

'Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Working Group on Rural Issues'
Tenth National Conference for Rural Catholics, Cambridge. February 10-12 2014

The 10th Rural Catholic conference took place just outside Cambridge from the afternoon of Monday 10th February to lunchtime Wed 12th, ably organised by Frs Robert Miller (Clifton) and Can Harry Doyle (Lancaster) and others. Over 25 resident delegates; priests, deacons, religious and lay, were joined on Tuesday by Bishop Alan Hopes, of East Anglia, as well as others who were present for only part of the conference.

Current Floods

The key speakers included Nick Hardiman (Environment Agency) and Rev Can Peter Mortimer reflecting on current UK floods. Background factors pertaining to the current flood scenario included reflections on current climate, on climate change and on the government's overall budget restrictions (every pound spent on flood protection by the Environment Agency now has to be able to show eight pounds of benefit, a more stringent government policy than before), as well as the power of environmental groups such as RSPB in promoting wetland habitats rather than drained farmlands. The absence of any statutory help for farmers whose livelihood is ruined by flooding, and the absence of statutory help for farm animals, were both noted by conference members. (A later decision was made by the conference to send a contribution to the Addington Fund, an agricultural charity which is working with farmers flooded on the Somerset levels) [see <http://www.addingtonfund.org.uk/news/more/somerset-flooding/>]. We were later led, by Rev Can Mortimer, through an East of England Voluntary Sector Working Group Document, in order to appreciate the various roles which Churches and other Faith groups might undertake in such disasters.

Local Agriculture: Grain

Key speakers who gave us insights into local agriculture were John Latham Snr. and John Latham Jnr., both farmers and experts on the cereal industry. Between them they gave a very full background of political, price and subsidy history of cereals to help us understand the current state of the industry. A very warm welcome and detailed explanation of "Camgrain" awaited us next day on our visit. It is a cooperative grain handling owned and used by over 500 farmers. The logistics, thought and planning behind the multi-million pound grain store consortium were explained. The details of rapid turnaround of grain trucks (6 minutes only on site), drying, cleaning, laboratory operations, optical monitoring of grain (120 000 grains per second optically checked) in preparation for supply of grain especially to the food industry, were very impressive.

Local Agriculture: Pigs

Where grain is in large supply, there pig farmers gather, so it was appropriate also to have a speaker on the UK pig industry. Mick Sloyan, director of BPEX, the pig section of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, led us through recent developments in UK legislation concerning pig care, as well as giving us a good insight into the different ways in which pigs are currently farmed in the UK along with the financial and practical difficulties for farmers in this sector.

Rural Pastoral Topics

Jerry Marshall, the new CEO of **the Arthur Rank Centre**, introduced himself and some aspects of the vision for the ARC. Sited in Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, it is the ecumenical hub of rural ministry in the UK, and houses the national rural Anglican, Methodist and URC chaplains (He invited deeper Catholic input.) and a very good source of wisdom and experience for all who work in rural ministry as well as promoting and helping to develop the UK's rural charities.

Keith Ineson & Fr Tim Bywater (Rural Chaplains) talked on **The Church and the County/Local Show**, inviting both interest in these events for pastoral work with rural communities and for Christian evangelisation and witness.

Jean Hurley and Lindy Head (Rural Parishioners of Clifton Diocese) spoke on **The Small Rural Parish and the "Live Simply" Award**. Both CAFOD's and Ecocongregation's materials were reflected on as well as Jean and Lindy leading us through what was needed for parishes to be awarded the "Live Simply" award (in their instance an impressive church photovoltaic solar panel system).

Terry Stork (Former Brewery Manager, now Advisor 'The Pub is the Hub') talked on **The Village Pub** as community centre, prospective shop and post office and centre of facilities in isolated rural areas. "The Pub is the Hub" is a rural charity supported by the Prince of Wales which seeks to facilitate such centres of community life in isolated villages.

As with previous conferences the background knowledge among participants was high, and the awareness of rural needs was well-honed and compassionate. Question and answer sessions with speakers were lively and challenging. The conference deepened our awareness of developments and current problems, equipping us for ministry and

educating us once more. Prayer and spiritual reflection were helped by the daily Mass and the communal praying of Morning, Evening and Night Prayer. (Next Conference: Garstang, Lancs 9-11 Feb 2015 see www.ruralcatholics.org.uk)
Speakers and Topics (with reference websites):

Nick Hardiman (Senior Coastal Advisor, Environment Agency) **Current Flood protection and Management in England**

Key Background Website <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/>

Rev Can Peter Mortimer (Ecumenical Advisor to bishop of St Edmondsbury & Ipswich) **Responding Pastorally to flooding**

Key Background Website <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/116001539/Guide-to-Engaging-the-vol-sector---v-11>
(East of England Voluntary Sector Working Group Document)

John Latham Snr. (Cereal farmer of several thousands of acres) **View from the Farm Gate**

(Historical/Subsidy/Economic background to current UK grain production) **For some background information see Oxford paper on farming without subsidies** www.ofc.org.uk/files/ofc/papers/08latham.pdf

John Latham Jnr (Chairman of Camgrain and large-scale farmer). **Visit : Grain drying, processing and marketing of a consortium of over 500 farmers** **Key Background Website** <http://www.camgrain.co.uk/>

Keith Ineson & Fr Tim Bywater (Rural Chaplains) **The Church and the County/Local Show**

Key Background Website www.agchap.co.uk

Jean Hurley and Lindy Head (Rural Parishioners Clifton Diocese) **The Small Rural Parish and the "Live Simply" Award**

Key Background Websites <http://ew.ecocongregation.org/> and
<http://www.cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Campaigning-guide/Become-a-LiveSimply-parish>

Jerry Marshall, (CEO, Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh) **Arthur Rank Centre News**

Key Background Website <http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/about-arc/what-we-do>

Mick Sloyan (Director BPEX) **Current Pig Industry in the UK**

Key Background Website <http://www.bpex.org.uk/AboutBpex/default.aspx>

Terry Stork (Former Brewery Manager, now Advisor 'The Pub is the Hub') **The Village Pub is Closing**

Key Background Website <http://www.pubisthehub.org.uk/>

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