members' feedback**

Last year I asked you to get your parish website to set up a link to the SOP website, and to let me have details so that we can then set up a reciprocal link. I have heard from virtually nobody on this.

**Back Issues**

We still have back issues of the newsletter. Some complete sets from 1995 to date are still available, though we have very few copies of the 1998 issue. We offer a full set (12 issues) for £20, a full set minus the 1998 issue for £15, or any single issue for £2.

**New members**

We badly need new members. Could you all please help? You can download the 'subscription and standing order' form from our website at any time and give it to friends and colleagues.

**Your ideas**

Your committee cannot win the battle to save parsonages without your help. Please be proactive. Contact me and write to the media whenever you read about a parsonage in danger, or hear ill-informed views being expressed. If parishes do not know about us we cannot help them!

AJSJ

## CASEWORK

### **Brigstock St. Andrews, Peterborough**

This handsome nineteenth century house has been saved for the time being and the recently appointed priest-in-charge of an enlarged benefice and his young family are in residence. The PCC members are negotiating with the diocese a fairly long-term agreement for use and maintenance of the Rectory Room, and they have the garden and paddock at a peppercorn rent. All in all, they consider this is the best they can hope for in difficult circumstances.

### **East Coker, Bath & Wells**

The diocese told the PCC that it intended to sell this good Late Georgian house unless it was prepared to provide substantial financial support. A committee was set up to conduct negotiations with the diocese. After much discussion, the diocese has suggested taking the property off the list of parsonages and moving it to their list of built assets, thus removing the threat of its sale as a Category C parsonage, then leasing it to the parish for a peppercorn rent for a fixed period after which the situation would be reviewed. The PCC has drawn up heads of terms for a final agreement and a charitable trust will be created. Although parish pressure helped deter the diocese from proceeding with a sale, we are happy to stress that the concept of leasing the vicarage to the parish came from the diocese, showing that mutual co-operation is always the best way forward.

### **Edale, Derby**

The future of this pleasant stone house of about 1880 remains uncertain. The incumbent will soon be leaving. The bishop has assured our member that before any decisions are made both he and “representatives of the parish” will be consulted and that meanwhile he must “trust the system.” There have been no such consultations so far however, and the parish magazine has already announced the next priest-in-charge and that he will not be living in Edale.

### **Gipsy Hill, Southwark**

The diocese wishes to sell this attractive and not massive four bedroom Victorian vicarage and erect a small vicarage 'box' in the garden. The original plan had been even worse, involving demolition of the vicarage, but this was foiled when it became part of a conservation area. Objections from successive churchwardens have gone unheeded, as have requests to improve the existing vicarage (for example it still has no roof insulation). The PCC has been given no figures, for example of costings for repairs as compared with the proposed new construction. The diocese has made various applications for planning permission, despite overwhelming lack of support. The latest application was refused on grounds that seem to make it unlikely that future applications will succeed and a working party has now been set up to try to find a way forward. A familiar tale, but perhaps now more hopeful.



*Christ Church Gipsy Hill -watercolour by Audrey Hammond*

### **Helmsley, York**

The fine and exceptionally historic Canon's Garth was recently sold off by the diocese with the reluctant agreement of the PCC. Martin Vander Weyer's article on the history of the house for his parish magazine is reproduced on page 17 with his kind permission. We did take the opportunity to advise him that no PCC should voluntarily consent to such a sale. It does no good, as the PCC thereby forfeits its rights of appeal to the Church Commissioners.

### **Iminster, Bath & Wells**

Since our article in 2006, a decision has been taken to sell this house and buy a replacement on the edge of the town. I have spoken to the team rector Alastair Wallace, to find out how this came about. I asked him what had been decisive in this decision, and how it had been taken.

Questions had been raised, he said, about the suitability of the vicarage for many years. In the 1930s an incumbent was finding it too expensive. In its favour was the location near the church, with a good front lawn for events and its status as the historical vicarage, known to everyone; against that was the cost of maintenance. Most recently much woodwork, in particular floors, had to be replaced through depredations of the powder post beetle; but as significant, he reckoned its size, the largeness of rooms, and expense of heating, and also the size of the garden. In particular he found upkeep and maintenance of the garden burdensome.

He is moving next week (March 2010) to a house on the edge of the town, which is sufficiently spacious, and with a smallish garden, a good five minutes' walk from the church.

As to process, when the proposal for a move was first mooted, no one on the PCC raised an objection. As Alastair said, apart from Ilminster, most of the churches in the rural groups of which the town is the centre have no vicarage in the parish, and have to travel to see the vicar, as does the vicar to get to the church. He felt that the retention of the present house could deter a future incumbent, and would continue as a drain on diocesan finances. He is clearly looking forward to the move.

This sale of a historic, well placed and not overlarge parsonage, with a garden that some clergy and their spouses might enjoy, pastorally convenient, though difficult for disabled access, and good for hospitality, is sad, and marks a step in the way the role of the parson has shifted from that of a persona in the local community who links the secular and the sacred, to the leader of a more gathered and self-conscious Christian Church.

