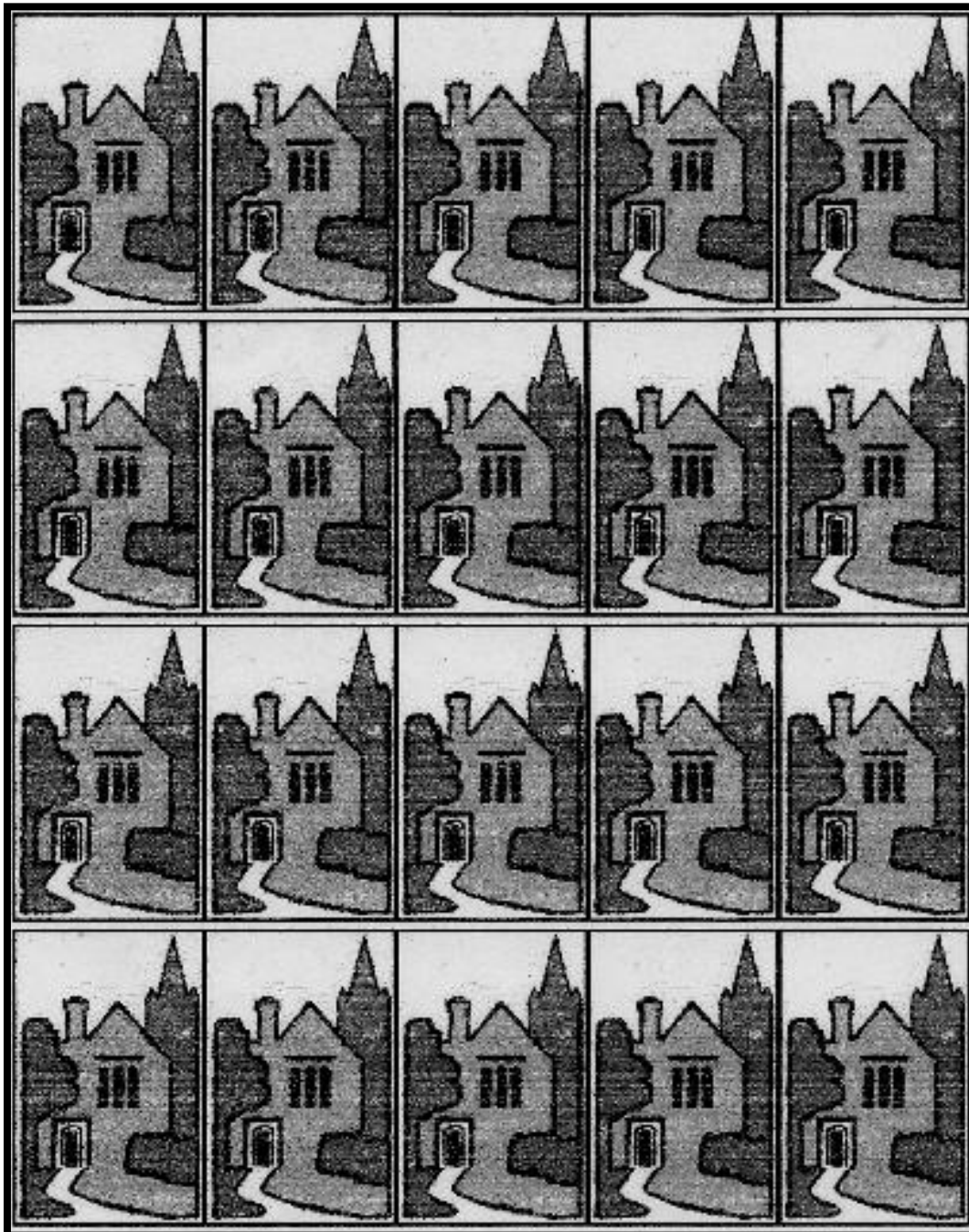


# SAVE OUR PARSONAGES

## NEWSLETTER



No. 18

Autumn 2012



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The PATRONS of Save Our Parsonages are:

**Dr. Peter Burman MBE**

**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**

**Terry Waite CBE**

The COMMITTEE of Save Our Parsonages currently comprises:

**Anthony Jennings (Director)**

**Anne Toms (Treasurer)**

**The Revd Mervyn Wilson (Secretary)**

**Noël Riley**

**Elizabeth Simon**

**The Revd Alastair Ferguson**

Our CONSULTANTS are:

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

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## **DIRECTOR'S REVIEW**

### **Advantages of Traditional Parsonages**

You'll recall from last year's newsletter that only a handful of diocesan secretaries were prepared to co-operate with us by responding to our request for information about parsonages currently on their 'unsuitable' list (the parsonages we consider to be the most suitable for mission and ministry). The Archbishops' Council could not help either, telling us: 'it is entirely for each diocese to decide how much information it wishes to disclose.' We believe the diocesan officials should be serving the parishes, yet they are happy to deprive them of the information they need. This scandalous outcome prompted the Patrons Consultative Group committee to ask me to make a presentation to them on the subject (see below), and also gave rise to the article in our last newsletter from 'Lulu Dupree' entitled 'The Church of England's Commissariat', which proved highly popular with our readers.

