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Topic:	Rev. Mott is like a 'Black Flash' in a cassock.
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Blazing a holy trail with the church's 'black flash'



Meet the "Black Flash" the rector who has to be in four places almost at the same time. Rev. Julian Mott, 38, holds separate Sunday services at each of the four churches on his patch. He arranges staggered start times and covers more than 20 miles getting from church to church in his faithful Mini Metro.

He rotates his sermons so that he doesn't have to repeat the same speech four times in a day. And the only danger to his carefully-planned timetable comes if he gets stuck behind a slow-moving tractor while he is between churches. Now, says the Rev Mott, one of his four churches at Chevington, Hargrave, Whepstead and Brockly, is under threat.

To the outsider, there is nothing to choose between the four. They are all beautiful, all worthy of being preserved and cherished. But the fact is that three have received thousand of pounds in grants from English Heritage and one hasn't got a penny.

Hargrave is the church in question and it is, says the Rev Mott, a church which is "on the brink of staring down the precipice. He can think of no good reason why one of the four has been ignored, except that it might have been an innocent victim of the sheer volume of churches needing financial aid.

"The criteria for aid is that the church should be unique as a building," said the Rev Mott. "But in architectural terms there is no difference between Hargrave and the others. If there is, then I haven't discovered it."

In pastoral terms, though, he believes every church is sacred. He says: "if you take a church out of a village you are taking people's souls, too, in some respects. The church is people's link with their faith and in God. Anyway, who likes the idea of being buried in a churchyard next to a crumbling monument?"

Hargrave needs £40,000 soon if it is to survive. The other three churches have, between them, received something like £65,000 from English Heritage. Hargrave has a Tudor tower with a fine set of bells which can't be rung because of rotting beams.

Slave Girl

Of the other churches, Whepstead is dedicated to St Petronilla, a Roman slave girl who, , says the Rev Mott, "may have been a colourful and interesting character but in herself had no architectural merit." The Rev Mott says he has never wanted to restrict his Sunday services to just one church and he believes the lack of funds for Hargrave is a warning signal that priceless chunks of heritage must not be lost because of indifference. He would like to continue what he calls his "merry Sunday roundabout" with Hargrave as part of the plan.

"I am very much a black flash in a cassock" he laughs. "It means I have to keep the accelerator pedal jammed to the floor. You could say the Holy Trail is well and truly blazed." A typical Sunday would see a service at Chevington at 8:45am, followed by an eight mile drive to Brockley for a 10:15am service. Next, he travels nine miles to Hargrave for the 11:30am sitting before a break for lunch at the Rectory which is back in Chevington. Final lap is Evensong, at 6pm which is held at Whepstead.

The venues, like the sermons, are swapped around according to his tried and tested system. "I try to avoid using the same sermon at all four services. It would be like a journalist writing the same story four times in a row" he says. "At the end of the day I would have an exceedingly dry throat and not so much fire in my belly."

Average attendance at each church is 25 and most of the congregation is aged between 60 and 80. Changes in social trends over the past few years are, he believes, part of the reason for the declining congregation numbers. All the more reason, he thinks, for the church to present a stable image amid the turmoil.

Many places of worship around the country are vacant, he says, because in some cases the church "simply cannot afford itself." A census last year revealed that Suffolk has one church for every 640 people. But, says the Rev Mott, if you reduced the church-population ratio to those who actually attended services, the figure is so small it is in danger of disappearing. "In reality, we are talking about one church in Suffolk for less than 40 people and how far should regular church-goers be responsible for these buildings?" he says.

How far can a group of committed people go when their responsibility is nothing less than maintaining the very fabric of the church?" He believes English heritage must look afresh at how and why it gives support and church authorities, the Government and communities must attend to the problem too.

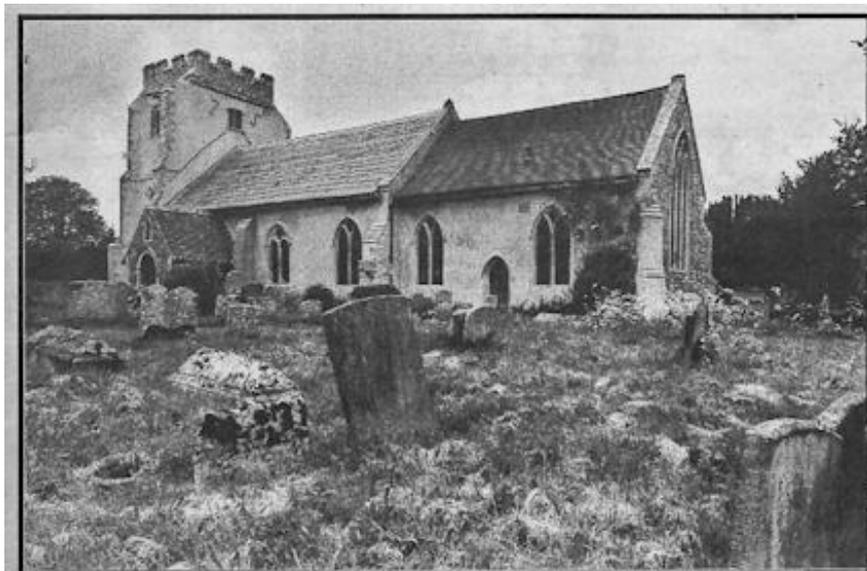
He says: " It seems that as far as Hargrave is concerned the parish has not had a fair crack of the whip and I am faced with a dilemma. How do I get money to preserve this beautiful historic church and get people to commit themselves? And if you ask me to make sense of what the English Heritage people have decided then I can't."

“The Government has got to look again at what it really wants. Does it want the church buildings preserved or does it want a series of ruins blotting the Suffolk landscape?” The Rev Mott says that if Jeremiah had “thrice woes” then he could be seen as having “quadrupal woes” with his four-handed responsibility. But, he quickly adds, it is a responsibility the he wouldn’t want to be without. And that includes Hargrave.



St Petronilla, Whapstead, above. The only church in this country dedicated to the disabled girl who, according to legend, was the daughter of St Peter. The accuracy of this family connection is open to question. St Peter, so the story goes, refused to use his powers to cure his daughter and said she would recover of her own accord and become a serving maid. This she apparently did. The church once had a spire, but it crashed to the ground during a violent storm which occurred on the night Oliver Cromwell died. The church has some interesting stained glass windows, amongst others, St Petronilla herself.

St Edmund, Hargrave, below. A rural church if ever there was one, even for Suffolk. But a church, says the Rev Mott, which is certainly worth fighting for. Once again, there have been many additions over the centuries and the shape of the church is certainly not conventional - a fact which many people find charming rather than alarming. Inside, there are plenty of features worth preserving - particularly the carvings. The Rev Mott says: “If a community loses its church, it loses part of its soul. And who wants to be buried in a churchyard next to a derelict building?”



St Andrew's, Brockley, pictured above. A country hike is required to reach this church, but the journey is certainly worth it. If the Rev Mott is a few minute's late for the Sunday service here, normally because he has been held-up behind a slow-moving tractor, then he can often hear the first hymn as he makes his way up the narrow country lane. The hymns are chosen six months in advance so, if necessary, the congregation can start without him. Both the church and the churchyard are said to have plenty of interesting features.

All Saints, Chevington, below. This is the church which boasts an addition so the fourth Earl of Bristol could see the tower from Ickworth Park. Some people believe the end result has not altered the proportions for the better... The church is nevertheless an imposing building and stands rather aloof in a large churchyard. Inside, the designs and decorations have taken their inspiration from across the centuries and the interior is popular with both locals and visitors from outside the area.

