



# REPORT

Sanctuary UK

## First Consultation at King's College Cambridge 7-8 April 2008

**Thirty-eight participants from parishes across the length and breadth of England assembled in King's College Cambridge in the afternoon of Monday 7 April to begin a 'structured brainstorm' around an idea. When they left 24 hours later, most had resolved to meet again in the autumn – hopefully with many others - to continue what had proved a multi-layered, engaging and educative discussion. The idea remained just that – an idea. But now it was owned by a significant number of experienced people who felt they were in at the start of something vitally important, both for the ministry of the Church of England and for the threatened future of its built heritage.**

### **Context**

Sanctuary UK was the result of the sabbatical musings in 2006 of Canon Lawrence Mortimer of Coventry Diocese. He had actually been mulling over for some years what he considered 'obvious conclusions' from his experience of setting up a Trust to launch a millennium exhibition in one of his churches. His sabbatical research, which attempted to interview major heritage stakeholders, was enough to win the encouragement of the so-called Hoare's Bank Group (which at the time convened most of them) to undertake a wider survey of parishes and Friends Groups than his report's earlier pilot. 96% of the respondents from half the Church of England dioceses said they thought the concept should be pursued; (survey results are found in Appendix 3). On the basis of this evidence King's College generously sponsored the residential consultation, and forty potential participants were sought from among the survey respondents, from important heritage churches, from diocesan staff and from heritage organisations. The event was also advertised in the church press.

## Consultation programme

The Consultation programme is found in Appendix 1. The participants (who are listed in Appendix 2) were expected to have read the paper “Sanctuary UK – a national trust for churches involving the local community”. Readers of this report will need to do the same for the following paragraphs to make much sense.

It is available for download at [www.sanctuary-uk.org.uk](http://www.sanctuary-uk.org.uk)

### Session 1 Our experience of heritage management

Lawrence Mortimer welcomed everybody and commented on the significance of the consultation’s timing. It coincided with Sir Roy Strong’s lecture tour (promoting his book *A Little History of the English Country Church*) advocating a thesis not a million light years from that under discussion in the hours ahead. It was a time for thinking radically, and for beginning to take responsibility for things we too readily assumed were the prerogative of experts elsewhere. Roy Strong cogently presented the problem. Sanctuary UK was a tentative first stab at an answer.

Conference facilitator Janet Sewell asked the plenary to divide into small groups to discuss three questions which would enable participants to share their experience and expertise. One story from each group was then shared in plenary.

Every individual was asked to answer the same questions on a proforma to provide an appendix to this report (Appendix 4).

**Share something you see as a significant success in the heritage management of your building(s). This might be an event, or the influence of a particular person, for example.**

*Summary: the thirty or so parish clusters represented were between them responsible for millions of pounds-worth of conservation/ development spending; the energy, enterprise, experience, imagination, diplomatic skills implied – and specified – were enormous.*

**If you dare, share a disaster or negative happening that has affected your building’s agenda.**

*Summary: relationships with Friends groups could be delicate; stress and fatigue relating to building issues (consistory courts etc) easily affected the effectiveness of ministry; a strong negativity towards statutory agencies was expressed, ranging from a resentment at being ‘beholden’, to frustration, to giving up; there was always the waiting for permission rather than the trust of empowerment; absurd ancillary costs.*

**Have you come to this consultation with any dream (or nightmare!) in mind?**

*Summary: Friends schemes and similar fund-raising mechanisms were essential and good practice would be useful to know about; global support for such activity was an interesting idea, especially if it had clout; anxiety about the calibre of Friends’ membership in small communities; need to work on a theology of redundancy.*

### Session 2 “Curates and Curators” - a presentation on Sanctuary UK

Lawrence Mortimer (*pictured right*) gave a Powerpoint presentation summarizing his original paper but leading up to the ‘big question’ – why should anyone want to become a paying subscriber of Sanctuary UK? (Appendix 5 has the full talk.)

In plenary response, the comparison of Sanctuary UK with the National Trust provoked considerable discussion: there was some evidence that in spite of its success the NT was susceptible to slump; it was by definition celebrating the past and precisely not developing old buildings for contemporary use; the NT gave new life to redundant buildings while Sanctuary UK’s concern was for living buildings; but it was indeed a tightly managed and marketed organisation. Comparisons with school PTAs and the Royal Horticultural Society were also explored.

Nobody wanted to go there as far as legal frameworks were concerned, but it was pointed out that – quite apart from Sanctuary UK issues – it might be time for General Synod to revisit PCC legislation.

As far as selling points were concerned, spirituality was clearly a burgeoning market. And we needed to stop apologising about what we already offered, and not be ashamed to give it a value.

The name of Sanctuary UK was scrutinized. In the absence of any formal testing of the name, it was generally considered a good working title.



### Session 3 The Sanctuary UK Association (Getting it to work locally)

Conference facilitator Helen McGowan introduced two short presentations which offered examples of how church and community structures already co-operated to manage local church heritage.

Martin Gorick, vicar of Holy Trinity Stratford-upon-Avon, formed the Friends of Shakespeare's Church five years ago since which time they had raised £1M, mainly from relatively modest donations and grants. The US connection had proved disappointing. Though he was President of the Friends, and there was also substantial PCC representation, everything depended on the choice and calibre of Chairman to keep on top of inevitable tensions. It was also vital to have a handle on charity law.

