

PRIORY HOUSE PURCHASED

TRUSTEES SAVE SITUATION

ACTION WHILST AWAITING FUNDS

PRIORY HOUSE ITS OWN SECURITY

C.T. January 12, 1935

It is good news that by the spirited action and enterprise of the Trustees of the Priory House Appeal, that building has been acquired by these good workers acting for the Church.

This does not mean the desired end has been reached or that the necessity for continued appeals for funds may cease. On the contrary, it is an announcement which means an effective stop-gap has been found, and that by an expedient the building is safe from the hands of the estate promoter and the land from the jerry builder.

Although the meetings of the Trustees have, of course, been private, yet it was simple to read between the lines of the Vicar's notes referring to the matter in his Parish Review, and thereby glean that a situation had been reached which called for drastic action.

The original pleas issued by the Trustees was as follows. It appeared in the local press, and "The Times" made a national appeal. It read as follows: —

In 1929 grave danger threatened Christchurch Priory. The house known as Church Hatch, with two acres of land adjacent to the northern boundary of the churchyard, was sold and there was imminent risk of the site being used for development. Thanks to the generosity of the public the property was acquired and danger for ever averted.

In the last few months a similar danger threatens on the south side of the Priory Church. The property known as "The Priory Estate" has come into the market and offers, if anything, an even greater source of potential danger than threatened in the case of Church Hatch. The house is a large one standing on the site of the old monastic buildings, and the grounds are four and half acres in extent. Incredible as it may appear, yet the walls of the house are in places not more than 6 feet 9 inches away from the south wall of the Priory Church, and it would seem that the church authorities have at present merely a right-of-way along the south side of the church.

There is therefore the gravest danger of the whole south side being ultimately shut in by buildings, whose foundations will abut on to those of the Priory Church. The glorious view of the sea, the Isle of Wight, Hengistbury Head and the meadows will be blotted out, and a similar fate will overtake the equally glorious view of the church itself from Hengistbury Head and Southbourne Cliffs, moreover the interior of the church will suffer irreparably by the darkening of the whole of the windows on the south side.

The sum of £6,000 is required to buy this property. If we can raise the sum of £2,000 before Christmas we are promised another £500, which will enable us to secure a mortgage on the property till the full sum can be collected. We must have this £2,000 before the 18th of December. We urgently appeal to the tens of thousands who know and love the Priory Church for their aid to save this beautiful and peaceful place from commercial exploitation.

This was signed by Mottistone, Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, C. F. Winton, Malmesbury, Esher, Chairman S.P.A.B., J. D. Mills. M.P., Norman Barnes, Mayor of Christchurch, J. R. Edgecombe, Mayor of Bournemouth, and Walter Tapper, A.R.A., F.S.A.

Later, the Vicar (Canon W. H. Gay, R.D.) announced through the columns of his "Parish Review," that a sum of £900 (exclusive of the bequest of the late Mr. Alan Druitt of

£1,000) had been donated. The full list of those who had contributed to that first total was given in the "Christchurch Times" last week.

Canon Gay, at that time, said: "We shall be in a better position next month to say whether the offer of £500 if £2,000 is forthcoming before Christmas has been extended. I hope the offer may be open to Easter."

PRACTICAL TRUSTEES.

Within the last few days the "Christchurch Times" understands the Trustees met in a last endeavour to save the situation, the monies which had been received being insufficient to make secure the ownership of Priory House.

On December 27th last Priory House became vacant, in view of the scheme afoot, but on that date it was apparent that still another scheme must be forthcoming if possession and ownership was to be secured.

At the last minute conference held at the offices of Messrs. J.H. Druitt, of Christchurch, the situation was explored by the trustees under their chairman, the Vicar.

The fact that public interest had been aroused to the extent of £900 showed that, given the necessary time, the purchase money would be forthcoming, but time was the deciding factor.

There was no speedy way to the realisation of the object, for the scheme does not lend itself to an impressive appeal. A number and variety of practical suggestions were discarded, and finally the plan of securing the Priory House upon a mortgage appealed as the soundest plan.

The method is safe, if not swift, and an open southern aspect of Priory Church is by it definitely assured.

The trustees entertained no delusions that the Priory House could be allowed to stand empty while awaiting final demolition, and in the best commercial manner they at once entered into arrangements for a tenant. One was secured in the person of Mr. Cuthbert Watmough, who is said to have secured a lease for 21 years.

In speaking to a representative of the "Christchurch Times" last night, the Vicar said:—

"The Trustees have done everything possible, and it is now by the generous assistance of a good friend that they are enabled to retain Priory House, and they are for the moment content to know that it is safe for all time from the hands of the jerry builder.

TIME AGAIN THE ESSENCE OF THE CONTRACT.

"It is useless to show impatience, the money requisite for the completion of the scheme will come, they are sure of that, but it is of course a matter of time. Whilst they recognise this, there was no time which they themselves might lose."

It was a sound and wise decision to secure it, and we have now to face the matter of removing the mortgage."

When asked if a twenty-one years' lease was not a rather long one, the Vicar replied. "The lease will be terminable at a much shorter term, probably seven years."

A meeting was held this morning (Friday) by the Trustees, in order to settle this point. "The Trustees," said Mr. F. Ricardo to our representative, "are fully alive to the entire desirability of granting a short term lease."

The net result of the whole business is that safety in immediate ownership and future control of the building has been secured. In the meantime, the Vicar, the Trustees, and the subscribers to the Fund, can only hope for generous treatment by the new tenant, Mr.

Watmough. That he genuinely loves the old house is obvious, and that he will be willing to curtail his acquirement of the property at the termination of a short period is to be hoped. The response to the public appeals will then place the Trustees in a position to complete their purchase.

PROVIDING FOR ITS OWN DEMISE.

In the meantime it is understood that the Priory House is providing the funds for its demolition, as a security for the money borrowed.

A strange end to a rather fascinating old building.