



# ROOF 'N' ROOTS

The Newsletter of the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

SUMMER 2016

Photoshot



Suited up – Kathleen, in 1998, when she was 'introduced' as Baroness Richardson of Calow by Lord Murray of Epping Forest (left) and Lord Soper (right).



Looking back – Kathleen now, in her North London home

## 'IT'S ALL BEEN A GIFT'

**FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CONFERENCE, FIRST FEMALE MODERATOR OF THE FREE CHURCHES COUNCIL AND A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS, SOCIETY TENANT REVd KATHLEEN RICHARDSON SHARES HER STORY**

Born and bred amid the coal and iron fields of wartime Derbyshire, young Kathleen Fountain played darts at the miner's welfare. Later she'd face more challenging targets amid the clipped lawns and carpeted corridors of Westminster.

Kathleen came from the village of Calow. When she later became a peer of the realm, she took her title from that place.

Brought up in a Methodist family, she decided to serve the Church in 1961. 'The

only way for a woman to be involved in full-time work in the Methodist Church was through the deaconess order,' Kathleen explained.

She worked in Rochdale, where she met her future husband, research engineer Ian Richardson. She was in a celibate order, so had to resign to marry Ian.

They moved to Yorkshire and had three children, all girls. But Kathleen felt again 'the pull' to the Church. She became a lay worker in Hertfordshire. 'While I was

there, the Methodist ministry was opened to women,' she remembered. 'It was the next logical step for me. In 1976 I was accepted as a minister.'

It was nearly 20 years later when she was nominated for the lead role at Conference. Kathleen became first woman President in 1992. 'It was quite something,' is how she humbly put it.

What was the feedback? 'That it was time,' said Kathleen. 'That was the most significant thing people were saying. The first women were ordained in 1974, so it had been quite a time coming.'

Her presidency was 'a wonderful year'. She explained, 'In those days, you were expected to visit every district of Britain

## BLOOMIN' GOOD NEWS TO GRAB YOU

Good news and gardening have caused the Society's website to bloom.

A fresh summery look adorns the front page - with positive news stories and a gardening video from The Eden Project. There are more images across the site, too.

'The front page was attractive and informative,' said Communications Manager Clive Price. 'We wanted to make it lively.'

Initial stories on the new-look site have included - a new online satisfaction questionnaire and Property Director Godfried Addo singing for Mary Berry.





## WE'RE LISTENING

From my teenage years, I've loved 'Desiderata' by Max Ehrmann. This beautifully composed poem – which starts 'Go placidly amid the noise and the haste' – simply stirs the soul. Unsurprisingly, it has something to say about communication: 'and listen to others...they too have their story'.

Each of us has a story. So we've interviewed tenant Baroness Kathleen Richardson to discover her life's

narrative. We asked our property team to share recent experiences from their work. We commissioned board member John Harrod to offer a spiritual reflection on our mission.

It's all about opening up communication lines. We're listening. We're setting up different conversations with you, our valued tenants. This newsletter is one of those new regular channels.

If anything has encouraged you in this publication, we need to know. Drop us a line. We might even print some responses. Then there's the website. We've been doing much work to make it a little livelier. Let us know what you think about that, too.

Our most recent interaction has been the property survey questionnaire. We're most grateful for all the forms you've filled in.

Thank you so much! I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

• **Mairi Johnstone** CEO

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP!



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programme. 'The response has been fantastic,' said **Property Services Director Godfried Addo**, 'something we need to build on and celebrate.'



The property team are in a buoyant mood. It's the Society's biggest report since a survey of housing stock in 2010. This latest one has been tenant-led. 'It's a unique way of gathering information,' said Godfried.

A member of the Royal Institute of British Architects with more than 25 years' experience in construction, Godfried has direct management of repairs and maintenance.

### 'The response has been fantastic'

The survey findings show tenants sometimes hold back in reporting maintenance issues. 'Many are saying repairs are required, but there's no past record of those issues being reported,' said **Maintenance Manager Glenn Fry**.



Glenn has more than 30 years' experience in building maintenance, working with local government and housing associations. He's responsible for major and reactive repairs and maintenance.

Both he and Godfried encourage tenants to feel more comfortable in reporting repairs. 'We're here to help,' said Godfried, 'so tenants need to let us know.'

**Reactive Repairs Co-ordinator Patricia Berry** added, 'Some tenants don't want to trouble us with every little thing. But they might come to us later with a long list'.



Having previously worked in central government, the private sector and another housing association, Patricia handles the Society's day-to-day repairs. 'Tenants are much better off if they come and talk to us first,' she said.

