

**A REVIEW BY THE BELL SUPPORT GROUP OF THE TREATMENT BY THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND OF THE LATE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER,
GEORGE BELL**

The Purpose of this Review:

1. The purpose of this Review is to examine the process leading up to the release by the Church of England's Media Centre of its statement on 22nd October 2015 ("the October Statement") and the events which followed in the hope that no further steps will be taken to remove Bishop Bell's name from public memorials until a proper enquiry has taken place into the allegations against him. The members of the Bell Support Group responsible for this document believe that natural justice and the damage done to the Bishop's good name by the October Statement cry out for such an enquiry.

The Reputation of Bishop Bell until 22nd October 2015:

2. The reputation of George Bell, Bishop of Chichester from 1929 to 1958 could hardly be better described than it is on the memorial plaque in the Cathedral:

*"A TRUE PASTOR
POET AND PATRON OF THE ARTS
CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED
AND TIRELESS WORKER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY".*

3. Until the October Statement Bishop Bell's reputation was close to saintly. It was certainly quite unsullied: he is commemorated in the Church's liturgical calendar on 3rd October and Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford has an altar dedicated to him. Following the Statement the wording of the Memorial in Chichester Cathedral has been described by the Diocese as "*problematic*", and it seems likely that at some stage in the future a proposal may be made to remove the late Bishop's name from the Calendar.

The Wording of the Church's Statement of 22nd October 2015:

4. The wording of the October Statement was treated by the media as an acceptance by the Church that Bishop Bell was a *proven* paedophile. Examples of such reports on the same day are:

(1) **The Telegraph:** *“A former Church of England bishop revered as a peacemaker – and granted the closest thing Anglicanism has to a saint’s day – was a paedophile, the Church has acknowledged.”*

(2) **The BBC:** *“A victim who was sexually abused as a young child by a former Bishop of Chichester who died in the 1950s has received compensation from the Church.”*

(3) **The Times:** *“Eminent bishop was paedophile, admits Church.”*

5. It is not clear who drafted the October Statement, but it seems that only a very small number of people in the Diocese were involved (for example, the Dean of Chichester has never seen the evidence relied upon). What is clear, however, is that the Statement was very carefully worded. In the House of Lords on 28th January 2016 the Bishop of Durham told the assembled peers that if they *“read very carefully the statements that have been put out, they will see that there has been no declaration that we are **convinced** that this [abuse] took place [emphasis added]”*. If those responsible were not convinced by the evidence before them, the wording of the October Statement was (at best) reprehensibly equivocal, and (at worst) positively misleading. It was predictable that the subtlety of the wording would be overlooked and that the media would report the statement in precisely the way they did.

6. To the credit of the BBC, the Corporation has accepted that both their broadcast and their article online were inaccurate in suggesting that Bishop Bell had been proven guilty of sexual abuse. The Head of Editorial Complaints acknowledged to a complainant that *“no information has been disclosed about the matter which might warrant the view that the allegations had in effect been proven, even though not through court proceedings.”*

7. A particularly prejudicial part of the Statement, since it has no direct bearing on the truth of the complaint, is that which stated that the Sussex Police had confirmed in 2013 that the information obtained *“would have justified, had he still been alive, Bishop Bell’s arrest and interview, on suspicion of serious sexual offences.....”*. Those unfamiliar with police procedure will have had their minds prejudiced and most likely have thought that this added weight to the allegations. In fact, an arrest in such circumstances in order to carry out an interview under caution is standard police process. This has been confirmed in a letter dated 26th February 2016 by T/Detective Superintendent Jason Tingley of Sussex Police. There has been no suggestion that the police based their statement on any evidence other than Carol’s complaint. Furthermore, Sussex Police confirmed on 16th March 2016 that they had received no further complaints about Bishop Bell. This is significant: experience shows that instances of solitary abuse, one adult only picking on one child, are exceptionally rare.