This year, therefore, as a natural successor to that 'Vulnerable Parsonages' project, we have worked on a document which enumerates the reasons why the Church should retain its traditional houses. We call this our 'Parsonage Retention Principles.' After many months' work, we sent these principles out in May to all diocesan secretaries, archdeacons, parsonage committee chairmen and diocesan surveyors, about 200 individuals. The full text is set out on page 25 of this newsletter. We have asked for diocesan comments and will keep you updated on any responses we receive.

### **Updated Code of Practice**

Last year we amended our Code of Practice. The core principle continues to be that the dioceses should formally consult the affected parish as soon as any suggestion arises that a parsonage is marked out for sale, so that the matter can be discussed. That is all that we ask, but it still does not happen at present. Its full text is at the end of this newsletter.

### **Rectories and Vicarages Trust – Update**

The Rectories and Vicarages Trust was set up to facilitate the retention and use of 'redundant' church houses by the Church (see earlier newsletters for details). It is not a campaigning body, and separate from SOP, though linked because of its principles. The RVT committee has been exploring the possibility of retention of ex-parsonages for use as clergy retirement homes, and committee member The Bishop of Dudley, the Rt. Revd David Walker, has been consulting with the Pensions Board on this possibility. Other areas to explore include use as 'house for duty' houses, or by housing associations or as retirement homes. The quest continues.

### **Events, Publications and Patrons**

Our plans for a conference on the environmental advantages of older buildings are proving difficult. Our approach to English Heritage for a joint conference with them this autumn seemed to have borne fruit, but then their conservation department underwent a complete reorganisation following government cuts, and their current

Green Deal seminars do not seem sufficiently relevant. We are exploring other possibilities. I did have a very useful meeting in April with our patron the Bishop of London, who is very much involved in environmental matters. SOP shares many of the aims of the 'Shrinking the Footprint' campaign, but we are trying to focus specifically on traditionally built houses. These pre-1919 houses are often adversely portrayed as environmentally unfriendly, but this is a highly misguided view, ignoring the much higher quality of their construction and materials. The huge 'embodied energy' involved in the process of new construction in any case offsets any environmental gain in a new house for many years, by which time further costly 'improvements' often have to be made, and its shorter life means it will be demolished long before the older and better house, which will live on.

We continue to publicise SOP with press releases. Church Times reported on our Vulnerable Parsonages Project (see page 4). We featured in an article about Church finances in the Sunday Times, and the Church of England Newspaper featured our Parsonage Retention Principles. The BBC has told me it is interested in doing a feature on SOP. In April the online paper Christian.co.uk published an article about SOP together with my own piece explaining our mission.

### **Patrons Consultative Group**

I am a member of the Patrons Consultative Group (PCG), the national committee which works for the benefit of private patrons and their rights. The PCG has strong links with SOP because patrons, PCCs and churchwardens have much in common; patrons have been great benefactors to the Church and they often provided the parsonage in the first place. The PCG recently held a very successful meeting at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire, for churchwardens and patrons, to help them properly understand their rights and use them to the full.

### **Media Relations**

We were fortunate earlier in the year to get the voluntary services of one of our members as Media Relations Manager for a short while, but sadly he has now had to withdraw due to pressure of other work. Please let us have details of anyone you think may be suitable for this very interesting task for which there is again an urgent need.

### **Events**

We also need someone who is prepared to spend some of their time organising events. It will not be a very demanding job, and is an interesting one. Please volunteer!

AJSJ

## **MEMBERSHIP NEWS AND COMMENT**

### **AGM**

This year's AGM will be at St. Barnabas Vicarage, Walthamstow, London, by courtesy of our member Father Steven Saxby. The invitation together with the minutes of the 2011 AGM is as usual on the separate sheet enclosed with this newsletter. Please reply whether or not you can come, as your apologies will be recorded.

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

Even more of you are now paying by standing order, which is enormously helpful for Jennifer, our Membership Secretary. Please note that the subscription has been £15 for some years now.

### **Donations**

Special thanks are always due to those of you who have kindly made donations or enhanced your subscriptions. Particular mention this year must be made of Canon Ian Sherwood OBE for his extremely generous donation of £250.

### **CAF Cheques**

Once again, a reminder that CAF cheques **cannot be banked by SOP**. If we get them we have to return them.

### **Addresses**

As well as your email addresses, it is still vital that you notify all changes of postal address; mailed newsletters continue to be returned to us marked 'not at this address.' It is very difficult to trace members under those circumstances.

### **Website**

Please look at our website, which the Revd Jeremy Hummerstone continues to administer for us. You will also find a number of references to us if you do an internet search under 'Save Our Parsonages'. We did ask you all to get your parish website to set up a link to the SOP website, and to let us have details so that we can set up a reciprocal link, but the response has been disappointing.

### **Back Issues**

We still have back issues of the newsletter. Some complete sets from 1995 to date are still available. We offer a full set (16 issues) for £25, a full set minus the scarce 1998 issue for £20, or any single issue for £3.

### **New Members**

We badly need new members. Could you all please download the 'subscription and standing order' form from our website and give it to friends and colleagues.

