

Chairman's Letter

DEAR FELLOW MEMBER

I am afraid that, for a number of reasons, we have not been able to produce the Autumn edition of *Ecclesiology Today*. On behalf of the Council, I apologise for this. However, the January edition is now in preparation, and promises to be full of good things.

Here, however, is the latest issue of *Church Crawler*, published separately I know that this round-up of news items is much appreciated, and our thanks are due to Phil Draper for his continuing efforts to ferret out news and pull it all together. Do carry on sending him news clippings which you think might be of interest.

We are also pleased that English Heritage have very kindly agreed to provide members of the Society with a free copy of the latest *Conservation Bulletin*. This issue is devoted to places of worship, and I believe you will find it of considerable interest.

Since I last wrote, we have had a successful Annual Conference, and a very different but equally successful 125th Anniversary event at Charterhouse. A particular pleasure on the latter occasion was the presence of our President and most of our Vice-Presidents. There will be more about these events in the next edition of *Ecclesiology Today*.

I and the other Council members much enjoyed meeting so many of you on these two occasions, and it was very helpful hearing your ideas as to how the Society might develop. Please always feel free to drop us a line with your thoughts.

With all good wishes

Trevor Cooper
Chairman of Council

Annual Dykes Bower Lecture – Tuesday 7 December

Our annual Dykes Bower Lecture is being held on Tuesday 7 December at Christ Church, Spitalfields, in conjunction with the Friends of that church. A separate leaflet is enclosed, and explains all. Members of our Society pay the discounted rate, guests pay the full rate. This should be a fascinating evening, and make a fine end to our anniversary year. We look forward to seeing you.

This issue of Church Crawler was completed in early September. We apologise for the delay in issuing it, which will mean that some of the news items date back a few months.



Leicester church gutted

Fire ripped through a disused Leicester church causing thousands of pounds of damage on 30th March. At its height more than 60 fire-fighters battled to control the blaze in St Augustine's Church, Fosse Road North. Eyewitnesses first spotted smoke billowing from the church at about 3pm. Minutes later the roof was engulfed in flames. Ten fire engines and five specialist units, including an aerial ladder, went to the scene and fire-fighters began pumping thousands of gallons of water on to the burning building, including supplies from the nearby River Soar. Hundreds of people watched as the flames took hold and thick plumes of smoke rose into the air.



St Augustine's before the fire (picture taken 11 March 2004)

No-one was injured, although neighbouring streets, the nearby Empire pub and the Tesco Express petrol station were evacuated amid fears the 40ft-high building's gable end would collapse. Investigators are investigating the cause, but only last December fire-fighters warned that arsonists were dicing with death when three fires were

deliberately started in three days. There have been several other arson attacks this year. The former Church of England building, built 1901-2 to the designs of R.J & J. Goodacre and completed in 1912, closed in 2002 and had recently been earmarked for flats, but it could now be demolished.



Bats & not just in the belfry...

Rare bats have taken over St Hilda's Church in Ellerburn, North Yorkshire and could force the small medieval church to close. Natterer's bats were getting through tiny gaps in the walls. But UK & European laws state the bats cannot be removed from their roosting place – causing the small but active congregation to fear their days are numbered. One member of the congregation of 11 believes she became ill because of bat droppings in the church.

The Revd Dave Clark said "There's a huge fine if you interfere with the bats. They're better protected than we are. There's bat urine on the old woodwork and little black spots of bat dung on the walls, and we have to sweep and clean and sweep and clean, but even then we can't get it all off. We will have to close for health and safety reasons. It would turn the church into a bat sanctuary." However Simon Christian, conservation officer for English Nature, said there were no known health hazards associated with British bats and no reason the church should be



St Hilda's, Ellerburn

forced to close. He said: “St Hilda’s is an historic church in a beautiful setting. English Nature are keen to find an acceptable solution for churchgoers whilst safeguarding the local population of bats.”