8. Following an arrest police procedure involves carrying out further inquiries before submitting a report to the Crown Prosecution Service for advice on whether to charge. It is elementary that not every arrest and inquiry is followed by a charge, not every charge results in a trial and not every trial results in a conviction. Mr Tingley has stated that only 20% to 30% of investigations by Sussex Police result in a suspect being charged.

9. In the October Statement the Diocese did not shrink from naming Bell as being liable to arrest had he still been alive. But in fact had he been arrested, the police would not have named him at that stage. The conduct of the Diocese in this respect differs from the manner in which the Church dealt with the publication of the report commissioned from Ian Elliott into the conduct of Chancellor Garth Moore and Brother Michael Fisher, both of whom were dead. In October the Church paid £35,000 damages to a man subjected to attempted rape by Moore, who died in 1990 after requesting to meet his victim on his deathbed. Initially (according to a report in *The Times* of 16th March 2016) the Church named neither priest, nor the Bishop (the Church's spokesman on child protection, the Bishop of Durham) who was said to have broken off contact with the victim on the advice of insurers. The names of the priests and the Bishop were confirmed after *The Times* managed to see a full copy of the report.

The Background to the Diocese's Settlement with the Complainant:

10. It is not the intention of this review to try to overturn or undermine the settlement reached between the Church and the individual whom the October Statement calls "the survivor", still less to do anything which might tend to reveal her identity. The Group does not challenge the survivor's belief in her account; the question is whether others should believe it. The shock at the contents of the October Statement felt by those still alive who knew Bishop Bell and by those who revere his memory was all the greater for the fact that it is not possible to gauge the basis upon which the Chichester Diocese decided to pay compensation of an unstated amount (later revealed as £15,000) and to issue a formal apology.

11. It has never been said whether insurers were involved in the settlement, but the figure for damages is very modest for serious sexual abuse alleged to have taken place over such a lengthy period. (It is markedly less than the £35,000 compensation paid to the victim of the attempted rape by Chancellor Moore). It is obvious that insurers would have been keen to settle the Chichester claim as quickly and cheaply as possible, and would have had little or no interest in the reputation of a dead man, however much revered.

12. Any attempt to understand the background to the settlement is complicated by the fact that the Diocese also accepted that Bishop Eric Kemp had not dealt adequately with the complaint when it was first raised in August 1995. It is not clear whether compensation was

paid for that deficiency. At any rate what were described as “*serious sexual offences*”, which were alleged to have occurred in “*the late 1940s and early 1950s*” were not made the subject of complaint for well over 40 years, by which time Bishop Bell (who had no children to defend his name) had been dead for 37 years.

13. The Church, citing confidentiality, has provided no further information beyond that contained in the October Statement. That statement gave no indication of the nature of the abuse, the circumstances in which it was alleged to have occurred, or even the gender of the alleged victim. It simply said that “*the settlement followed a thorough pre-litigation process during which further investigations into the claim took place, including the commissioning of expert independent reports*”. None of these reports had “*found any reason to doubt the veracity of the claim*”.

14. In his statement in October 2015 Bishop Warner said of his revered predecessor that “*we face with shame a story of abuse of a child*”. Such words left no room for doubt as to the (supposed) fact of the abuse. He explained that “*the scrutiny of the allegation has been thorough, objective and undertaken by people who command the respect of all parties*”. The Bishop did not identify the “parties” to whom he was referring, and he provided no information about the scrutineers, their number, their professional backgrounds or (most important of all) the nature of the process they undertook. This last point is especially relevant since the October Statement did not suggest that any corroboration of the allegations had been found. Nor, it might be added, has any come to light since. The October Statement invited those with further information to contact the hotline set up by the Church together with the NSPCC. As at 15th March 2016 the NSPCC had received no calls in relation to Bishop Bell.