*Report by Mervyn Wilson, Feb 2010*

### **Ludlow, Hereford**

With the departure of the Team rector of Ludlow in December, the Diocese of Hereford has decided to sell Ludlow rectory and buy his successor a new house in the town. The present rectory is a fascinating building, created from the hall of the College of Priests who served the church and dates from about 1320. In other words it has been, in effect, the rectory since the Middle Ages (though, for a time, another building in the town was used). The diocese claims it is an expensive building to maintain - both for the diocese and the incumbent. But, disposing of 700 years or so of church history in an instant, does seem a great tragedy. The rectory is adjacent to the magnificent church of St Laurence's and very convenient for both church and town.

### **Marks Tey, Chelmsford**

There is a plan to sell off this Early Victorian house, which was illustrated in our last issue, and build a smaller rectory in the garden. The churchwarden who is our contact there seems to favour this though there seems to us no good reason for disposal; it seems to be a typical and classic case of counterproductive sale of a suitable house that should be retained for the ministry. There is local concern about sale in today's market and of course the reduction of the garden will lower the price achievable.

### **Nailsea, Bath & Wells**

We are delighted to report on this great success story in the article on page 25.

### **Pinchbeck, Lincoln**

As we reported, after the bitterly opposed sale of the fine vicarage at Pinchbeck in 2001, there was no car park for the church, parishioners having always used that at the convenient vicarage. The diocese had to put forward several schemes, incurring opposition from English Heritage, the council and the parish, involving numerous refused planning applications. We hear that the saga has finally ended with approval for a parking area with an unsightly 'grasscrete' access.

**St. Endellion, Truro**

We are told that this fine rectory, associated with the celebrated St. Endellion Music Festival, which was put under great threat in 2007 despite total opposition (see our earlier casework reports) is now fully restored to a proper condition and the priest in charge is living there with his family. The parishioners now feel that its future is reasonably secure and are in the process of trying to develop a major project around the church and the rectory in partnership with the St Endellion Music Festivals and the diocese. If this comes to fruition it will underpin the future status of the rectory. Another case that we can consider a success.

**Great Torrington, Exeter**

There is very good news that the retirement of the Revd Jeremy Hummerstone has not spelt the sale of this vicarage that is so well known to our committee and members. We are told the diocese intends to keep it for the time being, for which it must be loudly applauded, an enlightened decision that is unusual given its track record. Having said that, they are installing central heating apparently without consulting the incoming vicar (Jeremy found it totally unnecessary) and Jeremy is worried that they may nail down the fine Georgian shutters, as they would have done when he moved in, if he had not been there at the time and stopped them. This of course should never be done, not just for the insult to the historic fabric - they are there to be used and so good for environmentally friendly warmth.



*Great Torrington Vicarage*

**Whitchurch, Oxford**

You may recall from our casework report last year that we have now written to the Archdeacon of Oxford four times following his promise to give us more information about the circumstances of the sale of this fine house, including a letter delivered by hand, without any reply! Coincidentally, however, we have received a very informative update from our member Tanya Hawley - see Letters.

## LETTERS

We are always very grateful to members for writing to us. The following are extracts from letters we have received during the course of this year.

*Following our comment about Whitchurch, near Reading, in last year's newsletter, Tanya Hawley has kindly updated us and the following is extracted from her letter:*

It has been such a lengthy saga here. Our rector retired about 10 years ago having hung on to try to get the future of the parish and the Rectory sorted out before he went. However, we ended up with a three year interregnum and endless hold ups on plans for the Rectory.

Eventually we became one in a six parish team centred on Checkendon, a village about five miles away where the team rector has a bungalow and a team office in another village, not the handsome late Georgian rectory here in this village which has rooms for parish business. The team rector says that he could not afford to maintain it.

We became designated as a parish that was only entitled to a house for duty priest. The PCC favoured the sale of the Rectory, (I didn't), but was very anxious that the original plan to build a new house for duty in the extensive vegetable gardens would be carried out.

The Glebe and Buildings Committee did one sensible thing. They bought back the former Rectory Cottage and stables that had previously been sold off separately when they came back onto the market. Reuniting the property made it more valuable as a whole and produced a two bedroom flat suitable for a single person, small family or granny annex.

A single man with a day job was appointed as our priest with the cottage as his house for duty. The Rectory had various short-term caretaker tenants while the wrangling went on. It was the route for two of the tenants ultimately to obtain council housing. There was never a repairing commercial let. Any repairs or upkeep done by the Glebe and Buildings Committee was invisible and the place became a village eyesore, very bad for the credibility of responsible stewardship of the Church of England and the locals could not understand that it was no longer the responsibility of the PCC.

The major hold up on the building of a new house and the sale of the old was the question of access. The highways department would not allow the new house to use the old rectory drive for this. So plan B was to gain access via the church drive which during the 19th century fell into private hands. As well as the church, the drive also serves three properties in the grounds of the former Walliscote House which was pulled down after the war and two houses built in Walliscote's vegetable garden in the 1950s.