MPs urge greater effort to retain redundant churches

During a debate on 24 May, MPs urged that more should be done to prevent disused churches from being demolished. Labour’s David Taylor (Leicestershire NW) said 10% of Anglican churches have been lost as places of worship since 1969. More than 300 have been demolished, a quarter of which were listed buildings. He said: “The Churches Conservation Trust should be given greater resources to protect threatened churches, especially those in rural areas where alternative uses are difficult to find but their historic interest, architectural quality and landscape value are often of the utmost importance to local communities.” Tory John Bercow (Buckingham) said demolition was “an admission of failure. In almost every imaginable scenario, with a degree of commitment and imagination, it ought to be possible to refurbish a potentially redundant church so it can be made available to young people, for amateur dramatics or other useful indoor activities.” Labour’s Gordon Prentice (Pendle) said he found it “very dispiriting” when graveyards next to abandoned churches were neglected “when the church is spending money on bishops’ palaces”. Sir Stuart Bell, replying for the Church Commissioners, said 332 “high quality and important” churches have been placed in the care of the trust, which the commissioners have funded to the tune of £6.4 million. Demolition was “a last resort” but 366 have been knocked down. Selling redundant churches has raised £33m since 1969, with 80% of that money passed back to the local diocese “for the use of the living church”.



St Wandregesilius church after the fire (exterior picture courtesy of CJ Harrison)

Arson destroys C13 Norfolk church

St Wandregesilius Church in Bixley was gutted by fire, caused by vandals on 13 May. The church, which dates back to 1272, is a shell of its former self, with pews reduced to ashes and just a few beams left of the roof. Rev Robert Parsonage admitted he did not know what the future held “The damage is quite substantial — it’s a real tragedy.”

Fire-fighters were unable to prevent extensive damage taking place. Eleven fire vehicles attended the blaze at its peak, with one gas cylinder inside the church exploding at one point. Fire service spokesman Graham Joy said fire-fighters had a lucky escape. "If the cylinder had gone up when they were inside it could have been very unpleasant for the crews," he said.

The church had services some four or five times a year and was lit by candles. It is the only one in Britain to be dedicated to St Wandregesilius, an obscure seventh-century abbot of a French monastery and patron of Flemish weavers. The pictures shown tells the story better than words.



Foreign News

In March more than 2000 Romanians protested against plans to demolish a 1960s communist mausoleum in Carol Park in central **Bucharest** to make way for a huge orthodox cathedral that would hold four to five thousand worshippers. Communism saw some 18 churches demolished in Bucharest alone, some as late as in the 1980s.

Following our earlier report, there was another fire in March at the all-male monastic enclave of **Mount Athos** which damaged the bell-tower of the **Protatou** Church but



The Cathedral at Riga

officials said the blaze was extinguished before it could spread. The fire broke out just before midnight and it took fire-fighters nearly three hours to extinguish it. The building, which dates to the 15th century, serves as the central church for the 20 Orthodox monasteries on the peninsula.

Officials closed **Riga's** Dome Cathedral, which dates from the 13th century, after authorities discovered the tourist attraction was in danger of collapsing, according to the Latvian Culture Ministry. The cathedral is the largest place of worship in the Baltics. It has one of Europe's biggest organs, with 6,768 pipes, and concerts at the cathedral draw thousands each year. Two of the eight columns supporting the cathedral's roof have 30- to 36-foot cracks, and there is evidence that the ground beneath one of them is unstable, said French architect Bruno Deslandes, who conducted a three-month assessment. In addition, the cathedral's roof is supported by rotten wooden beams and there are sections insulated with asbestos. Fixing the problems could cost more than £10 million and take as long as eight years.



The Cathedral at Shanghai, from an old postcard

Shanghai's former Anglican cathedral, spiritual home of Britain's colonial classes in the Far East for almost a century, was handed back in June to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official title of the state-approved protestant Church in China, after

years of communist neglect, in response to a surge in support for Christianity in China. The Government intend to clear the debris of half a century of official occupation and, they say, re-install mahogany fittings to the interior to match Sir Gilbert Scott's original design. They even hope to rebuild the spire. Situated in old Shanghai's international settlement, the Anglican church has a red brick and white stone frontage, which would not be out of place in an English suburb. For 90 years it gave spiritual solace to Britons and others a long way from home as Shanghai grew into one of the world's largest port cities. The cathedral was closed after the city was 'liberated' by the communists in the civil war in 1949. For much of the time since it has been a police station and latterly a visa office. Tess Johnston, a former US diplomat and expert on the city's colonial era buildings, said: "If you know what a Victorian 'high church' looks like, that's what the old photographs show - all dark mahogany, altar railings, the lot. I hope that the authorities have the wood and the know-how."