## CASEWORK

### **Abbots Langley, St. Albans**

There are plans to sell this five bedroom Queen Anne vicarage next to the church at the centre of the village, within the conservation area, at the end of the incumbency, and to build houses in the gardens. A group of the congregation has met the churchwardens to express their concerns over the threat to the vicarage. They have it on the agenda to discuss with the archdeacon, who has reassured the churchwardens that there will be time for consultation before any decision is taken. Where have we heard that before?



*Abbots Langley Vicarage as it was in 1912*

### **Ashwell, St. Albans**

The diocese said it was selling the fine late Georgian rectory at Ashwell, Herts, and that it was buying a 1930s house at the other end of the village which the PCC found unsuitable. The PCC formally objected, but we were told by a concerned parishioner that it was then manipulated into withdrawing because of pressure from the Church bureaucracies. With the rectory, the parish is losing the focal point of church life.

We have been looking into this case particularly closely. In many ways it is typical of our casework. There was not only a lack of consultation with the PCC, which alas is

all too normal, but the case raises questions about the efficacy of the appeal procedures, something which has always been particularly worrying to SOP and our members. In previous newsletters we have expressed our concerns about the claim by the pastoral division of the Church Commissioners to be an independent appeal body. This cannot be so in any sense that would be recognised in legal process. They are a major Church institution which has much dialogue with the dioceses, so their appellate role would never be accepted as independent by a court. But this case gives further cause for concern. Our correspondent told us that when the PCC objected to the sale and filed an appeal, they were contacted by a representative of the Church Commissioners, before the hearing, who discouraged them from proceeding. If this did happen as alleged, it was quite clearly prejudicial.

We have therefore been in correspondence with the Church Commissioners' pastoral division about this. They do have some written guidance about pre-appeal contact, but in our view this is at present quite inadequate; for example nowhere does it expressly prohibit any pre-appeal discussion of the merits of a case between members of their tribunal and appellants. This being so, the process is clearly open to abuse. We have offered to assist with the drafting of stricter guidance, and the correspondence has been cordial, but our offer has not so far been taken up.

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

As we understand it, there are no further problems with this handsome nineteenth century parsonage house with its new incumbent last year. The PCC is said to be largely satisfied; 'on the whole a good outcome.'

### **Colyton, Exeter**

Good news for the time being for this fine and practical old house. It is saved for the time being, with the new priest in charge in residence. We know however that the Archdeacon of Exeter advised all candidates in writing that the future of the house was not certain, and would be reviewed. This of course is a strong warning sign. A new archdeacon has very recently taken over.

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

We reported last year that the parish has had to spend a great deal of its own money on this house in order to keep it as a working parsonage, but recently relations with the diocese have improved and the majority of parishioners are said to be happy that they have (or seem to have) saved the vicarage, and have a priest living in it. Ian White's article in this newsletter gives us a detailed update on this case.

### **Edale, Derby**

The patron, our member's wife, had generously given a valuable nearby building to the diocese as a residential youth centre on condition that there would always be a priest in this pleasant stone vicarage of about 1880. The bishop had assured our member that "representatives of the parish" (as he put it) would be consulted and that meanwhile they must "trust the system." There were no such consultations, so our



member intervened again, by which time it had already been announced that the next priest-in-charge would not be living in Edale. The warden of the youth centre is now living there, despite the fact that the growing number of recreational visitors makes Edale an important place to develop ministry. Under pressure from our member, the bishop has said he still hopes the vicarage may again be used for its proper purpose, but this pattern of behaviour is all too typical of the Church these days. The way the bishop and diocesan officials have handled the matter has caused great and unjustifiable upset and aggravation, and they seem intent on running down the Church in this parish.

### **Gipsy Hill, Southwark**

The diocese wanted to sell this attractive, not massive five (two mini) bedroom Victorian vicarage and erect a much smaller vicarage 'box' in its garden. (The original plan had been even worse, involving demolition of the vicarage and its attached annex, foiled when it became part of a conservation area). Objections from successive churchwardens went unheeded, as did requests to improve the vicarage. The PCC had been given no figures, for example, of costings for repairs as compared with the proposed new construction. Despite the lack of parish support, the diocese reapplied for planning permission in 2010, and was again refused, for reasons mainly to do with contravention of regulations concerning building on garden sites in the area. For the first time ever, the diocese installed loft insulation in the vicarage in the autumn of 2010, making a significant difference to fuel costs (repairs for the past 11 years and possibly longer had been piecemeal, patchwork and unattended to in a timely fashion). The entire Church-owned site is relatively small, and in an urban setting with no obvious alternative land for purchase. It is also ideally situated *vis-a-vis* the church. A small working party was set up to consider a way forward. As of late spring 2012, there had been no resolution.

The vicar from 2000 to 2011 left to take up another post. Because figures given by the diocese for repairs seemed highly inflated, an independent surveyor was appointed to assess and cost repairs, renewal and 'greening' of the vicarage. His report was sent to the diocese which has not yet responded. The PCC was told during the interregnum that the diocese remained committed to the plan for a new build in the garden but that it would do modest works to the vicarage in preparation for the incoming Priest in Charge who would assist the diocese with its intended plans. In late spring 2011 the PCC was told that the diocese was planning to do more substantial works to the vicarage, including the installation of a new kitchen and bathroom renewal. The plan has been further enlarged to include a new roof, correction of damp, new radiators and the reintegration of the annex to the vicarage. It is unclear what the diocese's long term plan is, as its earlier, expressed plan seems at odds with the work being carried out. Clearly, members of the PCC are delighted about the long overdue works and take a hopeful view for the future, and for a constructive exchange with the diocese.