**Property Services Administrator Conrad Mercer-Graham** said he was 'really impressed and indeed grateful' for the detail tenants had shared. 'It gives us so much invaluable information not only about our tenants' homes but also their views.'



With a varied background in social services and housing associations - and a good deal of voluntary work with organisations as diverse as the National Trust and CAB - Conrad now documents the Society's property services needs.

### 'Tenants are much better off if they talk to us first'

Some issues can be sorted out quickly. For example, the Society will meet the cost of gutter cleaning once a year. If there is any minor repair costing less than £100, the tenant can get it fixed and send the bill to the Society. Other issues need quotations.

'It's important to check the Tenants' Handbook,' said Glenn. 'Everything the householder needs to know is in there.'

## 'IT'S ALL BEEN A GIFT'

Initially, she shunned the 'baroness' title. 'I didn't want another job,' she said. 'I was looking forward to retiring and playing with my grandchildren.'

But it wasn't to be turned down lightly. 'It was an honour as much for Methodism or for free churches as for me personally,' Kathleen pointed out.

'I then became ill. He had to retire at 42. So he was on an extremely small pension. We had no money put away. We'd never owned our own house. I was completely at the mercy of the Society. They were very, very kind.'

As she retired from church leadership, the Society found her a place in North London. Kathleen moved in during the spring of 2001. It became an ideal base for work at the Lords. 'I couldn't have done it without them,' she said of MMHS.

Home is a beautiful two-bedroom cottage. The house is set back from

**'I was completely at the mercy of the housing society. They were very, very kind'**

the suburban street. A pretty garden tumbles down to a fence at the rear of the whitewashed property. Constant birdsong creates a rural atmosphere.



Kathleen's cottage garden

Sadly, Ian died in 2008 after numerous operations for a brain tumour. Kathleen had planned to move back up north to her roots after her husband's passing. But at 78, she's decided to stay put.

'London suburbia had never appealed to me,' she said, 'but I shan't move now. The girls are down here and I've developed many friendships.'

With laughter – and she enjoys a good laugh – Kathleen concluded, 'It's been a fascinating life. It's all been a gift. It's been wonderful!'

## MEET THE PROPERTY TEAM, AS THEY REFLECT ON A RECENT SURVEY

We're here to help. That's the message from the Property Team as they reflect on the response to their property survey.

More than 750 tenants have submitted forms with basic information on the condition of their homes. This will help draw up a planned maintenance

## BE WISE ABOUT WATER HYGIENE

Simple steps for water hygiene have been issued by the Society.

The bacteria that causes Legionnaires' Disease is common in rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Very rarely it may also be active in domestic hot and cold water systems.

Risk of catching this potentially fatal form of pneumonia in an average house is very low. Government guidelines recommend that all tenants should be informed about water hygiene, so the Society has issued basic prevention tips.

Possibly the biggest concerns are leaving the property for more than a week or so – for example when going on holiday – or where there are additional taps/showers/toilets not in daily use. Good practice is simply to:

- run hot and cold taps for 3-5 minutes;
- turn shower mixer valve onto a hot setting and flush for 3-5 minutes (remove shower head from holder before turning on the shower, then hold the flexible hose down over plug hole and purge to drain to lessen the risk of inhaling sprayed droplets);
- dismantle, clean and descale

removable parts, heads, inserts and hoses where fitted every three months;

- keep hot water in your boiler system at minimum temperature of 50-60 degrees C (be aware of risk of scalding);
- flush toilet twice to circulate fresh water and empty the cistern.

'Risk of the Legionella bacteria causing illness in small domestic properties is low,' said Maintenance Manager Glenn Fry. 'But by taking these simple steps, we can limit those risks further. Contact us if you have any concerns.'



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Church allies: Kathleen met Pope John Paul II in 1992 – an expression of friendship across the denominations

and also do some overseas trips. I went to meet the Pope. That was arranged by Cardinal Basil Hume who wanted to impress the Pope on what good relationships we had between Methodists and Catholics in Britain.'

In 1995 she became Moderator of the Free Church Council. 'Again, I was the first woman they'd ever had in that role,' said Kathleen. She represented the free churches at Whitehall on Remembrance Day, amid a range of other events: 'I was at Diana's funeral, the Queen's Golden Wedding, dinners at the Mansion House and so on'.

Kathleen was still serving as moderator when she was given the life peerage.

# HOME TRUTHS

## REFLECTION BY JOHN HARROD

It's striking how often the word 'house' is used in our Scriptures. It points to and feeds upon what is central to the human condition. That is, our need for a 'house', a need which is unembarrassing to the Hebrew mind with its realistic embrace of our physicality and physical needs.

However, a house is not just a utility object protecting us from the elements and giving security and safety. Our house feeds our well-being in so many ways. It's a place where friendship, family and love are deepened and enjoyed.