However, the owner of the drive wanted a sum of money for access from the drive across the verge which the Glebe and Property Committee deemed excessive and refused to pay. Years went by while other unsuitable accesses were mooted as well as the suggestion of buying an alternative house in the village. The PCC was anxious to stick with the original plan in the hope of getting a parish room and a lavatory as part of the development. Ultimately a deal was done with the owner of the drive. A large house for duty was built but with no scope for any facilities for the parish. It was apparent that this house had been put up unencumbered so that it could be suitable for resale in the future. The house for duty priest and his new wife moved in in January 2008. It is called St. Mary's House. The then church warden, a surveyor, fought for and obtained an agreement for the diocese to hang on to the end section of the stables, the coach house, with a view to making that the parish room and lavatory. But the cost of re-roofing the building was prohibitive and quite beyond the fund raising means of the parish.

The Rectory and the cottage were suddenly put on the market last September 2008, at the height of the banking crisis when market prices were at an all time low. This outraged the village, including the locals who never come to church except for christenings, marriages and funerals, but are happy to subscribe to the Stewardship Campaign. Never again.

I do not know what price was paid but at the height of the property price rise, an old rectory with cottage by the Thames and in walking distance of a commuter station to London must have been double the asking price of £1.3 million for the house and £400,000 for the cottage. The sale was completed by Christmas 2008 to a private buyer.

The new owner must know he has a bargain. However, he has run into difficulties and delays over planning permission and the work is halted. It remains to be seen whether he is able to complete the project.

Our house for duty priest leaves us after seven years in April 2010. We hope we shall get a replacement. We do now have a house to offer but for how long?

After major rows, the Archdeacon's committee may after all pay for the re-roofing of the potential parish room provided they can get permission for a tiny flat over it to be let commercially and the parish raises the funds to fit out and furnish the room.

Watch this space!

***Christopher Tull*** writes from Challacombe, North Devon:

It was good to have the photo of Bishopsnympton Rectory on the same page as the story [see last year's newsletter]. Although I do not say so, I very much have that house in mind when I write my stories. It was, however, nothing like as bad as the initial description of it when Jack Longfield first saw it. I got that from other clergy

houses I had known. The huge pump was real - we used it for several years in Norfolk until a petrol one was installed.

I am so glad you met at our old home at BN, and that Andrews Jones loves it as we did. It was a house perfect for everything, extremely well built and never really cold or damp. As I had the freehold, they could not get rid of it, much as they would have liked to at one stage. Latterly they agreed it was right to keep it. We used to have our own sheep in the field, lamb in the shed and use the horse boxes for ewes and lambs. At other times we had other uses for the stables. I am glad Andrew still has the use of them.

*Our 'Caribbean Correspondent' Derek Sawyer reports from St. Kitts:*

I still socialise with marginalised young people, and help them where I can, but refusing to give a young woman who'd fallen out with all her family, accommodation, resulted in me more than once being beaten, and my black eye still hurts! However most village folk are very nice to me and I'm welcomed into their (very often humble) houses and plied with chicken, dumplings and vegetable stew and a bottle of Carib (the local lager)....I seem to be in demand as a godparent - and most of the girls of my 2001-2002 confirmation classes have produced babies or have 'belly-big'. Three of the boys have murdered or were murdered.....All this is to change when I fly to Dominica to become parish priest there - January 4th - St. George's Rectory....I have just visited Dominica and celebrated the Holy Eucharist. The rectory is palatial and has three double bedrooms. It is on a hillside with views of the town, cruise ships and the sea.

*J. Michael Thompson, Rector of Humshaugh with Simonburn and Wark, Northumberland, writes about the sensible retention and adaptation of his parsonage by his diocese:*

Under an Act of 1811, which became effective on the death of the Revd. Dr Jas. Scott in 1814, the Commissioners of Greenwich Hospital, as then Patrons of the ancient and extensive parish of Simonburn began a process of pastoral reorganisation embracing an area of over 200 square miles between the Roman Wall and the source of the North Tyne. At that time the benefice house was the large 17th and 18th century rectory at Simonburn and nothing is, presently, known of the housing provided for either the resident curates of the chapelries of Bellingham and Falstone or the assistant curates sometimes engaged at Simonburn itself. By 1818 Greenwich Hospital had organised the formation of six parishes and a chapelry within the bounds of the 'Great Parish'. The scheme involved building four new churches and six new parsonages. It is understood that Seward, a pupil of Soane, was the principal architect involved and much of the building work betrays stylistic similarities to farm buildings and houses the Greenwich Commissioners erected on their Northumbrian farms at a similar period. The smallest of the new parsonages was built adjacent to the largest of the new churches, Humshaugh Chapel. It would appear that when Humshaugh

became a 'titular vicarage', later in the 19th century, the Regency Curate's House was deemed too small for a vicarage and it acquired a large 'back-shoot' service wing.

At its zenith the house had nine bedrooms and was not unreasonably deemed to be oversized when my predecessor moved here in 1976. He came with the knowledge that either the house was to be 'modified' or sold and replaced. 'Providentially' the decision was made to modify, rather than replace. The result was that the Victorian rear wing was demolished and replaced, at ground floor level only, by an entrance lobby, cloakroom, utility room, pantry and attached garage.