**Great Torrington, Exeter**

We hear that all is well at Great Torrington and that the new vicar and his family are delighted with this fine traditional house, fondly remembered by all who attended our AGM there. Once again we applaud the diocese for its enlightened decision to retain it, presumably recognising the obvious fact that it is ideal for its purpose.

**Ludlow, Hereford**

The rectory was created from the hall of the College of Priests who served the church, and dates from about 1320, having been the rectory for most of the time since the Middle Ages. But with the departure of the team rector of Ludlow in December 2009, the Diocese of Hereford decided to buy his successor a new house, claiming the rectory is expensive to maintain, both for diocese and incumbent. But disposing of 700 years or so of church history in an instant is a great tragedy. The rectory is adjacent to the magnificent church of St Laurence and very convenient for both church and town. The diocese has said it intends to sell it, but no consultation has taken place to date. We are told that the sale will be strongly opposed.

**Preston, Peterborough**

This house has not been occupied by an incumbent for some years, but has housed a diocesan official. It is now being sold off. While this can be seen as formal completion of pastoral schemes long after they practically came into being, it is nevertheless a loss to the diocese, which should have worked harder to find an alternative use for it, if only by retaining it and letting it out.



*Preston Rectory*

**Tidenham, Gloucester**

The eagle eye of Noel Riley spotted an advert for a vicar in Church Times reading as follows: 'There is a plan to replace the overly large vicarage and garden with a more efficient and manageable modern property.' She reports: I couldn't resist ringing Geoffrey Sidaway (Archdeacon of Gloucester) to find out what size/problems constituted 'overly large.' Apparently a Grade 1 listed house, 'very large' but couldn't say how many bedrooms, for example, and costs £3,000 per year to heat. Garden 'needs a sit-on mower for the lawn' but wasn't sure how many acres. As they haven't been able to find another property this time around, they have decided to refurbish the house (now run down) but will certainly develop the garden in the near future. Gloucester Diocese has a 'development department' for this - apparently the garden will give room for 4 or 5 houses. He has someone interested in taking the living, so all is not lost.

**Totteridge, St. Albans**

In our last issue we noted that the diocese was planning to sell off this nice late Victorian house, as mentioned to the PCC at a preliminary meeting with the Archdeacon, and to include the parish within the Chipping Barnet Team Ministry, the vicar to be shared with one of their parishes, living in the Arkley vicarage, a poor 1960s property built in the church grounds there. Sadly, we understand the plan to sell is now well under way.

## 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.

*Nicola Nartowski writes from Stratton, Cornwall:*

Thank you for your recent newsletter, which as usual makes the blood boil! I absolutely loved the 'Lulu' article, which resonates with our PCC and needs to be read by all the bishops.

We recently raised our heads above the parapet in terms of our Common Fund contribution and have been rewarded by the equivalent of a tax audit...and attempts to tap into our reserve funds and access our 'friends' monies. Shameful!

I shall be passing on Lulu's comments, as it raises the spirits for all good souls who feel that the Church has no place for the hardworking People in the Pews, and we are the victims of the glorious hierarchy of the deaf.

*The Revd Martin Weymont writes from Frome, Somerset:*

I lived for ten years in a large country rectory with seven siblings - Brightwell Baldwin, Oxford Diocese. Long since sold.

The points made by diocesan authorities are well known by you but I list the item I wish to address below, namely:

It is justified [the argument runs] to sell large parsonages and downsize large gardens because any additional value the large size has for local ministry/local parish is beside the point - in fact it's almost counterproductive because a) it detracts from the true reason of a parsonage being provided to house satisfactorily the cleric and family, and b) it is an (implicit) subsidy for the local PCC and thus causes that PCC to underestimate their true costs. Anyway it's not the business of the diocese to help local Church finances or resources via housing for the cleric.

But such a line is overstated at best or disingenuous at worst. First, ours is a parochial system of Church and in principle there is no stated intention to change this. The arrangement and law is that a vicar lives in the boundaries of the area of his/her responsibility. But if a complete divorce is insisted upon (whether by diocesan fund managers or clergy spouse or children) between the cleric's living arrangements and all other parish duties and sites for worship/meetings/prayers etc., then the whole principle of parish church structure with resident priest is in effect undermined or reduced to a low level where it is no longer of value or even noticed by people living in the parish or attending church. Thus clergy living on site is a principle to be discarded.

It is also a question of what may be called proportionality or apportionment of cost centres in local church finance. Money saved by the parsonages board by insisting on small vicarages, set in small gardens with no outhouses or parking is disproportionately small compared with extra costs by the parish for all facilities to be separate (and distanced) from the clergy house. Cases in point include a) night time security such as for lawn mowers b) hiring the local school even for medium sized meeting with its caretaker cost c) having to build a pastoral centre onto the church or hall (if existing) in place of vicarage facilities.

***The Revd Edward Underhill writes from Keswick:***

Having been a parish minister - in the one parish - for 52 years I can fully sympathise with you. More volunteers are needed and you can't get 'em. More paying members are required - and so some opt out! But we press on.