Through furnishing and decorating our house, we express our individuality and self respect – as well as meet our aesthetic needs. And so the 'house' becomes a 'home'. In our homes we keep and do things that help us become what we are. It is where we plant daffodils or cook favourite recipes. It is where we keep our books, our CDs, our collection of toby jugs, that picture we bought on a special holiday.

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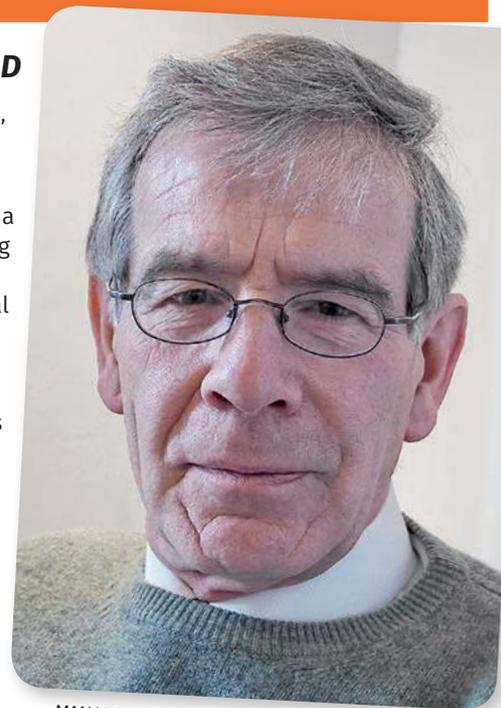
***'...a house is not just a utility object protecting us from the elements and giving security and safety'***

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Some ministers have a philistine indifference towards all this. Perhaps for some older ones it has been a necessity formed during the post-war years of austerity. They are indeed released from some anxiety. But I am not persuaded this should be the ideal for all – still less a mark of special piety.

Christian theology speaks of the 'sacramental', the capacity of the physical to nourish and feed the spiritual and personal. This is as we would expect if God is creator. We're reminded of Hopkins and Herbert – 'The earth is charged with the grandeur of God...Those who look on glass, on it may stay their eye, or if it pleaseth through it pass and then the heaven espy'.

The sheer physicality of a beautiful church as a sacred place can facilitate our worship, breaking down any barrier between the 'physical' and the 'spiritual'.



MMHS board member Revd John Harrod

Music almost by definition is sacramental. When lovers embrace their 'physical' bodies they 'make love'. There is something deeply sacramental here because it's about the 'physical' becoming the vehicle of the personal and spiritual.

When the words are written – 'Do get well soon, with love' – the physical card becomes for me a token and pledge of love and care. 'When the words are spoken the bread and the wine become for us...'

The sacraments of the gospel 'work' in our experience because of the sacramental potential in so much of our experience, and of which the sacraments of the gospel are paradigm instances.

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***'The lack of a home seriously undermines our well-being'***

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Thus, the home, a physical thing full of physical things, can be sacramental, feeding our well-being. And, of course, the converse is true. The lack of a home seriously undermines our well-being. All this means that the work of MMHS is not peripheral to the mission of the Church. A concern that people have an adequate house should be at the heart of our Christian commitment. This is because the business of Christian faith is salvation – our wholeness. And that involves the house – the home.

## METHODISM IN OUR MADNESS

### ARTS AND MUSIC BY CLIVE PRICE

One of the greatest works of contemporary music centres on a Methodist folk hero from America's Wild West.

Bob Dylan's classic album *John Wesley Harding* was a key part of the country rock revolution of the late 60s. The title track is a cowboy ballad about the renegade son of Methodist minister James Gibson Hardin. The song depicts John Wesley Harding, born in 1853, as 'a friend to the poor' who 'was never known to hurt an honest man'. But history websites say he was one of the deadliest gunslingers of the Old West.

The rest of Dylan's record reflects a morality to which Methodists would relate. Indeed, there are more than 60 biblical allusions in the LP's contents, according to Bert Cartwright's *The Bible In The Lyrics Of Bob Dylan*. Did Dylan use the John Wesley hook on which to hang these Scripture references?

For example, *All Along The Watchtower* – later made famous by Jimi Hendrix – echoes lines from Isaiah and Revelation. *Dear Landlord* sounds like a prayer. *I Dreamed I Saw St Augustine* – covered by Eric Clapton on his latest record – is a confession of guilt. *I Pity The Poor Immigrant* and *I Am A Lonesome Hobo* are warnings about immoral lifestyles.

Whatever historians decide on trigger-happy John Wesley Harding, the album about this rebel 'son of the manse' offers much ammunition of a more spiritual kind.