Within the Regency core of the building a first floor room was appropriated and divided to form a linen cupboard, bathroom and separate w.c. On the ground floor a room was converted to form a good-sized kitchen. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and thirty years on my only regret about what was done is that it now seems unfortunate that the integral garage was provided, since that has led to the outbuilding which had served the purpose being regarded as superfluous and now subject to minimal maintenance. Even that issue contains a 'silver lining', for if the needs of the benefice, or the duties of the incumbent, varied, the modern garage could be appropriated, quite inexpensively as an office or meeting room.

Because of its robust and simple construction, and the provision of a dry lining when built, the house has not proved unduly expensive either to maintain or run. Indeed when I moved here from a gas central heated 1970s parsonage in 1997 the annual fuel bill fell noticeably! I should guess that the only cost which gives a Parsonages Committee reasonable cause for concern is ongoing tree surgery on a fairly extensive site in a conservation area. So far as I am aware the diocesan view is that this is still the 'right house in the right place' but that the fairly extensive area of garden and paddock surrounding it on a land-locked site continue to present a challenge in terms of upkeep.

## ARTICLES

### Canon's Garth: a Potted History

Martin Vander Weyer

*Many parishioners have expressed their sadness at the proposed sale of Canon's Garth – and the PCC shares that sentiment, while accepting the realities of diocesan requirements for a modern-day vicarage. We all hope this lovely old house will find sympathetic new owners who will cherish it as a family home. In the meantime, here is a potted history of a Helmsley landmark which has had many occupants and several different uses over the centuries. The moral of the story, perhaps, is that when you are as timeless as Canon's Garth, all change is merely temporary.*



Canon's Garth 'was twenty five years ago used as a couple of cottages, then as a tramp's house, then its reputation got worse and worse, and finally the rats alone had possession,' wrote Vicar Gray in the Parish Magazine in August 1893, celebrating the restoration of the ancient house adjacent to All Saints – and he might have added that the building which is now the Hope Room had done service as a slaughterhouse. 'To any who crawled over its broken stair or tried to tread its garrets,' he went on, 'the change is now wonderful. A fine, large range of building, clean and bright looking, well warmed and lighted, with eleven good upstairs rooms, three downstairs rooms, with a chapel, kitchen, scullery and halls, the whole place looks ready for work.'

The description suggests that Gray might have made a good estate agent, but it's harder to tell whether he was a good historian. His mural in All Saints says Canon's Garth dates from 1122, a year before the first stone church. But that refers to an earlier house on the site, erected by Walter L'Espece, lord of Helmsley – and the dates may be wrong by a decade or so. What we know for certain is that the first occupants of the house were vicars appointed by the Priory of Kirkham, beside the Derwent south of Malton, and that this Augustinian priory owed its foundation to L'Espece, who endowed it with lands in Yorkshire and Northumberland and the patronage or

advowson of several parishes, including Helmsley. According to the legend which became the subject of Vicar Gray's celebrated 1897 pageant, L'Espec 'made Christ his heir' by successively founding Kirkham, Rievaulx and Warden Abbey (in Bedfordshire) in memory of his beloved son, also Walter, who died after being thrown from his horse while hunting. One modern study of the founding charter addressed by L'Espec to the Archbishop of York and Bishop of Durham dates the foundation of Kirkham between 1133 and 1139.

In any event, the oldest element of the house we know today is the timberwork of its central roof structure, a rare remnant of a mediaeval aisled hall. According to the scholarly *Houses of the North York Moors* (1987), the roof 'has features which may be dated to the late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century', but the stone walls below and the original kitchen, later the dining room, probably date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One note in the vicarage files suggests 1296 as the date of first occupation of the 'new' house, so let us settle for that as a reasonable guess.

What we don't know is precisely what happened to Canon's Garth after the dissolution of Kirkham in 1539. Gray conjectured that it served as the vicarage until the tenure of Dr Richard Conyers in the 1770s. But the authors of *A History of Helmsley, Rievaulx and District* (ed. McDonnell, 1963) believe it was lived in at various times between 1589 and 1710 by the Croslands, a Roman Catholic family who were JPs and stewards to the Earls of Rutland and one of whom commanded Helmsley Castle during the Civil War.

In 1605, the vicar of the day was in fact recorded as living in the half-timbered house which is now part of the Black Swan hotel, and which was known as Rectory House until after the second world war. Gray himself lived in Rectory House until 1900, when he commissioned a fine new vicarage for himself on Bondgate. To complete this rather confusing catalogue, Gray's Bondgate house became the offices of Helmsley Rural District Council in the early 1950s (with the Forestry Commission upstairs) when what is now Mike and Jan Titchmarsh's house on Castlegate became the vicarage; finally, the Bondgate house became the headquarters of the North York Moors National Park.

So it seems likely that Canon's Garth had not been the home of Helmsley's vicar for some 300 years when Gray, in his unstoppable way, decided to take the place in hand. The extent of its dilapidation can be seen in a photograph in the McDonnell history (and a fine painting by George Cammidge of Withernsea) that must date from before 1889, the year in which the Earl of Feversham gave the property to Gray as trustee on behalf of the parish. The architect Temple Moore was set to work overseeing the refurbishment and the addition of a new lean-to kitchen extension on the east side. Also installed were a stone fireplace salvaged from Helmsley Castle, and floor tiles in the chapel from the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey.