The diocese is saying that a) St. George's Vicarage is too big, and 'it has an Aga.' Therefore we need to sell it. And b) the parish doesn't justify a full time incumbent any more. Any help you could give to the PCC would be good.

***Lord Cormack (formerly Sir Patrick Cormack MP) writes:***

Congratulations on all you are doing.

***Derek Sawyer gives us another glimpse of life in St. Kitts:***

Singleton, my cat and constant companion is very annoying. He's broken down the anti-mosquito window gauze to get in and out of the house, tries to sleep on my writing pad and computer keyboard when I'm trying to write, and paws me with his claws when I'm asleep to wake me up to feed him.

It doesn't matter too much that I have to live without certain things. Why do I need them when I can pass the time of day by walking down the street, going to town, going for a swim, and sitting on my doorstep? A trip out will inevitably bring me into contact with two dozen or more friendly folk, and quite a number will travel with me, to and fro town, if I pick them up in my bus.

Fortunately my computer wasn't stolen from me when my TV was taken when I was asleep, although I'd just brought it back from the menders; but at the moment the internet keeps failing, losing my 'replies', and a series of power cuts and telephone failures - both land and mobile phones - makes communication impossible. I just go to bed when there's no electricity; and as it gets dark at 6.30pm, in old fashioned style, I read by candle and hurricane lamp or just go to sleep.

*Nicholas Hopkins writes:*

My late father was a parish priest in the Peterborough Diocese, but architecture was a life-long passion and over the years he built up an extensive library on the subject. Sadly, I must dispose of the majority of his books and I have now catalogued over 300 of them for sale.

On two occasions when my father moved from one living to another, I remember him giving short shrift to second-hand book dealers who had the cheek to price his library by the foot, and I have vowed not to take that route either! I wonder if members of Save Our Parsonages might be interested in purchasing any of them? The list may be seen at <http://ukbooklink.com/rvb6sq>

## THE TRADITIONAL WORKING VICARAGE

Anna Sorensen

Last Monday I conducted an impromptu footfall survey at Billingborough Vicarage. At nine o'clock two ladies arrived to open up the Church charity shop that operates out of the utility room at the back of the house. At about the same time, another lady arrived to start printing the parish magazine. Well over a thousand copies are printed on a large Canon copier in the study and delivered, free, into each home in the benefice. After Morning Prayer, five of us colonised the kitchen for coffee. We were joined by a sixth person, on their way to the local care home to lead Holy Communion. In the afternoon, ten children and three leaders used the dining room and upstairs 'Godly Play Room' for a Christian after school club; and in the evening ten readers and ordained local ministers (OLMs) in training, with their tutor, used the sitting room for a tutorial.



*Billingborough Vicarage - the architect was Thomas Pilkington, who also did alterations to the fine parsonage at Market Deeping.*

Monday is probably the busiest day of the week. But other events, including Sunday School, Bible Study Groups, PCC meetings, Ministry Team Meetings, Lent Groups, vocational supervision, benefice parties and shared meals, and the occasional Quiet

Day, all happen at the vicarage. Add to this the usual – baptism and wedding interviews, pastoral meetings, casual callers of a needy nature, and the Priest-in-Charge grovelling in her study on liturgies, sermons and ‘paperwork’! The house also offers hospitality to visiting preachers, workshop leaders and other overnight guests. And the large garden has hosted fetes, animal blessing services and teddy bears picnics.

In 2003, when I was appointed Priest-in-Charge of the Billingborough Benefice in the Diocese of Lincoln, my husband was, at the same time, appointed Vicar of Bourne, ten miles down the road. The diocese informed me that they would rent out or sell my vicarage, and when I made it clear that I was not a ‘commuting vicar’, they offered to provide me with a ‘base’ in the benefice. But, to my mind, no rural clergy person worth their salt is non-resident among their people, unless there are really compelling reasons, and to be truly resident, I needed bedrooms for the family, a kitchen, bathroom .... well, in short, a house. I knew, from previous experience, that the parsonage house was going to be very important to the quality of ministry that I could offer. So I sat down and wrote an impassioned plea for the retention of the vicarage. To my amazement and relief, the diocese agreed, though it was clear that they thought it a bit strange. The archdeacon said that it would not suit him. He would want to sleep in his own bed. As he was senior clergy and I was a newly hatched incumbent, I forbore to ask him whose bed he thought I was going to sleep in! Some parishioners were also confused by my home arrangements, but they soon got the idea; especially when it became clear that the vicarage was to be a place of hospitality and fellowship.

None of the five parishes (and six churches) that I serve has a church hall. Village halls are available to hire, but, while that is useful, it is not the same as having a place where you can leave your stuff, and use for what you want, when you want. Nowadays, four of my churches have coffee making facilities and a social area and soon three will have a loo. However, at the time of my appointment there was just one outside toilet between the six. The space provided by the vicarage has been a vital part of my ministry.

*Do I really live here?* Well, it is fully furnished. There is food in the fridge, clothes in the wardrobe, books, toys and clutter. I like being married, and go to Bourne at least four nights a week. However, for major festivals this is where the family gathers. My daughter sings in the church choir here, and has no hang-ups about having two homes. And this is definitely the ‘sleep-over’ house.