Jennie Hawks, Project Officer for the Broads and Rivers Open Churches project, spoke about the success of Ludham Church Friends Scheme which had been going since 1993. She said that, although the Rector had purposely nothing to do with the Friends, PCC representation on the group was vital. She thought all churches should have Friends, but whether they should be a separate charity was debatable.

After questions to the speakers, participants were allocated groups to discuss and individually record their answers to three questions. (Appendix 6).

#### **In reality can you envisage decisions being taken about your church building outside of the PCC in the event of a concept like Sanctuary UK being adopted?**

*Summary: yes, but the PCC must retain control of ultimate decision-making; some Friends already too independent or new-agey; good relations need to be formalized; a new platform for conservative leaders (like the PCC!); difficult to empower a dependent poor community; it's going to happen anyway in some form.*

#### **Do you believe that the potential and expertise within your community exists to form a SaFE group? If so, how should it be accountable?**

*Summary: widespread existence of Friends implies 'yes' but will Friends want to become a SaFE; hard enough to get good people on PCC; within multi-churched cities SaFE-clustering would have to happen; need a strong individual as driving force; how to recruit new energy an issue; expertise exists but so does apathy; potential culture clash between old and new guard.*

#### **How easy would it be for you to 'recruit' 50 Sanctuary UK members affiliated to your church @ £30 pa?**

*Summary: Difficult. Possible. Easy. Dream on. Everything depends on how Sanctuary UK and its subscription benefits are marketed.*

Some individual responses were edited into a looping Powerpoint presentation over the lunch period.

### Session 4 Owning the idea and sharing a strategy

Trevor Cooper (*pictured right*), Chair of Council of the Ecclesiological Society, gave an assessment of the consultation. Sanctuary UK was not, he said, the only party in town – he listed some of the many groups involved in church heritage issues and summarized their purpose. It was clear that there was widespread ignorance of this activity among clergy and Friends groups (not least among those present who had owned up to not having read the Building Faith report). The Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division at Church House was an existing fount of knowledge which Sanctuary UK did not need to replicate. Trevor himself had undertaken a number of statistical studies relating to church buildings which were in the public domain.



However, the Sanctuary UK initiative had already revealed a gaping hole in the conduct of the heritage debate, as this was the first instance of getting practitioners 'on the ground' to share their wide variety of experience and expertise (beyond such particulars as tourism). Discussion of the relationship between PCCs and Friends had been far-reaching and fascinating. A tendency to reinvent the wheel was evident in every conversation. There was a manifest case for harnessing all this energy more systematically and sympathetically. Some kind of forum of Friends was called for.

Facilitator Helen McGowan managed a discussion in which the following points were made. Such a federation – which as well as Friends might include Trusts and regional projects - could have a lobbying function, perhaps fronted by a queen bee with profile. It would need a website, mission statement, and a set of aims and objectives, with a timetable and a steering group. Lawrence Mortimer said it was important for the consultation to decide whether such a federation was simply a forum for Friends-like groups or whether it was Sanctuary UK with its more radical agenda of attracting a subscriber-base. There was also the question of whether such a development could possibly succeed on a ‘softly softly’ basis or whether it almost certainly required the risk of a ‘big bang’. From the floor it was noted that the 24 hours had not succeeded in moving Sanctuary UK from ‘concept’ to ‘model’ but that the concept was strong enough to warrant a second consultation soon.

### Action points

- Andy Rider offered Christ Church Spitalfields for an autumn day conference, and agreed to draft a mission statement.
- Martin Dudley said he would draft a budget for Sanctuary UK’s ‘consultation stage’.
- Lawrence Mortimer and the Consultation facilitators would convene a steering group from among those who had expressed interest in being part of such.
- The steering group would meet soon to ‘harness enthusiasm’, consider a profile front-person and/ or Chair, raise necessary funding to meet a provisional budget, be conscious of keeping other agencies in the loop and the possibility of partnerships, organise the autumn day in London and work to attract attendees.
- It was agreed to develop the existing website immediately to include an online discussion forum.
- Helen McGowan would ensure participants received a list of web links to resources relating to built heritage (Appendix 7) and would alert Becky Payne at Church House to their interest.

Lawrence Mortimer and the facilitators were thanked for an inspiring and thought-provoking 24 hours, and warm appreciation was expressed for the generous hospitality and support of King’s College.



### Conclusion

After an ambitious and ground-breaking consultation of experienced practitioners, Sanctuary UK remained ‘just an idea’. It had moved on, however. Where no convincing consensus had emerged on such central questions as ‘what would a subscriber get out of it?’ or ‘would a local association help or hinder the workings of the PCC?’, there was no feeling that the questions themselves were beyond the pale. Rather, they had given the opportunity for others to be explored alongside them. Encouragingly some answers seemed almost within reach, whether they were to be found simply by tapping the experience of another Friends’ group or by pushing the boundaries of Sanctuary UK-thinking just a little bit further. By the end of the consultation, ideas were flowing thick and fast, and there were even the beginnings of financial investment. As someone observed, “Sanctuary UK has legs”.

A point was reached that resonated with the conclusion of Roy Strong’s 2007 Gresham Lecture:

We need one organisation only with a new name, a revised series of community based objectives in tune with where we are now and a radical recruiting drive for members with keen thoughts as to what can be offered because there must be things to offer.

There must be things to offer. Once there is convincing ‘stuff’ which is marketable, Sanctuary UK won’t just have legs it will take wing. Something has to happen to ensure the appropriate and meaningful survival of our unique buildings, and Sanctuary UK offers ordinary people, local communities, a way of doing it.