

The Business of Barchester

Pete Hobson reveals the mystery of how Cathedrals manage to survive, and the tensions between business sense and spiritual priorities. Does the presence of tourists detract from the worship and sense of the spiritual? What is the right balance between Heritage and Faith? How can cathedrals proclaim the gospel? Why are cathedral Deans expected, on appointment, to do mini-MBAs?

The Cathedrals of England are both a familiar and an arcane world. Familiar because many of us love to visit them – for a whole range of purposes, ranging seamlessly along a spectrum from the purely tourist to the wholly spiritual¹. But also arcane in that few of us if pushed could give a convincing account of how they work, less still how they are paid for. We probably know that in this country, unlike much of the

continent, there is no state aid for cathedrals, and we will all have had a moan at entrance charges, or battled with our conscience over voluntary donations. But when it comes to the hard economics, let alone to a fully-fledged and road-tested Business Plan, I suspect we'd not know where to begin.

Certainly, that would have been me a few years back – notwithstanding a

career of over 30 years of ordained parish ministry in the Church of England. But circumstances brought me into closer contact with the cathedral of my own diocese, Leicester, and now I find myself charged with creating a Business Plan for it – and much like the reinterment of a certain long-lost and rediscovered Plantagenet monarch, wondering where the template is².



Leicester Cathedral:
lowering of Richard III's
coffin into the grave

Photo: Ian Davis