*Would I use the house in this way if the family lived here all the time?* Pretty well. I would need sole use of the utility room - so the charity shop, which is the only activity that requires a fair amount of permanent space, would have to move elsewhere. But otherwise I feel that family and benefice can live side by side without falling out, and actually benefit from the experience. Of course parameters have to be drawn in any situation where you work from home; and my parishioners know better



than to come calling on my day off, unless it is an emergency. In both our vicarages we have a created a family room upstairs so that the children (and us) are able to hang out with privacy. This is all made possible by the fact that the house is a decent size. It was built in 1847, and the rooms are spacious and practical without being barnlike.

*The future?* Well, that is uncertain. Until recently the word was that ‘spare’ parsonage houses would be sold to finance parochial ministry. This was very worrying for us, as the Deanery plan is to replace my full time stipendiary ministry with a half time, *possibly* stipendiary post, when I move on. While someone might come to this area for a part time post if there was a house for duty in the package, we fear that it would not be very attractive proposition if the priest had to buy a property. In any interregnum, my OLM curate would need to organise the day to day running of the benefice. For personal reasons he cannot do that from his own home. He currently uses the vicarage for all his meetings, and the study is in many ways a parish office. We hear on the grape vine that the prevailing approach to parsonage houses may be changing for the better, but we don’t know for certain. It may be time soon for another impassioned plea to the diocese!

*The Revd Anna Sorenson is Priest-in-Charge of Billingborough Benefice, Lincoln Diocese*

**East Coker Vicarage****Ian White**

The Bath & Wells Diocese's decision to sell the vicarage at East Coker first came to the attention of the parish in 2009. The Priest in Charge, the Revd Roger Burt, had announced his intention to retire at the end of May 2010. The diocese had plans at that time to merge the United Benefice of East Coker with that of West Coker, to create what they at the time referred to as a Local Ministry Group. Their intention was that the half-stipend post occupied by Mr. Burt would be replaced by a House for Duty post, resident elsewhere in the parish, and that the vicarage should be sold.

A group of parishioners was formed to liaise with the diocese on their plans. This group was a separate entity from the PCC, but there were of course very close links with the PCC. The group made strong representations against selling the vicarage, and discussions went on over some months. Not the least of the points we made was that it made no sense to sell off the vicarage and then buy another property to provide a dwelling for a minister elsewhere in the village, a scheme that was bound to result in greater, not less cost.



From the end of May 2010, when the Revd Roger Burt retired, the parish duly went into vacancy. Three members of the Vicarage Group had by then been elected onto the PCC, and now acted as a sub-committee of the PCC with responsibility for continued liaison with the diocese.

At some point, the diocese changed its plan to create a Local Ministry Group. Its intention then became one of joining the two United Benefices into one United Benefice with a Priest in Charge resident in West Coker, and an associate priest in a House for Duty post at East Coker. This post was in due course advertised. The difference between the single United Benefice and the Local Ministry Group was never satisfactorily explained.

In late 2010, the Diocesan Secretary contacted us with a new proposal. This was that the diocese, instead of selling off the vicarage, would lease it to the parish at a peppercorn rent. The parish would then lease the vicarage back to the diocese for use as a residence for the House for Duty post. This would allow the diocese to remove the vicarage from the parsonages list, which had been the main aim of the proposal to sell it off.

There followed a period of negotiation between the PCC and the diocese over some significant details. The period of the lease was extended from an original ten years to twenty years. The diocese agreed to pay to the parish for maintenance of the building an amount equal to the average they spent on maintenance of vicarages across the diocese. The rent from a separately-let annexe would be passed to the parish, and the adjacent field, known as the Glebe Field would be included in the arrangements, but on a separate lease.

Eventually, the Revd Charles Hatton was appointed to the House for Duty post, with the intention of moving in to the vicarage in early June 2011. It was therefore necessary to carry out a great deal of work on the internal state of the vicarage. This included completely replacing the kitchen and bathroom, and extensive redecoration throughout the property. This work was carried out by a small number of parishioners and one professional decorator. The diocese assisted with some of the funding for this work. The Revd Charles Hatton and Alison moved into the vicarage in early June 2011.

The completion of any contractual agreement between the diocese and the PCC cannot take place until after the completion of the pastoral scheme to merge the two benefices. In the meantime, the arrangements are being operated under 'as if' conditions. Charles and Alison are delighted with the building. The parish are delighted to have saved the vicarage from being sold off. The majority of the liaison and negotiation has been carried out by a few members of the PCC, since the diocese insisted, reasonably, that any letting contract must be between themselves and the PCC, rather than any other group.

The pastoral scheme is making its slow progress, somewhat delayed by objections being received by the Church Commissioners. Until the scheme is in place, we continue to operate arrangements on an 'as if' basis, which, so far, is working well. It must be emphasised that the proposal to adopt this leasing arrangement originated with the diocese, and many of the features of it are based on a similar arrangement that exists in respect of the Bishop's Palace at Wells.

*Ian White is a churchwarden at St. Michael's, East Coker, Somerset*

A morning mist shrouds Asia across the Bosphoros. The water takes on the colour of the mist. The silvery greyness reminds me of the morning fens in Lincolnshire; then, perched on its mound, the Cathedral of Lincoln heaves into view: a creation of beauty cloaking something not so beautiful.