The Investigation by Independent Experts:

15. Although the Diocese has remained silent about the process of investigation, it has been described by the Bishop of Durham as not just robust, but “*long and careful*”. Using the pseudonym “Carol”, the complainant chose to provide details of the alleged assaults in an interview given to the *Brighton Argus* published on 3rd February 2016:

(1) Chichester Cathedral paid for “*counselling which included a return to the scene of her abuse, which she hated*”. The visit to the Palace would have confirmed nothing. It provides no proof of the allegations; on the contrary, from what she saw of the lay-out of the Palace it may well have served to confirm Carol’s self-belief that she had been assaulted there.

(2) Chichester Cathedral also appointed an intermediary, who “*acted as an independent go-between*”. However, it was this independent intermediary who introduced

Carol to the solicitor who acted for her against the Diocese. The independence of the intermediary does not seem to have extended to protecting the interests of Bishop Bell. The process of investigation appears to have been complainant-led.

16. Carol's account in the *Argus* was that Bishop Bell waited for her on the stairs leading to the Bishop's Kitchen.

(1) Her quoted words are as follows:

"If you go into the Bishop's kitchen there's a wooden stair that comes down and he used to wait on there, half way down it.

And then he'd go, 'Oh, Elsie, I'll take Carol and read her story.'"

(2) As mentioned above, the counselling provided to Carol included a return to "the scene of her abuse". Carol described that visit in the *Argus* article:

"The lady who was giving me counselling, actually took me to the Bishop's kitchen. The Cathedral had some sort of pottery exhibition on there, and she said 'we'll go, and see how you feel'. Well I got in there, and I said 'Can we leave now?'. I had to leave."

(3) The author of the article records that "Carol's voice only broke once in the course of a three-hour interview, when she recalled how it felt to stand back in that room, at the foot of those stairs."

(4) The website of the Southern Ceramic Group <http://www.southernceramicgroup.co.uk/exhibitions/exhibitions/htm> shows photographs of the ceramic shows held in the Bishop's Kitchen each summer since 2007 to date. As can be seen from the photographs, the Bishop's Kitchen is a two-storey building with no staircase leading out of it. There is no staircase on which Carol could have seen the Bishop standing. The Bishop's Kitchen (and for that matter the staircase *outside* it) was not part of the Bishop's domestic residence or where he worked. Away from the door to the domestic quarters, it was a quite separate complex, at that time in regular use by the Theological College, its staff and students.

17. Despite the silence about the Diocese's process of investigation, it is already clear that it was seriously deficient in a number of respects. In particular, no explanation has been given as to why no contact was made, before or after the October Statement, with the surviving chaplain of Bishop Bell (or that of Bishop Kemp).

(1) **Canon Adrian Carey:** Canon Carey was Bishop Bell’s chaplain from 1950 to 1952, the last two years of the four-year period over which the abuse is alleged to have taken place.

- Canon Carey has stated that from his knowledge of Bishop Bell and the hours which he worked, he finds it impossible to imagine how such abuse could have occurred. He knew who was obtaining access to the Bishop’s Palace, since it was his duty to answer the door. (Roy Porter, a previous domestic chaplain from 1947 to 1949, bears out Canon Carey’s evidence as to the hours worked by Bishop Bell; he recalled him being “*at work all day*”.)

- There was only one living-in member of staff at the Palace – the cook. Two women came in the morning to clean: Flora Monk, the wife of Charles (the Bishop’s chauffeur) and a Mrs Green. Apart from the chaplain, at a child’s bedtime in the evening, the only person working in the Palace was the cook. Canon Carey strongly refutes any suggestion that anyone working in the Palace “*would often take the little girl with her when she went to work*” [emphasis added]. He never saw a child in such circumstances, and it is not clear in what capacity the relative can possibly have worked at the Palace in the evenings.