Canon's Garth was ceremonially reopened by William McLagan, Archbishop of

York, and came to be occupied by nuns from the nursing order of the Holy Rood in Middlesbrough, which also had a convent in Sowerby. The nuns' attic cells were named Faith, Hope and Charity; downstairs, they provided a small sanatorium for the sick. During the Second World War one of the nuns, Sister Amy, was encouraged by Dr Blair to train as midwife: in due course she was responsible for bringing Sally Tetley's son Christopher into the world.

In 1953, Canon's Garth was divided into two, one half accommodating the curate. But fifteen years later, the house was empty and once again at risk – particularly when major building works were planned for the extension of the Black Swan next door. That was a factor in David and Barbara Senior's decision to move from Castlegate to Canon's Garth in the late 1960s – and the beginning of a long battle by Canon Senior to have the house officially adopted by the Diocesan Parsonages Board as Helmsley's vicarage. The negotiation was completed in 1986 when the house was sold by the parish trust to the diocese, and the proceeds were vested in the Duncombe Canon's Garth Trust, which provides the PCC with a modest income for parish purposes.

The Seniors' daughter Kate, who now lives in Hong Kong, remembers: 'Heating was by open fires and slow-burning stoves: my father was extremely skilled in keeping them going day and night from the autumn through to the spring. He was also very particular about not defacing the exterior of the house with aials of any kind: the so-called "television lounge" was therefore conveniently situated in the attic with a direct beam to the Bilsdale mast. This had the advantage of viewing being very selective and usually a family event.' It was, she recalls, 'an idyllic house in which to grow up.'

One final little mystery is what has happened to the apostrophe. The name on the gate today says 'Canons Garth', without one. Correspondence before 1986 generally refers to 'Canon's Garth' (which was David Senior's preferred form) but in some cases 'The Canonsgarth'. The 1889 Indenture transferring the house from Feversham to Gray also gave it a definite article, 'The Canon's Garth'. There are references from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (when, to be fair, no one worried much about spelling) to 'Cannon Garth', and the McDonnell history uses several variants, including (to be fair again, only in the index) 'Canons' Garth', suggesting more than one canon. But it seems highly likely that the house was only ever home to one reverend canon at a time – and it will be some consolation to the town if sympathetic new owners decide to restore not only the fabric of this great survivor, but also its proper punctuation.

*Martin Vander Weyer is churchwarden at Helmsley and writes for The Spectator.*

**The battle for Bishopscourt Melbourne and Bishops Court Adelaide 2006-2008**  
**David Wetherell**

Bishopscourt East Melbourne is the last surviving urban estate in the City of Melbourne. The builder, Charles Perry, first Bishop of Melbourne (1847-1876) wanted to be within walking distance of his cathedral and rejected larger sites elsewhere. Speculators, enriched by the gold rush, and professional people – lawyers, government officials and MPs - were attracted by the convenient location of East Melbourne, believing also that the presence of a bishop's residence would ensure a good neighbourhood.



The house is situated on a prime two-acre site not far from the city centre. In the garden many of the original plants placed in the gardenesque style in the 1860s remain to this day. In 2001 the Australian Garden History Society led by Helen Page began restoring the garden to its former glory, and over \$A45,000 was invested in trees and plants. Standing in the garden until the 1990s was the 500 year Corroboree Tree, possibly the oldest tree in Melbourne, and it is a nice thought that – as the colonial botanist von Mueller observed – the Corroboree Tree had been a sapling at the time Cranmer was drafting the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549. Bishopscourt was occupied by the colonial governor of Victoria as a temporary government house in the period before Government House was completed. Its Tuscan tower soon became a model for aspiring home owners in the days of ‘marvellous Melbourne’, and many a mansion thereafter boasted an Italian tower in imitation of Bishopscourt.

Early in 2006 rumours were rife in the diocese that Bishopscourt was to be disposed of, either by lease or sale. It was known that an overwhelming majority of the Diocesan Council (DC) had voted in favour of these options. As SOP members well

know, the best time to sell church property is during an interregnum between incumbents. In Melbourne the time was propitious: the archbishop had retired and electing a successor was taking months to organize. Diocesan officials did not comment on the rumours; and the monthly newspaper *The Melbourne Anglican* maintained a coy silence.

To end the uncertainty, I took advice from an Australian duck shooter of my acquaintance: ‘remember, you must always be a good sport – give the ducks a chance – flush them out first’. A letter signed by three church historians in *The Melbourne Anglican* in May 2006 ‘flushed out’ a flurry of officials and a very public debate began. The bishop administrator made an interim announcement– the registrar was interviewed in the principal newspaper *The Age* – and the headline ‘As Ugly as Sin’ was emblazoned over the accompanying article citing the most influential Anglican feminist in Australia wanting the Church to be rid of the property. To our gratification, however, letters **against** sale in the Church press ran at 4:1 over the ensuing months.