Let us put aside the idea of religious supremacism from the horrors of that violent supremacism so evident in the news, and look at the phenomenon in its lighter reaches - in the form of Lincoln Diocese apparatchiks. We think that supremacism is a phenomenon far from home, in another land, in another community, and most certainly very far from Lincoln. Some Anglicans think of supremacism as the domain of centralised Vatican authoritarianism, or of extreme Eastern Orthodox or Protestant fundamentalism, or even worse, of those disturbed areas of North Africa and the Arab world. But supremacism "light", under our very noses, has taken up residence in the Diocese of Lincoln. It is a supremacism, once established, that suppresses decent souls and strangulates the Church and society.

In recent years, more and more property of the English Church has ceased to be the property of the parish or to fall under the incumbency of the parish. We see dioceses now governed by well paid bureaucrats arriving in parishes and dictating what should happen to an old property such as a rectory or other parsonage. This has proven a catastrophe for the Church and her parsonages. It is a catastrophe whose benefits seem only to enrich the coffers for detached episcopal ideas and bureaucratic interference in the practical management and incumbency of the parish.

Such an intrusive and unwelcome aspect of supremacism recently struck a parish in the Lincolnshire fens. The "priest-in-charge" is out doing his rounds. The diocesan apparatchik appears unannounced. The apparatchik brazenly gives himself access to the rectory gardens, and starts hacking away at magnificent creepers growing up the wall of the rectory. Amongst the plants is a Climbing Hydrangea. As readers already know, this vine is a robust plant with wonderful flowers like round white lacy caps. It was introduced to the British archipelago from the Far East. The Climbing Hydrangea tolerates the shade and makes a perfect parsonage vine that does not need too much tending.

Not so in this case. By the time the priest had returned to his much loved garden the diocesan apparatchik had already, not only decapitated and hacked down the vine, but also hacked out its roots. The diocesan vandal claimed that the vine and other plant species would destroy the rectory.

If this were not a case of bureaucracy perpetually keeping itself employed, what on earth is? If this were not a case of nascent supremacism, what is? The urbanised hacker soon went back to his city, confident he had carried out his responsibilities. No doubt his day's destruction was written up as a report of great activity in which he

claimed to have saved "diocesan" property from nature's wear and tear - yet another colossal ignorant given physical power in the Church.

The priest, who is perhaps the most knowledgeable horticulturist in the Church of England, was so taken aback and distressed, he could hardly speak after the apparatchik had departed. He was sickened to the core. I asked the priest why he did not accost the bureaucrat and send him packing - as I would have done. He explained that this would possibly cost him his "job" - at which stage I was sickened to the core. This neo-bureaucracy cannot claim to support the *pastoralia* of the Church. It is an encumbrance to the mission of the Church.



*An Istanbul parsonage and garden*

Supremacism may seem foreign to many English parishes. Sadly supremacism has become part and parcel of some diocesan governance. It creeps up on all of us - almost unnoticeably. But the C of E, like most churches, is about doing good. She is redemptive in all her labours and in her vast work throughout the kingdom. Her clergy, her monastics, her wardens, her councils, her teachers, her doctors and nurses, her chaplaincies in prisons, hospitals, schools, universities, her elected synods, and

much else are all about good in the nation and in the world. Some insensitive neo-diocesan bureaucrats may have fallen from goodness. Most people have not.

Were a diocesan official ever to turn up at The Parsonage in Istanbul, and attempt to hack at parsonage plants, he would be firmly named for what he is - a bullying destructive supremacist - and sent running with a foot up his backside, and perhaps a switch to lash him too. The consequences? Deal with them later! Fight the good fight! Supremacism stinks. It is not Anglican. It is not Jesus. We will have none of it; so be gone from our parsonage gardens ye hackers!

*Canon Ian Sherwood OBE is Chaplain of St. Helena's Istanbul, with Christ Church Pera, and All Saints Moda, and Apokrisiarios of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople*

**A Local Place of Retreat****Tony Hodgson**

I am very fortunate to live quite near a beautiful Georgian rectory which is still in use. It is a short bike ride and a fair sized walk away along lanes and across fields. I have been invited to visit this rectory on a monthly basis for a quiet day.

When I arrive, which is usually around 10 o'clock, I am given possession of the gracious and spacious drawing room. It faces South and the view consists of mature trees and shrubs and the lovely old wall covered in parts with ivy which surrounds the rectory garden. On each occasion that I have been there the sun has streamed through for at least part of the day and the windows are large enough to let in plenty of light.

There are no formalities: I bring my own lunch which I may or may not share with whoever is there. Sometimes lunch is accompanied by a quiet conversation between the Rector and myself. Sometimes I eat lunch on my own and on one occasion, when there were both members of the family and a guest, we all had a lively exchange.

This did not seriously disrupt the quality of peace which the house breathes. I am not aware of being in any way an intruder as the Rector is often on her rounds in her six parishes or getting on in her well-stocked study and there is another family room complete with telly which can be used by other members of the family.

Although in the winter I am using their heating, there is no charge, and if I have offered money I know that it will be given away to charity. There is always a welcome and an air of hospitality in the home.

