



The Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Members' Newsletter MARCH 2015

Welcome

The great news is that, thanks to generous sponsorship from Ecclesiastical, Sarah Crossland and Becky Payne, CVTA now has a new website – www.cvta.org.uk

CVTA Southern Symposium, St. James' Priory, Bristol 18 October 2014

'Partnerships between Churches, Tourism Professionals, Local Authorities, Rural Communities and those of other Faiths'. Since the number of attendees was less than expected, opportunity was taken of adopting more of an interactive approach between presenters and audience, a model which seemed to work well.

The opening keynote address was provided by Professor Terry Stevens, Patron of the Churches Tourism Network, Wales, and an international tourism consultant. The summary which follows is fuller than usual since what Professor Stevens had to give to the audience is worth a wider readership. He spoke about tourism development and its relevance to church visiting from a tourist perspective. The tourist is a consumer and a church visitor is often on a metaphorical as well as actual journey when they

enter a church. Importantly, churches are points of reference in any landscape – markers, destinations, always central to 'place'. He identified 5 trends in current tourism: growth, people seeking happiness, wellness, and signature experiences.

Tourism is the largest and most quickly developing global industry as a direct result of increased mobility, communications, wealth and leisure time. The market is competitive and volatile. Social media impact is powerful – it often takes only 10 seconds to enhance and promote, and equally to destroy. First impressions are critical.

People seek happiness – visitors who are well informed before their visit, welcomed when they arrive, well cared for during it, then leave with positive feelings which in turn they pass on to others and so promote the location.

Wellness Tourism – growing interest in inclusive experiences which embrace mind, body and soul. Our job is to 'awaken curiosity' – not to overload but to provide a spark. Churches are singularly well placed as natural magnets – symbols and

signifiers to satisfy the wellness agenda.

Signature experiences – Terry referred to the principle of progression of economic value and gave the parallel of purchasing a bottle of wine. For many of today's consumers/visitors the wine is not enough; they want to meet the vintner, plant, pick, press and bottle the grape. For church visitors, something extra or special will add value to their visit.

Good to great – something 'good' may be mediocre. It is important to aim for 'great' so that visitors have the most positive experience.

Speaking as a tourism professional, in conclusion Terry referred to hybrid thinking and hybrid solutions. Sometimes a conventional tourist marketing approach is too narrow. He emphasised it was important for churches to be open to new ideas, to seek partnerships, connections and networks across a wide range of organisations so that visitors can make sense of and engage with our churches.

John Savage and John Hirst of Destination Bristol together with David Worthington of the Bristol New Room were the next presenters. The overriding impressions from this tripartite presentation were commitment, enthusiasm and a recognition of partnership.

John Savage as Chair of Destination Bristol for many years has been a key contributor in the city's regeneration. Always positive and passionate about his work, he talked at length about partnerships

bringing resources to bear from different places. John Hirst, also from Destination Bristol, spoke energetically about the huge success of Bristol's re-invention as a tourist destination and as such one of the 'high earners' in the UK's tourist economy. He too emphasised the need for different interest groups to work together and the need to look forward - 'never steer the ship by looking at the wake'!

David Worthington of the Methodist New Room outlined the need to engage with worldwide members and to recognise that the heritage of the past carried the seeds of the future. In particular he felt that volunteers have a vital role to play.

The Revd. Nigel Lacey gave a presentation entitled 'West Wycombe, Open and Closed Churches'. Nigel outlined developments in his on-going study of open and shut churches. To date he has visited and evaluated 500+ churches and always leaves questionnaires. He evaluates each church in terms of a visible churchmanship index, which includes such indicators as whether the church is open, signage, how well ordered it is, what helpful guidance is available to visitors, whether there are candles. He tries to look at churches in clusters or groupings and currently is investigating churches which are recommended by the Small Pilgrim Places Network – an organisation which selects churches for its register based on their qualities of holiness and prayerfulness – www.smallpilgrimplaces.org Questionnaires are often answered and returned stimulating a dialogue between himself and the incumbent,

sometimes leading to churches becoming open more often. Nigel reminded us not to forget that in fact many visitors to churches are local people, seeking solitude and a quiet moment to reflect.

Richard Tulloch – ‘Parish Councils and rural churches in Somerset’. As Church Use and Visitor Adviser, for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, Richard outlined how important the physical building of the church actually is in rural areas where it may be the shared community space. Partnerships with secular organisations are vital at both formal and informal level. Rural church buildings are being seen as increasingly versatile in providing facilities for the location of broadband and space for small local enterprises. He emphasised the fact that work to maximise the asset of the church goes hand in hand with giving it a more secure future.

Martin Goss – Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity and Church and Society Director within Exeter Diocese, spoke passionately about his role networking and partnering across many faiths in the diocese, linked by shared theological values, as well as working with diverse housing, health, food, emergency service groups on a number of projects, sharing values and working together for the common good.

As I hope you will appreciate from this summary this was an extremely informative and stimulating Symposium, all present wish to express their thanks to those who provided the input.

Symposiums for 2015

The Trustees are looking at the possibility of again holding two Symposiums during the autumn of 2015, one to coincide with an event in the West Midlands and the other to be based in the East Midlands. Planning is at a very early stage but members will be kept informed through the next Newsletter.

Church Care Conference -

‘Always Welcome – Interpreting your Church Building’ 30 April 2015
10.00am – 4.30pm at Manchester Cathedral. £40 to include lunch. Details of the programme can be found at www.ChurchCare.co.uk

Conference -

‘Mission Shaped Heritage 16-18 July 2015, Cliff College, Calver, Derbyshire. £175 residential or £48 per day. More information is available at www.methodistheritage.org.uk

CVTA Trustees Meeting 19 January 2015, Wesley’s Chapel, London

At this first meeting of the Trustees following the AGM of October 2014 Canon John Brown was re-elected as Chairman of the Association and Mrs. Carol Roast as the Honorary and Membership Secretary. Mr. Richard Illidge stood down as Treasurer and the Chairman informed Trustees that he would be seeking agreement from them for the appointment of a new Treasurer. Subsequently, Mrs. Lesley Childs, already a Trustee of CVTA agreed to become CVTA’s Treasurer, and this has been ratified by the Trustees.

Next edition: May 2015

Copy to: canonjbrown@mac.com - by 24 April please.