(2) **Former Choristers:** No former choristers at Chichester Cathedral are known to have been approached by the inquiry team. Eleven of them who had served in the choir between 1949 and 1958 wrote to *The Times* in the aftermath of the October Statement recalling Bishop Bell as “*a loved, respected and saintly figure*” and describing the revelation by Bishop Warner as “*not only shocking but incredible to us – especially since so little information has been provided about the offence*”. They expressed the fear that Bishop Bell had been “*smearred to suit a public relations need. Unless basic facts about the accusation are made public, its truth will remain cloudy.*”

(3) **Living relatives:** No attempt was made to find living relatives – a failure about which Bishop Warner has told one relative, Captain Wood, that Lambeth Palace is concerned. They are surely right to be so. Another relative, Bishop Bell’s niece, Mrs Barbara Whitley, who stayed from time to time in the Bishop’s Palace, is alive and well in her early-90s living in Kent.

(4) **Bishop Bell’s Papers and Diaries:** So far as has been revealed, no examination of the Archives or Bell’s extensive papers and diaries was conducted during the scrutiny said to have been so long and careful. This is potentially relevant, since Bishop Bell travelled widely abroad and was often away during the period of the alleged abuse

(1948-1952), for example, in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and India between August and December 1949. In a written Parliamentary answer for the Church Commissioners on 24th February 2016, Mrs Caroline Spelman MP confirmed that “*Lambeth Palace Library has no record in the last three years of any of the individuals involved in these investigations making an application to view the papers and diaries of George Bell that are held in the Library.*”

(5) ***Historians and Experts on Bell:*** Nor does any contact appear to have been made with any of those who have studied the life and character of Bishop Bell in depth, notwithstanding that his biographer, Dr Andrew Chandler works at the University of Chichester. Dr Chandler has pointed out that Bishop Bell’s “*daily patterns of life and work were meticulously documented by himself and almost constantly observed by those who lived and worked with him..... Bell shared almost all of his time with his wife, secretary, domestic chaplain and driver*”.

The Burden of Proof:

18. All those who have expressed concern about the conduct of the Church are well aware that a civil claimant for damages does not need to prove their case to the criminal standard. However, the wording of the October Statement indicates that though Bishop Warner and the independent experts on whom he relied addressed the question whether there was “*reason to doubt the veracity of the claim*”, they did not approach the issue of liability by asking themselves whether the claimant had discharged the civil burden of proof on the balance of probability. This is probably because the inquiry team did not have a lawyer to assist them in a proper assessment of the evidence. In discharging the burden of proof in civil proceedings, there is no *prima facie* presumption as to the claimant’s credibility. On the contrary, it is for the claimant to adduce evidence to prove it.

19. If the independent experts had directed their minds to the balance of probability, they would have needed to take into account against the background of all that is known about Bishop Bell the inherent probability (or improbability) of him committing over a period of four years frequent serious sexual offences against a young child. The proper legal approach was expressed by Lord Nicholls in the House of Lords in ***Re H (Minors) (1996) AC 563***: “*The more improbable the event, the stronger must be the evidence that it did occur before, on the balance of probabilities, its occurrence will be established.*”

20. There is no reason to think that the experts or Bishop Warner approached the matter in this fashion. Natural justice makes the proper approach to the evidence all the more important, where there appears to be no corroboration and an adverse factual conclusion is

drawn in the absence of any opportunity for refutation by the alleged perpetrator. The passage of time does not mean that there is no relevant circumstantial evidence, and a failure to seek it out undermines the conclusion drawn.

The Justification for Close Scrutiny of the Diocesan Investigation:

21. In a letter published in the *Church Times* on 20th November 2015 the Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge and others expressed their “*hope that something at least of the ‘expert independent reports’ will be released, appropriately redacted, to demonstrate the strength of the evidence.....*”. Regrettably this has not happened, even after the complainant in early February 2016 chose to recount her story not merely to the *Brighton Argus*, but also to *BBC South Television*. A story on the BBC website for 9th February 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-35535241> stated that the victim alleged Bishop Bell “*molested her in the cathedral as she sat listening to stories* [emphasis added]”.

22. Carol gave a third interview on Tuesday 8th March 2016 to BBC Radio Sussex <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03jydzj>. As with the BBC TV interview her voice was not disguised.