I don’t know whether exaggerating the cost of maintaining parsonages is a tactic used by English diocesan officials in order to justify sale. The three signatory historians noted that there seemed a determination within the diocesan registry to present the DC with high maintenance costs of Bishops court. The registrar’s statement to the media of ‘\$300,000 to \$500,000 on a five year cycle’ was nothing if not inaccurate. I was able to reply that \$300,000 was indeed spent on the property in 2000, but that – apart from one renovation in 1977, half of which was paid for by the National Trust– *it was the first major church-financed renovation in a century!*

The sale of hundreds of Church of England parsonages in the last 50 years is a warning to Australians unused to the sale of rectories and bishops’ houses. Without any precedent to guide us, and being thus ill- prepared, I felt we could put SOP’s charter to good use in the debate. I sent an 8-page letter to 59 members of the Melbourne DC, repeating SOP statements that the unit cost of ‘inferior’ replacement parsonages was higher than the proceeds from the sale of the fine houses put on the market. And there were other useful quotations – ‘it is thought that bishops are ‘embarrassed to live in houses that are “better” than those of their flocks’; and ‘the idea that people dislike living in a large house is an odd one’. And so on. The title of my letter, ‘Bishops court: the Lowest Home-Maintenance cost in Historic Melbourne’ exposed the diocesan registry’s inflated maintenance figures. What was Bishops court actually costing the church? The maintenance cost is \$A30-40,000, about the average price of a new car.

Supporters of sale believed that some of the proceeds from Bishops court could be devoted to establishing new churches and vicarages. Desirable though parochial expansion is, my letter pointed out that there would be no chance of distributing funds to build churches. The legal proprietor of Bishops court is the Melbourne Anglican Trust Corporation and proceeds are directed to the archbishop in his official capacity,

and not the diocese. The purpose to which such proceeds can be applied is severely limited. But the argument in favour of retaining Bishops court also rested on the spiritual and social advantages of multi-purpose bishops' palaces and vicarages in advancing the mission of the church. In making a number of 'palpable hits' in the letter, I was grateful to Mr Anthony Jennings for the use of printed SOP material.

Opponents were spurred on by two goals. One, that an important part of the Church's heritage should not be put on the market. Two, that 'Bishops court', precious to the diocese of Melbourne over 150 years, might become the property of interests unsympathetic to the Christian message. The example of 'Raheen', episcopal palace of Melbourne's Roman Catholic archbishops, provided a worrying precedent. 'Raheen' had been sold in 1983 by R.C. Archbishop Frank Little to one of Australia's richest men : a billionaire purchaser who, at the time of his death in 2009, had been fined \$27 million – the largest cartel case, and the highest company fine, in Australian history. His price fixing activity had cost the Australian public a sum alleged to exceed \$700 million. Even the billionaire's rabbi admitted his co-religionist's faults. The new owner of the archbishop's house had already surrendered his Order of Australia, an honour conferred in recognition of generous philanthropy, based partly, it now seemed possible, upon funds drawn from his illicit gains. He was facing four further separate charges by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, abandoned because of failing health. Prominent Australian Jewish leaders had tried to have the Order restored to the owner of 'Raheen', but the outcry was too great. Some adherents of a particular religious faith plumb the depths of indecency in their pursuit of money and power.

Was this shabby tale a portent of what 'life after Bishops court' might mean to the Anglican church? One option discussed in Melbourne newspapers in 2000 was to give Bishops court a new role as the Melbourne home for the Australian Prime Minister, to match the PM's official Sydney residence. By 2006, the property was valued at above \$10 million, and had been inspected personally by the deputy PM. But, were sale to the Australian Commonwealth to fall through - as indeed happened - would the new owner of Bishops court be a private buyer? Melbourne's 'casino kings' were rumoured to be interested in a property 'scoop'. An irony: mindful of the damage done by the casino industry to the families of gambling addicts, the Diocese of Melbourne had spent large sums in legal challenges to prevent the licensing of Crown Casino. The humiliation of an Anglican archbishop's home becoming the haunt of some notorious public figure were among the reasons for active lobbying in 2006. Dreadful to contemplate was the possibility of Bishops court's chapel, scene of daily worship from the *Book of Common Prayer* since 1903, being turned into a gaming room.\*

We regarded an announcement by Bishop Philip Freier immediately upon his election as Archbishop of Melbourne in late 2006 as ominous. In his initial interview in Darwin, possibly assuming that the sale of Bishops court was inevitable, Dr Freier threw out the suggestion that he would live in Melbourne's suburbs, as if to say, 'if I

have to, I shall'. But after an initial year spent with his wife Joy in the chaplain's flat at Bishops Court, he moved into the main building. It is reported that Joy and Philip Freier are happy with the decision to defer sale.

*\*A perhaps fitting irony in this context is that James Blackburn, Bishops Court's architect 1849-53, was a pardoned convict who had been transported to Van Diemen's Land for forgery.*

\* \* \*

Built on a two-acre site close to the city of Adelaide, Bishops Court Adelaide has been the home of all Adelaide's diocesan bishops since Augustus Short moved there in 1851. The limestone-built house was described as 'a chaste design in the Tudor Gothic style, but by no means an ambitious structure for an episcopal palace'. From upstairs the spires of St Peter's Cathedral may be seen, flanked by views across the city to the Mount Lofty ranges.