A planned A\$15 million redevelopment unveiled for Western Australia's **Perth** Catholic cathedral, which has remained unfinished since it opened 139 years ago, will involve expanding the building with graceful curved sides and twin towers flanking the



St Mary's RC Cathedral, Perth, Australia



St Mary's RC Cathedral, Perth, Australia

entrance, boosting the cathedral's capacity to 1200 people. Archbishop Barry Hickey said St Mary's had needed work for some time, as parts of the building had rising damp and structural weakness. "The old sections of the cathedral are deteriorating and we would have had to spend millions to fix them, so rather than do that, we decided to complete the building," he said. Under the plan, the front and bell-tower from the original 1865 building will be retained along with additions built in the 1920s. The middle section of the original building will be demolished and rebuilt, subject to permission from the Australian Heritage Council. The design, by Perth architect Peter Quinn, will aim to integrate the three eras of the cathedral's history.

Up to 30,000 people gathered in central **Dresden** in June to observe the final stages of the reconstruction of the landmark Frauenkirche church, destroyed in the massive



The Frauenkirche, Dresden

Allied bombing of the city during the Second World War. A massive 28-tonne cupola and replica golden cross were lifted into place by crane, marking the final phase in an 11-year exterior restoration programme. The cross was funded by the 'Dresden Trust' as an act of British-German reconciliation; the silversmith who built the new cross is the son of one of the British bomber pilots. The baroque Frauenkirche had dominated Dresden's skyline for two centuries after it was first built in 1743 but collapsed two days after the Allied raids. For more than four decades under the former communist eastern German regime, the site remained derelict, its 6,000 tonnes of stone coming to be regarded as a symbol of the war.

A fifteenth-century statue of Moses on the facade of the Doge's Palace in St Mark's Square was one of several statues vandalised with a hammer in **Venice** over a long

weekend at the end of June. Italian news reports said 38-year-old man was taken to hospital for treatment. Il Redentore and Venice's former cathedral San Pietro di Castelli were also damaged.



Other news in brief

Major changes are planned at **All Saints Kings, Heath Birmingham**, a large spreading Victorian church originally by F.Preedy and extended several times including work by J.A.Chatwin. Plans for the church include a doctors' surgery, pharmacy and coffee bar. More details on <http://www.allsaintskingsheath.org.uk/> Another church with major development plans is **St Martin-in-the-Fields**, Trafalgar Square, London. The plans include a circular glazed dome structure giving lift access to the rooms below ground.

St John the Baptist Church in **Ruyton-XI-Towns** suffered £2000 damage from stones to stained glass windows in March. The vicar, the Rev Les Foster, said "they must have thrown pretty hard because they had to smash a sheet of clear glass - put over the stained glass to protect it - before they could get at the leaded lights." In 1998 vandalism at the same Shropshire church cost £15000 to repair.

The Church of St Mary in **Ingestre**, Staffordshire, reopened in March following a £580,000 repair programme after being closed by an infestation of death watch beetles in 2000. The Grade I-listed building is thought to be the only church outside London designed by Wren.

People living at **Durrington** on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire are at odds with the RC Diocese of Clifton. In the late 1950s people from all denominations raised £140,000 for Our Lady Queen of Heaven's Catholic church which opened in 1961. Villagers now resent that they are being asked for £150,000 to buy their building back from

the church which closed it in September 2003. Villagers plan to use the building as a community centre for the whole of Durrington.

Experts Fondedile Foundations who have worked on some of England's most famous landmarks are being called in to stabilise **Beverley** Minster's crumbling foundations. Concerned church leaders sought specialist help because the Minster's 700-year-old nave walls are gradually moving apart, causing its vaults to flatten. The deterioration of the Minster's chalk foundations is being blamed for the movement in the walls, which has continued over the centuries, although collapse is not foreseen as yet. The decaying foundations are made up of random sized blocks of chalk. As a result of exploratory excavations last year, engineers are proposing to inject cement grout into gaps in the foundations. They are confident it will stabilise the building and put a stop to the walls moving.