23. It is difficult to understand how the Diocese can cling to the confidentiality of Carol’s account, when she herself has waived that confidentiality by the details of the alleged assaults she has provided to the media. No one seeks to uncover her identity, but with appropriate redactions it should be possible for the Diocese to provide details of her account and of the steps taken by the inquiry team to check it so that (in the words of the Master of Trinity Hall) the strength of the evidence against Bishop Bell can be assessed. The Diocese has even declined to say when the servant alleged to have taken Carol to work died, or whether she was questioned before she died. In a matter of this gravity, it is inequitable that the only details of the assault in the public domain are those which Carol chooses to place in the media. In contrast, she declined to give an interview to a journalist who had written defending Bishop Bell.

24. Bishops (like Field Marshals and Prime Ministers) are not immune from false allegations; the example of the former Bishop of Gloucester, forced to stand down before being completely exonerated, was cited in the Lords’ debate on 28th January 2016. Over recent years there have also been a number of notorious cases of non-judicial inquiries into alleged child abuse which have fallen into grave error. One such example was the inquiry carried out for Newcastle City Council, which led to the maximum award of £200,000 libel damages each to Christopher Lillie and Dawn Reed. At an interlocutory stage in that litigation (on 7th February 2002) Mr Justice Eady emphasised the critical importance of close scrutiny of the reasoning

process by which such an inquiry reached its conclusion. He said:

*“For all I know [the Review Team’s] motives may have been of the highest; in other words, to serve the public interest and to protect children in the future. But of course we do not have a system where people can be condemned as guilty of any serious criminal offence let alone rape and mass child abuse **without a trial and behind closed doors** [emphasis added]. Anyone who arrogates to themselves such a responsibility must expect, if it is necessary, to have their reasoning processes and their motives brought into the sunlight and subjected to close scrutiny.”*

Carol’s Account in the Media:

25. It is highly significant that in her account in the *Brighton Argus*, Carol provided no details of the circumstances of the alleged assaults which were not in the public domain. She said nothing which she could only have known if the rest of her story was true.

(1) Her description of Bishop Bell was of him “wearing a black tunic thing that came down to his knees and long black leggings”. She added that the leggings “might have been trousers”. There are, of course, numerous published photographs of the Bishop in the episcopal garb of those days -- a frock coat and leggings.

(2) Carol described the room in which the assault had taken place as big, and said there were “books all around”. Again, just as one might expect, there are numerous photographs of Bishop Bell in book-lined rooms, including in his study (see, for example, the frontispiece to the *Otter Memorial Paper No.17* on Bell’s life published in 2003).

26. According to Carol, the pretence used by Bishop Bell to molest her was to read her a bedtime story. This suggests that she was put to bed somewhere in the Palace, whilst her relative (as instructed by the Bishop) got on with her work. There is no record of any employee who “went to work” at the Palace in the evenings. The cook apparently lived in. This makes all the more significant Canon Carey’s conviction that there was never any employee in the Palace accompanied by a child. Carol’s account of the time spent with her relative was that she “went for weekends and school holidays, usually for two or three days at a time, sometimes a week.” It is inconceivable that if a child was spending such a length of time in the Palace, she would not have been seen by the Bishop’s chaplain or chauffeur. But Mr Monk apparently saw nothing untoward and Canon Carey’s recollection is quite emphatic that he never saw a child staying in the Palace.

27. It is not just supporters of Bishop Bell who are likely to feel that Carol’s story does

not ring true. In his letter to the late Bishop's niece dated 9th February 2016 Bishop Warner commented in relation to the account in the *Argus* published six days before: "*We might indeed wonder about some details*". Regrettably the Bishop fails to recognise that wonderment at some of the details is good reason to question the veracity of the account as a whole, particularly in the absence of independent corroboration.

