



Church Times  
13 March 09

Under threat?  
A badger  
in woodland  
near  
Stoodleigh,  
Devon

## Mayfair spa would 'serve Mammon'

by Ed Beavan

**THE DISPUTE** over the future use of St Mark's, North Audley Street, in Mayfair, London, intensified this week, when the diocese of London

revealed that it still had plans to lease the building to the Polish entrepreneur George Hammer. Earlier this year, his planning application to turn it into a health spa was rejected (News, 2 January).

The Archdeacon of Charing Cross, the Ven. Dr William Jacob, this week wrote to Lady Sainsbury, who chairs the Save St Mark's Action Group, stating that the diocese is to consider a proposal to lease the Grade-I listed building to Mr Hammer.

During the Second World War, the church became the spiritual home of American service personnel who were based near by in Grosvenor Square, and became known as "the American church in London". But, by the 1970s, the American congregation had moved out, and the church became redundant.

From 1994 until last year, the church was leased to the Commonwealth Christian Fellowship, which, the Archdeacon says, was unable to carry out essential repairs on the building.

Holy Trinity, Brompton, has offered to restore the church and bring it back to use as "a home to the worshipping Christian community in the West End".

But in his letter to Lady Sainsbury, Dr Jacob said the diocesan finance committee would shortly be meeting to consider a proposal to lease the church to Mr Hammer "with immediate effect". This would mean that he "will take sole responsibility for securing any necessary planning permission for St Mark's".

Outlining the reasons for the decision, Dr Jacob said: "We see no need for a parish church at St Mark's... Mayfair is already well served by another three of our churches."

The scale of restoration needed at St Mark's was "simply not a financial possibility for the diocese", he wrote. The proceeds of the lease "will fund the annual running costs of at least two active parishes elsewhere in London", particularly in areas of considerable social deprivation.

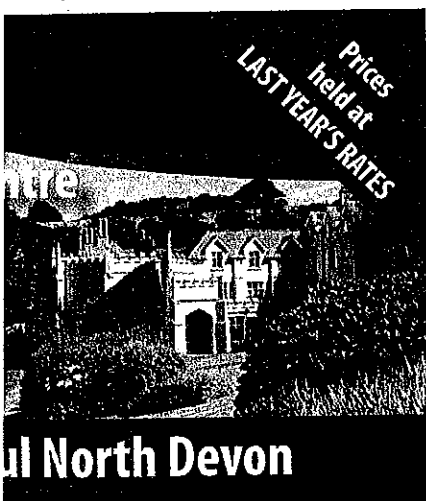
"How can we justify to other, much more deserving parishes, the need to resuscitate a redundant church in Mayfair when it represents a financial drain on the diocese and when there has been no requirement for a parish church there for more than three decades?"

Responding to the Archdeacon, Lady Sainsbury said she was "surprised" to get his letter, and "even more surprised" that it had already been released to the press. She wrote: "The proposal that we put to the diocese does not involve, as you suggest, 'a financial drain on the diocese'. The Campaigners are passionate about keeping this church, restoring it and giving back the glory to God.

"I am deeply disappointed that on this issue the diocese seems to be serving Mammon ahead of God."

Bruce Streather, a lawyer and member of the Save St Mark's group, said the campaign to keep the building for Christian use would continue "as long as we have breath". He said that in 1824 it was conveyed by the Grosvenor family that the church be used "for ecclesiastical practices for ever.

"My view is that a health spa doesn't fit within ecclesiastical purposes. My understanding of the Christian faith is that covenants in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are taken seriously, and I'm disappointed the diocese has breached this for financial gain."



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