And following **previous Church Crawler reports . . .**

Devon parishioners rejoiced on 2 August when they celebrated the first service back in their newly refurbished church in **Braunton**. "It is good to be home," was repeated by many of the 150-strong congregation which flocked to St Brannock's Parish Church to worship there again, little more than a year after fire devastated the 13th century building, as we reported previously. The final bill is expected to reach around half-a-million pounds after skilled craftsmen were employed to clean and restore the fire, soot and smoke-damaged timbers, glass and stonework. Some features destroyed by fire can never be replaced, such as a 17th-century Jacobean gallery and the organ housed in it. Three juveniles, aged at the time 10, 11 and 12, were given 12-month supervision orders after admitting starting the fire.

The vicar and wardens of St Mary and All Saints parish church in **Trentham**, Staffs were ordered to pay costs estimated at

£20,000 after a Lichfield diocesan consistory court ruled in July they had moved the font and carpeted over rare floor tiles without permission.

Mr D. Dean, **Waltham Abbey** Librarian, reports that almost all the damage in the axe attack which we reported in a previous Church Crawler has been skilfully repaired, and the church remains open to visitors. Their only remaining problems are the "hobnail-booted squirrels in the vestry roof"!!



STOP PRESS

In October was published the important *Building faith in our future*, a 'green paper' from the Church Heritage Forum, which aims to celebrate Church of England church buildings and the achievements of the volunteers who maintain them. The paper also aims to awaken greater understanding of



how church buildings contribute to community and social cohesion and to seek partnership to sustain those achievements for the future.

It is available from the Church of England website, www.cofe.anglican.org – click on ‘About the church’ and then ‘Built Heritage’. Or write for a free copy to the Council for the Care of Churches at Church House, Westminster, SW1P 3NZ.



MORE STOP PRESS

On 25 October the House of Lords debated the wider use of historic churches. Speaking for the Government, Lord McIntosh the Heritage Minister congratulated those responsible for *Building Faith in our Future*, and said that the Government already accepted a good deal of the analysis of the problem and many of the solutions.

Lord Harrison raised a point we are likely to hear more of over the coming years, asking “Do the Government believe it is right to suggest to the Church, as the quid pro quo for receiving these [government] grants, a programme of widening the access to the broader community.”

On behalf of the Government, Lord McIntosh agreed that Government repair grants make ‘an important contribution’ and recognised that ‘our historic churches are legitimate public attractions’. But, interestingly, he went on to say that “we cannot make access a condition [of grants] because we must consider the merit of the repair works first, but, certainly within the limits of the directions which we can give to

the Heritage Lottery Fund and to English Heritage, access is clearly an important consideration”.

He made it clear that no new money was being promised but welcomed the general thrust of the debate towards wider community use: “without actually promising the £20 million for which the Church of England asked last week, we shall do everything in our power to continue with the collaboration, if I may put it that way, between Churches and government over the best use of our historic churches for all our people.”

Finally, members of the Society will be pleased to know that our recent publication, *How do we keep our parish churches?* received favourable mention, though less pleased to hear that it was apparently published by the Ecclesiology Society!

The debate is on the internet at <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk>



And finally . . .

I could not write this article successfully without you the members keeping me informed of what is happening in your area. However the views expressed are often my own or those of contributors, not the EcclSoc.

I can be contacted on Email at churchcrawler@blueyonder.co.uk or by conventional means at Phil Draper, 10 Lambley Road, St George, Bristol BS5 8JQ. Please send articles, newspaper clippings, with photographs too preferably, together with a SAE for return if required.

This issue of *Church Crawler* is published by the Ecclesiological Society, PO Box 287, New Malden, KT3 4YT. Website: www.ecclsoc.org. *Church Crawler* normally appears as part of the Society’s thrice-yearly journal, *Ecclesiology Today*, but is published separately on this occasion due to the delay of the Autumn 2004 issue of the journal. The views expressed here are those of the author and/or contributors, not necessarily those of the Society or its officers.