



THE STORY OF LINDISFARNE HOUSE - OUR FIRST (AND SO FAR ONLY) HOME

Some of us never wanted a building for the church! We were fearful that acquiring a building would institutionalise us. Some had previously belonged to churches where buildings seemed to be a constant drain on resources, and a distraction from the main task in hand. We had started our journey together meeting in homes, with a vision to do church simply, so what would we want with a large building, even if we could afford it?!

But, in the end, it was vision which led to a change of heart. God was speaking to us about connecting with the community, having a “home” to which we could invite people, and from which we could serve the community. God was encouraging us to widen our horizons, to see ourselves as serving the whole city – hence the change of name to “City Church”.

It was the mid 1990’s, and in those days, it seemed everyone was reading about the Celtic church, in the very early days of the church in this country. We were particularly impressed by the stories of Aidan, and the community that developed in Lindisfarne. As many of you will know if you have visited the north-east coast, Lindisfarne Island is joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus which is covered over at high tide. So a rhythm of life developed on Lindisfarne – when the tide was up, they gave themselves to prayer, worship and reflection, and to building their relationships as a community. Then, when the tide was out, they were able to venture forth on missions, which took them all over the north of England, southern Scotland, and down as far as the Midlands, in a massive explosion of evangelism and church planting. This balance and rhythm of life caught the attention of some of us, and we began to dream of a building, which we thought we would call Lindisfarne House, and which would serve both these priorities, like its namesake.

At the time, we had the church office on the ground floor of 4 Barbourne Terrace, then in the hands of the NFU and known as Agriculture House. We had been renting office space there for about a year when this sense that we should be acquiring a building began to grow. We wondered if Agriculture House would be a suitable venue. After all, it did have a meeting room which, although not large enough for the whole church, would serve many other purposes. There would be room for plenty of offices, and a basement with potential for development as a youth venue. Parking was ample, and at that stage a significant proportion of the church membership lived in the northern quadrant of the city. (Indeed, there had been a short period earlier in our history, during which we had experimented with having more than one congregation on a Sunday, one of them meeting in that hall). The idea began to grow on us!

However, when we approached the NFU, in the summer of 1994, they were not interested in selling. But, quite unexpectedly, within 6 months they came back to us to ask if we were still

interested. It was valued at £200,000, but they were prepared to sell it to us for £185,000 in the light of some remedial work that needed doing.

Well, we were certainly interested, but we didn't have £185, much less the asking price! So began a period of sharing vision and seeking God together as a church. The sense grew in our hearts that this was indeed the right place for us, and that we should agree to the asking price. But we were uneasy about taking a large mortgage, and didn't want finances to be tied up in repayments for many years to come. So, we were each encouraged to consider what we might be able to give or pledge, and we set ourselves a date for an offering. The response to that opportunity to give would be the test – were our hearts really in it, and were we ready to give sacrificially.

I shall never forget the evening when we gathered, the sense of excitement and adventure, the atmosphere that seemed to say, "It's fun to have faith", and perhaps just a little apprehension as well. I have forgotten who counted the offering but I have never forgotten the result! £80,000 was given that evening. Within a fortnight or so, that figure had risen to £120,000. As a result, and with a few extra gifts and the tax back from Gift Aid payments, we were able to purchase Agriculture House with a small, £36,000 mortgage (which was itself paid off over the next two or three years) but, more importantly, with the confidence that we were together in the venture. It was a definite turning point, a statement of purpose and intention to lay hold of our inheritance in the city under God. They were great days – we hadn't been this way before, but if this was kingdom living, we were up for it!

By June 1995, the building was ours, and we renamed it Lindisfarne House, and got to work fixing it up. The basement was damp, there was dry rot on two floors requiring extensive remedial work, and we needed to create good kitchen and toilet facilities. How hard people worked! So many gave time, expertise and finance to the venture. Much more was repaired and developed than just a building – as we worked side by side, the body of Christ was being strengthened and built up too!

At no point did we have to eat into the regular giving of the church in order to purchase or refurbish the building – all that money was given separately, so that the regular ministry of the church continued, uninterrupted. We had previously assisted one or two other churches in the city, when they had been purchasing or constructing buildings for their own use, and now it was our delight to receive gifts from them, in turn. What a pleasure to see the people of God blessing one another in this way across the city, recognising we are all about the King's business, shoulder to shoulder for the gospel.

A year or two later, after the work was complete, Sheila Downward stumbled across a book of the history of Worcester, containing numerous old photos of some of the city's finest buildings.

Included amongst them was a picture of 4 Barbourne Terrace as it had been, without the extension, around the turn of the century. Imagine our surprise when we saw the caption beneath the photo of 'our' building, taken in 1910: it read - Lindisfarne House! The NFU had known nothing of this and of course, neither had we when we renamed the building, inadvertently giving it back its original name!



Lindisfarne House and gardens in 1910

Rick Thomas