As more and more people are looking for places near at hand where they could be quiet, this might well be a very good use for some more of our fine, traditional parsonages.

25<sup>th</sup> February 2012

*Tony Hodgson helped to refound the Little Gidding community in the 1970s, and was cofounder of the Rural Theology Association, Christian Rural Concern and Save Our Parsonages*



*This is the full text of the document we sent to the dioceses this year (see comments in Director's review, page 4).*

### **Parsonage Retention Principles**

Save Our Parsonages is not ideologically opposed to the sale of older parsonages. It is opposed to their unnecessary and unwise disposal. We consider that houses have too often been sold on inadequate grounds, that there has been insufficient attention given to viewing the whole scene and weighing the various interests before a decision is taken. We also know from our members' comments that many feel there has been insufficient consultation and discussion with parishioners about the fate of their parsonage. We have on the basis of our observation and experience put together a set of principles which we hope may be useful when the time comes to consider the future of a particular house.

1. **General:** clergy vary in age, taste, style of ministry, capacity and size of family. It is wiser to retain some larger houses in every diocese.
  - The house can be a visible sign of the incumbent's presence and position as leader of the local church. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century church, hall and parsonage were often placed together as the focus for the local mission. Nowadays proximity to the church carries the advantage of security for the church building and a guaranteed sympathetic neighbour.
  - The house is both the clergy and family home, and the working base. It has been, and should still be, a strong symbol of the presence of the Church and a house in which the local church and community have an interest.
  - Hospitality has been and is seen as a sign of Christian welcome, to be exercised in palace and parsonage.
  
2. **Reasons given** for changing or selling an existing house:
  - Owing to pastoral reorganisation it is not wanted for an incumbent. But the parish will in some cases have a need for a Church house, for example to house a self-supporting minister. This should be encouraged and respected. In an enlarged benefice there may be a case for a larger rather than a smaller house to be retained.
  - Comfort of the parson and family. After the second world war this was a major reason. It rarely is today and most of the remaining older houses are very manageable, and often preferred by clergy even when more expensive to run (see below).
  - Running costs: some older houses can be expensive to maintain on the grounds of large size or dilapidation. Sensible investment will reduce these costs. There is no rule of thumb here. Some older houses cost no more than newer ones. Dilapidation may be due to lack of routine maintenance. As to the parson's running costs, newer is

not necessarily cheaper. Clergy will also weigh any loss in warmth against the gains in use and attractive living.

- **Cost of replacement:** When a house is replaced, historically there has been little gain and often even a net loss. Despite the popularity of old vicarages, the Church has not benefited as it should have and much of the gain, where houses have been sold, has gone to private buyers. All new builds have an environmental impact which needs to be taken into account.
- **Sale of houses not to be replaced:** there will be an immediate cash gain. At the same time an appreciating asset has been lost for ever, so that over the years of parsonage sales the Church has now lost a huge capital sum, as well as a footprint in communities which it may never be able to replace in the future if needs change. **Environmental audit:** older houses are often better built with materials sourced locally. Today's building practice is less environmentally sustainable in terms of the 'embodied energy' involved in building and shorter length of life. The benefits of maintaining existing housing stock are underrated when conducting environmental audits.

### 3. **Gardens:**

Many clergy see gardening as a chore, and have no inclination towards it. Older houses generally have gardens, which require some cost or effort to maintain. Against that parishes have often been able to make use of parsonage gardens for fetes, meetings, and other activities, which has helped them to meet the share of Church costs increasingly demanded of them, as well as keeping the Church at the heart of the community. There are even some clergy who find in gardening a healthful activity and a way of demonstrating care for God's world, a place to grow good food, vegetables, fruit and so on, even to point to the way in which heaven is found on earth.

### 4. **Questions** a diocese should look at without bias:

- Is the decision a result of any ideological agenda aimed at housing all clergy equally?
- Is the pressure coming from just one individual priest? In our view a decision should never be taken in the interest of one incumbent, but for future incumbents and the community as a whole.
- What is the view of the PCC?
- What is the view of the congregation?
- What is the view of the wider community?
- Is the parish or local community willing to assist in maintenance costs of an older or larger parsonage?
- What will be the impact on the local mission of the Church?
- Can a replacement be bought or built which will satisfy the general requirements set out in paragraph 1?
- Should a 'redundant' house be kept and let out?

## CODE OF PRACTICE LETTER

*This is the text of the covering letter with which we sent our earlier 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 (revised October 2010)**

This code of practice sets out a procedure to be adopted by 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’), when considering the future of a parsonage.

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 it is first 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 shall 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 value of the house as a symbol of Church in community and as a tool for mission;

(v) 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 between all parties.

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 ongoing maintenance of the existing parsonage is agreed to be significantly higher than the diocesan average, the PCC shall be given the opportunity

to identify additional funds to assist the diocese in maintenance. A local trust fund may be the solution.

8. If unanimous agreement cannot be reached, the matter must be put to arbitration, either in agreed manner or under the appeal process to the Church Commissioners.

9. 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 those proceeds should 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). If compensation is agreed, the proceeds shall, to the extent necessary, be so 'ring fenced'. It is recognised that the loss of a parsonage may reduce fundraising opportunities and mean potential increased costs to the parish.



