



Church of England
Evangelical Council

The Future Role of Bishops in the Church of England

The results of the 2010 survey

by Dr Peter Brierley
April 2010

BRIERLEY CONSULTANCY



The Future Role of Bishops in the Church of England

Report of the Spring 2010 Survey

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
1 The survey respondents	5
2 The role and appointment of the Diocesan Bishop	8
3 Suffragan Bishops	10
4 The Bishop and National Life	11
Appendix: About Brierley Consultancy	13

Executive Summary

This 2010 survey on the work, role and duties of Bishops in the Church of England by members of the Church of England Evangelical Council drew a response of nearly 230 replies from across the country. Questions were arranged in five blocks of up to five with two supplementaries, and the replies are listed below by the percentage of agreement that each obtained, with one negative question being reversed scored for ease of understanding (marked *).

% agreeing	Statement
100	The Bishop should teach and explain the Christian faith
99	The Bishop should be accessible to his clergy
98	The Bishop should lead the Church in ministry and mission
95	The Bishop should be interviewed about what he believes, proclaims and practises before he is appointed
94	The Bishop is the key leader in the running of a C of E Diocese
94	The Bishop should have regular contact with local community leaders
92	The Bishop should seek to visit each parish in the Diocese over a 5-year period
92	All candidates who are short-listed to become a Bishop should be interviewed before any appointment is made
88	The Bishop should resign if he supports clergy in active homosexual relationships
85	The Suffragan Bishop role should NOT be abolished*
85	The Bishop should handle clergy discipline
83	The Bishop should bring additional skills to his work
80	The Bishop should sit in the House of Lords
75	Consecrating Women Bishops would divide the Church of England
70	The Suffragan Bishop gives strong pastoral support to the local church
68	The Bishop is in touch with ordinary Church life
60	The Bishop should no longer live in a palace or specially large house
53	The Suffragan Bishop lacks independence and authority
48	The Suffragan Bishop should be based in a local parish church setting
41	The Bishop should be elected to his position by the clergy of the Diocese
40	The Bishop should be appointed only for a fixed period (say 10 years)
37	The Suffragan Bishop should be responsible for a much smaller area (say a Deanery)
27	The Bishop should be appointed by the Prime Minister and Queen
20	The Bishop should be judged on performance and paid accordingly

There was very strong agreement (over 90%) on 8 of the 25 statements in the questionnaire. The top 3 indicated that respondents felt that the Diocesan bishop should be a teacher, a pastor and a leader in mission. When asked what should be the top priorities of a Bishop today, teaching the Christian faith and leading in mission and ministry were put first. Orthodoxy and outreach are seen as the key roles for a Bishop in the 21st century.

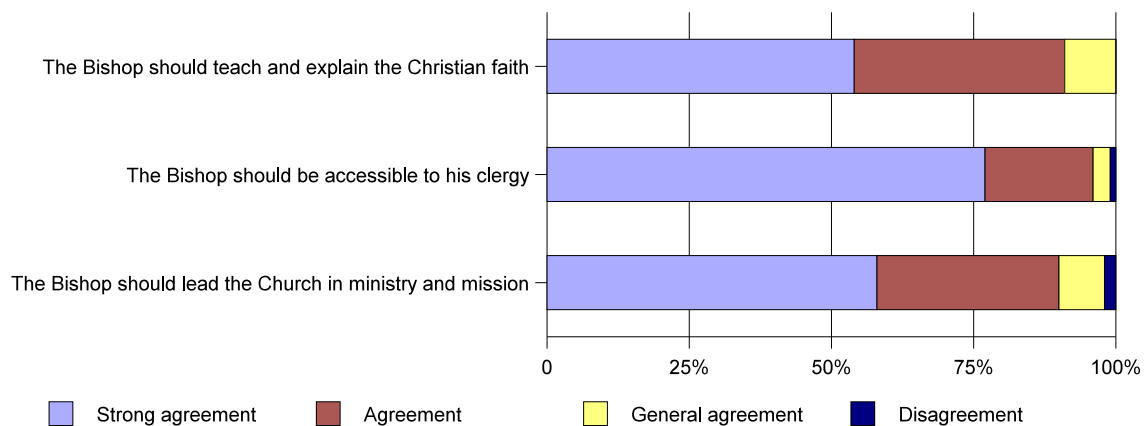
There was strong agreement on a further five statements (proportion agreeing 80 to 89%), and agreement on five more (50% to 79% agreeing). There were 7 statements on which a majority of respondents did not agree.

In general terms, respondents supported the role of Suffragan Bishops. They did not wish to see the method of appointing Bishops greatly changed, even though 73% disagreed with the Bishop being appointed by the Prime Minister and Queen, though they did want his views to be known before appointment and that all short-listed candidates should be interviewed.

There was strong agreement that bishops should not support active homosexual clergy.

