

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1994

A REFLECTION BY PHILIP PETCHEY

The Society was delighted and honoured when it was first announced that the Lord Chancellor had accepted an invitation to address the Seventh Annual Conference. We realised the full extent of that honour when we discovered that Lord Mackay was interrupting a visit to Scotland to visit us, necessitating his catching an early flight from Edinburgh.

In the event his plane was delayed which meant that the afternoon's planned proceedings were advanced to the morning, with the Lord Chancellor's address concluding our business for the day. This proved, from the Society's point of view, doubly fortuitous since it enabled the Lord Chancellor to hear the Question Time session which had been brought forward from the afternoon and meant that the conference proceedings ended with a splendid climax.

The day's business began with the AGM of the Society. Chancellor Edward's conduct of the meeting was a model of how these things should be done: good humoured and efficient. All current office holders in the Society were re-elected.

We then moved to the Question Time session, which was ably chaired by Canon Christopher Hill. The other panellists were Sir William Gage, Bishop Turnbull, Registrar Cheetham and Archdeacon Fernyhough. There was some lively discussion and wise words spoken although not surprisingly there was little that was new to be said on the subject of blasphemy. One of the more interesting topics which arose concerned the difficulties facing the Church's Legal Aid Fund, and by his later remarks the Lord Chancellor showed that he had been much interested to discover that issues similar to those he experienced in the secular field arose also in the ecclesiastical.

The Lord Chancellor's address was lucid and informative (see page 201) but it was the questions that followed which were most interesting. These ranged over a wide field including; the views of a Scot on the English ecclesiastical establishment, the function of the Lord Chancellor as keeper of the Queen's conscience and, of course, legal aid. The Lord Chancellor's answers were both clear and provocative of thought. Among other things we learned of the progress towards a statute law computer data base and were able to put in a plea that the ecclesiastical section be available for hard pressed but computer-wise archdeacons separately from the whole.

The value of a conference is not simply the business that is there transacted but also in the opportunities which it gives to members of the Society to meet each other. Conversation flowed before the formal opening of proceedings, during lunch and – for those not travelling – after Evensong which appropriately ended our day. The pattern of alternating a day conference with the residential conference is generally agreed to be a sound one, but it clearly does present difficulties of organisation. There is a limited amount of time available (10.30-3.30); the AGM has to be held, and members will naturally want to have some issue of moment to be considered by speakers and in discussion; but they also want the opportunity to meet. This member would prefer a format which provided for the AGM and two (necessarily comparatively short) addresses on a

linked topic before lunch, followed by questions and discussion after lunch. The proceedings at the Seventh Annual Conference, although not conforming to this pattern, nonetheless provided a splendid occasion and in the event represented as good an arrangement as it is possible to imagine.

Our thanks as ever to those who bore the brunt of the organisation, in particular our genial and enthusiastic Executive Officer, Hughie Jones, whom we were all delighted to find fully recovered after his recent bout of illness. Our thanks also to the unflappable Mary Whytcock who aided and abetted him so ably. We look forward to Oxford 1995 with breathless anticipation!

**ECCLESIASTICAL LAW SOCIETY
LONDON MEETINGS**

“Briefs”, 7 Stone Buildings, Lincoln’s Inn, 5.30 pm

Wednesday 14 September 1994

“The Discipline of the Clergy and the Laity” – Brian Hanson, Esq.,
Registrar of the General Synod

Wednesday 9 November 1994

“The Work of a Chancellor” – The Worshipful Robert Gray, Q.C.
Chancellor of Southwark

Wednesday 11 January 1995

“Mixed Marriages in R.C. Canon Law” – Fr. Robert Ombres, O.P.