While the Adelaide synod had authorized the sale of the whole of Bishops Court in 1990, it did not go ahead. In 2006, the Adelaide synod again debated the property and defeated (by the narrowest of margins) a motion that the entire property be sold. It had been hoped that the property would fetch more than \$1.2 million, a windfall for a diocese grappling with repayments on a \$7.5 million loan made to the Church to underwrite compensation in a tragic case of sexual abuse by a lay youth worker.

By the time a third motion for sale came up, in October 2008, the opponents of sale had copies of SOP's charter and other literature.

Archbishop Jeffrey Driver said he would support any decision made by synod. It is impossible to gauge SOP's influence, but the figures showed the 'No' majority had increased, with 100:73 against sale. The lost motion to sell was then amended: the grounds would be subdivided into three blocks for sale. This was duly passed. Part of the lands were gone, but Bishops Court Adelaide was saved from the auctioneer's hammer.

The saving of these magnificent properties in Melbourne and Adelaide ensured that, at least for the time being, two important parts of the nation's ecclesiastical heritage would continue to belong to the Anglican people of Australia, and that neither of them would become the 'last refuge' of scoundrels.

*Acknowledgments are due to Mr. Eric Faulkner and to the Right Revd James Grant, former Dean of Melbourne. Photo of Bishops Court Melbourne courtesy of Robin Page, Photographer Australian Anglican Church Calendar*

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## Success at Nailsea

Steve Tilley

About 20 months ago, when the Diocese decided that the Rectory, a ramshackle Georgian affair next to Holy Trinity Church, would be sold, a few people at Holy Trinity and Trendlewood, Nailsea started thinking about how we might be able to keep it. Instead of questioning “why?”, we focused on “why not?”.

Why not buy it and use it as offices, conference space, a café, accommodation, meeting rooms, storage, a studio or retreat? The vision and ideas were endless. This was great, but also brought difficulties. Many asked why we were considering buying a building when we hadn't decided what to do with it. But, if we bought it, the building might become a flexible space that might take several different forms in the future. We had one shot at buying or lose it forever.

There was some concern that this wasn't the right time. There was a recession, we had two other projects on the go needing just under half a million pounds to complete, we were in a vacancy and the Diocese would want the money for the sale quickly.

But the vision niggled and a small group of people did some feasibility studies, arranged preliminary surveys and got a group of young adults to rent the building to keep it occupied, warmed and vandal-free while we decided on next steps.

It was also clear that we would need the right person to lead our amazing church. We produced a parish profile and person specification for a new Rector to attract a visionary leader with gifts and skills over and above those you might usually seek. It seems to have worked.

We decided that any news or developments would be shared not exclusively on a Sunday, but with the monthly parish prayer meeting. Numbers, which had slumped, grew to around 50 and have stayed high.

We embarked on detailed proposals and a recently retired architect did some free drawings. We had several open meetings where everyone's views were listened to and recorded. Initially we were split between yes, no and don't know. Then the 'don't knows' and 'no's' began to change.

At the decisive PCC meeting before launching our appeal, we heard from someone who had changed his mind. He said that the project was ridiculous, would only work if God blessed it, but that the history of our church was of many other projects such as that. It was simply that this one was bigger and grander. He was in. It would be a lie to say everyone was in. We had a high profile resignation, which I respected. But the eventual vote gave us the green light.

So how to fund it? Our initial thought had been to apply for grants and plan other fundraising schemes. But my new Rector colleague said that if this was our project

we should pay for it and trust people to be generous.

So we pulled together all our projects and gave them a spiritual rather than a buildings focus. We want to get our plan right so we can reach out to the community, the region and, possibly the whole of the South West. We want our generosity to bless others, not ourselves.

Our target for the Trinity Project Gift Day was £800,000. Half in lump sums and half in pledges, spread monthly for ten years.

We preached our hearts out about faithfulness, vision, stewardship and surrender. I had no idea what the outcome would be.

On the actual Gift Day I was on holiday. That's how much I left the results to God.

When the cash, cheques and pledges were counted a few days later and the results announced we exceeded our target with this amazing result:

- £130,000 cash in hand from previous fundraising
- £200,000 donations on the day
- £50,000 in reclaimable tax
- £10,000 in grants to date
- £380,000 in monthly pledges over ten years
- £190,000 in interest-free loans to aid cash-flow

Roughly 200 people have contributed so far, some so generously it can't all be gift-aided in the same year. We've also had some financial support from the Diocese.

I have never heard of this level of generosity outside the stockbroker belt. It is twenty times more than any Gift Day I have ever been involved in.

I stand in awe. We wanted to walk on water. We got out of the boat.

*Steve Tilley is Associate Vicar, Nailsea Local Ministry Group*

## CODE OF PRACTICE LETTER

*This is the text of the covering letter with which we sent our Code of Practice for sale of parsonages to all 43 dioceses:*

‘Dioceses have often made use of a vacancy in an incumbency in order to carry out their objective of selling the parsonage.

In taking these decisions to dispose of parsonages, little regard has been accorded to the heritage of the Church or its fine buildings. Indeed, some archdeacons and diocesan secretaries have even expressed hostility to the concepts of the conservation of, or even the community value of, traditional church houses.