The Alleged Complaint to Archbishop Rowan Williams:

28. Carol's account in the *Argus* contained one detail which had not been mentioned before. She claimed that "*in around 2010*" she had written to Archbishop Rowan Williams, and that all she got in reply was "*a 'sorry this happened', that was it and that was in an e-mail*". It is unfortunate that Carol did not retain the e-mail; for his part, Lord Williams told the *Argus* that he had no recollection of such an e-mail and that he was "*quite certain that [he] saw nothing on this matter*". Since Lord Williams had opened George Bell House just two years previously, it is inconceivable that he could ever have forgotten such an electrifying allegation, had it been made to him. During his time at Lambeth Palace, Lord Williams did not use a personal e-mail account.

29. After liaison with the correspondence secretary at Lambeth Palace and staff in records, it has been confirmed by the Palace that:

(1) the first evidence of any e-mail from Carol occurred in the autumn of 2012 (not 2010) when the Palace was effectively between Archbishop Williams and Archbishop Welby, and

(2) there was "*no mutually acknowledged correspondence until Spring 2013*", by which time Lord Williams was no longer Archbishop.

30. In an interview published in the *Mail on Sunday* for 6th March 2016 Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury between 1991 and 2002, called for a public enquiry into the Church's treatment of Bishop Bell. In a letter to Mrs Whitley, he had stated that he shared her distress: "*I am frankly appalled by the way the church authorities have treated his memory... The fact is that the Church of England has effectively delivered a 'guilty' verdict without anything resembling a fair and open trial. His reputation is in tatters.....*".

31. Carol responded to Lord Carey in an interview she gave to BBC Radio Sussex on Tuesday 8th March 2016. The BBC reporter said that Carol was angry at Lord Carey's intervention as she had written to him 14 years ago (ie. in 2002) when he was Archbishop. Carol was then heard saying: "*Perhaps he is feeling guilty that he didn't take any notice of me.*

Now he wants to discredit me. He doesn't understand the impact it has on your life....”.

32. Lord Carey has categorically denied that he ever received such a complaint from Carol, and it is now said on her behalf that she muddled her complaint to the Archbishop in 2012/2013 with her supposed complaint to Archbishop Carey in 2002. However, it is clear that she was aiming her remarks on BBC Radio Sussex explicitly at Lord Carey because of what he was reported as saying in the *Mail on Sunday*. All of this contributes to any assessment of Carol as a witness.

The Removal of Bishop Bell's name:

33. In the aftermath of the October Statement, Bell House at Bishop Luffa School and Bishop Bell School in Eastbourne have both been re-named. For the time being George Bell House is now simply referred to as “4 Canon Lane”. Other steps taken or proposed are:

(1) Chichester Cathedral Chapter announced on 12th February 2016 that as part of the “*re-evaluation*”, they had considered the memorial to Bishop Bell in the Cathedral, adding that “*there are those who find the description of George Bell on the memorial problematic since the announcement of the settlement.*”

(2) Chichester Cathedral volunteers have been given “*comprehensive guidance*” as to how “*to refer to Bell's legacy while acknowledging the recent settlement and apology by Bishop Martin.*” In a letter dated 14th January 2016 from the Chancellor of the Cathedral they were told they should now recognise “*the likelihood that the same man who showed moral courage in opposing saturation bombing, was also responsible for the devastating abuse of a child.*”

(3) The Bishop of Durham has indicated that he suspects that at some point in the future a formal proposal will be made to remove Bishop Bell's name from the Church Calendar.

34. These attempts to extirpate Bishop Bell's name from the public mind are the context in which this review has been undertaken. The signatories strongly urge that before further steps are taken to exorcise his name, there is a proper review of both the process and the evidence which resulted in the October Statement. So far that has not occurred. Justice to the memory of George Bell demands that it should. The point was well put in an article in the *Church of England Newspaper* on 28th October 2015 under the damning headline “*The rule of the lynch mob*”. The article deplored the “*indecent haste*” to describe Bishop Bell as an abuser, and concluded:

*“There may be a stain on his reputation for a short time but his memory will be cherished again in future especially when we look back at this time of **witch-hunting** [emphasis added] with a proper sense of perspective.”*

BELL SUPPORT GROUP

Friday 17th March 2016