No account has been taken of the fact that in many cases the parsonage was given by a benefactor, patron or previous incumbent expressly for the benefit of the parish in perpetuity. This sounds a harsh comment, but it is true on the evidence.

In some dioceses, regular routine maintenance and repairs are not being carried out. The reason given for failure to maintain has usually been that funds are insufficient because there are priorities elsewhere.

Because of those failures of maintenance, the Church has been unable to reap the proper reward in terms of the selling price of parsonages on disposal, or even of market income from lettings of parsonages during periods of vacancy. Indeed, our evidence suggests that in some dioceses there is no firm letting policy, and many have been left empty for long periods, wasting money.

More seriously still, our files show that these sales of parsonages have often been carried through in the teeth of opposition from churchwardens and PCCs, with little serious dialogue, and much resultant damage to the relationship between the diocesan authorities and the parish. Peshurst and Pinchbeck are just two of many recent examples.

Parishes often feel they have secured no financial or other material benefit from the proceeds of such sales, because those proceeds are usually taken away and placed in a central diocesan fund, worsening the blow to the parish, which by losing its parsonage has at the same time lost a valuable facility for local fundraising and community life.

There is a widespread perception at parish level (whatever the true position may be) that diocesan officials have little regard for their views. In any case, the parish perception is that the diocese has often already made the decision to sell, and thus the representations of the churchwardens, PCC, and other objectors will not be taken seriously, or even, sometimes, referred to the Church Commissioners for review under the provisions of the relevant Measures, principally the Parsonages Measure

1938 and the Pastoral Measure 1983. There is also a widespread perception that the Church Commissioners are not a fully and transparently impartial review body, and this causes further discontent.

Our files suggest that there is a fund of talent, goodwill and local knowledge available to the Church through its vital workers at parish level, for which present policy has insufficient regard, so these skills are not being harnessed to proper advantage. Thus, the broad mission of the Church has suffered.

In many of these cases of parsonage sales, the local community at large, not just clergy and churchgoers, has felt the loss of a vital amenity for local events, fundraising and meetings, as well as pastoral care. This has led to loss of morale and the decline of the whole community, as well as churchgoers, with great loss to the mission of the Church.'

## **CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PARSONAGES**

In this code of practice, Save Our Parsonages sets out the framework for a partnership between the bishop, the archdeacon, other diocesan officers, the parish priest, the PCC, the churchwardens, any parishioners who wish to be represented and where appropriate the patron of the living ( all below called ‘the parties’), regarding the future of parsonages.

Within the framework of practice and the law, the parties agree that it is important that the Church is seen to represent natural justice as well as to abide by ecclesiastical law in all dealings with parsonages.

Accordingly, whenever and as soon as it is contemplated that the role of a parsonage is to be changed, or the parsonage is to be altered, modified or sold:

1. The diocese shall call a meeting, prior to any action being taken, which all of the parties shall be invited to attend, to be held on a stated date, subject to agreement on a revised date if necessary.

2. The meeting must consider:

(i) The house, its state of repair, its convenience and maintenance cost;

(ii) Pastoral gains or losses consequent on retention or disposal and/or replacement;

(iii) Economic losses as well as gains consequent on proposed disposal;

(iv) The historic and conservation value of the house and garden.

3. If disposal of the existing house is proposed by any party, retention or adaptation for alternative pastoral use must be considered first.

4. If there is disagreement on costings, the PCC and diocese must jointly obtain a second independent survey report, such report to have evidential value equal to any original survey.

5. Following the meeting, a report shall be prepared and agreed.

6. The parties must then seek to reach agreement on the appropriate course of action. An action plan must be drawn up and signed by the parties.

7. If the cost of maintaining the existing parsonage (or an identified potential liability) is agreed to be significantly higher than the diocesan average, it may be retained on condition that additional funds are found, to assist the diocese in maintenance. A local trust fund may be the solution.

8. Subject to 7 above, if unanimous agreement cannot be reached, the matter must be put to independent arbitration.

9. Arbitration procedure shall be as follows:

- (i) A committee of the Church Commissioners or an agreed third party shall arbitrate.
- (ii) The chair of the tribunal shall not have a vote in the decision making process.
- (iii) The process will at all times be fair and transparent.
- (iv) All parties must be given equal time to make their case.
- (v) The diocese should put its case first.
- (vi) All parties must have the right to make a final statement.

10. It is acknowledged that many parsonages were built or improved from local benefactions by patrons, incumbents or others, whose intent was that they should be held in perpetuity for the parish. It is further acknowledged that diocesan 'ownership' of parsonages derives from Measures, not from acquisition by the diocese for financial consideration at market value. If, therefore, it is agreed or adjudged that the parsonage is to be sold, the diocese shall, before placing any proceeds from the disposal in a diocesan account, consult with the PCC to determine whether there is a case for those proceeds to be 'ring fenced' for the benefit of the parish or benefice (for example, to be credited to a parish fund for maintenance and repair, and/or to compensate the parish for lost meeting facilities) and if so, they shall, to the extent necessary, be so 'ring fenced'.