The top three statements break down as shown in the chart below.

Strength of agreement on the most highly supported statements



Introduction

The Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) began in 1960 and has been responsible for organising five National Evangelical Anglican Congresses (NEACs), most of several days duration, although the last was just a single day. The first of these was at Keele in 1967; the fifth was held in 2009.

The CEEC seeks to promote “effective consultation between evangelical Anglican leaders” largely, but not solely, in the UK. In 2009 a new Chairman was appointed, the Ven Michael Lawson, Archdeacon of Hampstead, and intimation was given on the CEEC website that it intended to undertake research on the future role of Bishops in the Church of England. Peter Brierley [Peter B1], former director of Christian Research, but acting as a church consultant since 2007, offered to help in any way he could.

The CEEC Director of Communications, the Revd Peter Breckwoltdt [Peter B2], Vicar of Moulton Parish Church, consequently wrote to Peter B1 in July 2009 asking if he would be willing to assist in such a survey, and on getting positive response, in the subsequent months a questionnaire was drafted and commented upon by Peter B1.

The questionnaire was eventually emailed early in 2010 to over 1000 members of the CEEC. Over 200 replies were received, an actual response rate of 23% which is very good for surveys of this type, comparing favourably with the response that might have been obtained had the survey been sent (more expensively) by printed questionnaire through the regular snail-mail. The results for each question were initially counted electronically through the survey programme used, and the whole was sent to Peter B1 early in March 2010.

One disadvantage of this method is that cross-tabulation of results was not undertaken; on the other hand the relatively small sample size would make any detailed cross-tabulations have high margins of variability which could be misleading. The results are therefore presented in terms of the six option “Liker” scale that was used – strongly agree, agree, generally agree, generally disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.

This report takes these results and summarises them, putting them into an easier format to follow and understand.

The questionnaire asked questions each on five topics:

- a) The Role of the Diocesan bishop
- b) The Appointment of bishops
- c) The Work of the Suffragan bishop
- d) The Bishop and his National Role
- e) The Bishop and National Issues

and it concluded with a few final questions especially relating to the respondent. We will look at these first before focussing on the five main sections.

1) The survey respondents

There were three basic control questions asked on the survey, a person's age and gender and lay/clerical status, as well as their Diocese, plus two questions on the dominant issues facing a bishop today and what his priorities ought to be.

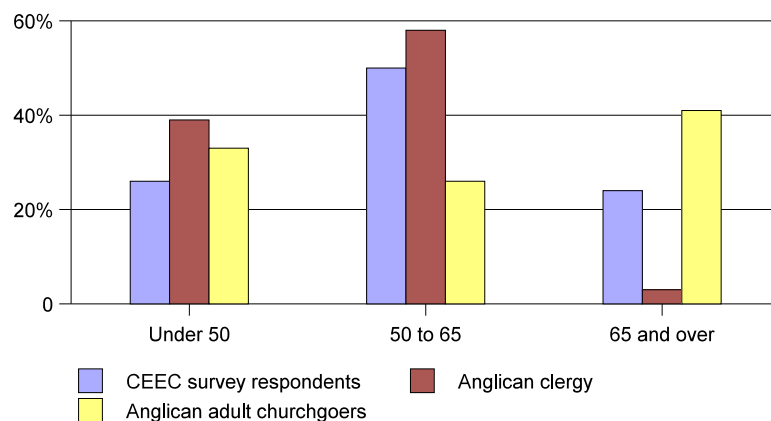
Control questions

Six in every seven (86%) of those who replied were male, and one in every seven (14%) was female. How representative that is of CEEC's membership is not known, but there were more male respondents than men attending church (40% in the Church of England in 2005¹) and more male responses than men in the ministry (81% in 2008²).

Two-thirds (69%) of those who responded were ordained clergy, and one-third (31%) were not. Again how representative this is of the CEEC total constituency is not known.

Only one respondent was under 30 years of age, so s/he has been added into the "30 to 49" age-group. A quarter of respondents (26%) were between 30 and 49, exactly half (50%) were aged 50 to 65 and the remaining quarter (24%) were over 65 years of age. Figure 1 compares these figures with the ages of Anglican clergy³ and adult churchgoers⁴.

Figure 1: Age-groups of respondents, clergy and churchgoers



While the proportions of the three groups under 50 are moderately similar, the same is not true for the older age-groups. There are too few adult churchgoers aged 50 to 65 and far too many aged 65 and over. It would thus seem that probably many of the responses from those aged 50 to 65 were from clergy and those from older people mostly laity, but the actual numbers are too small to be certain.

¹ From the 2005 English Church Census, *Religious Trends* No 6, Christian Research, London, Table 5.8.1.

² From the Church of England website, Research and Statistics Division, Archbishops' Council, 2007/2008 statistics.

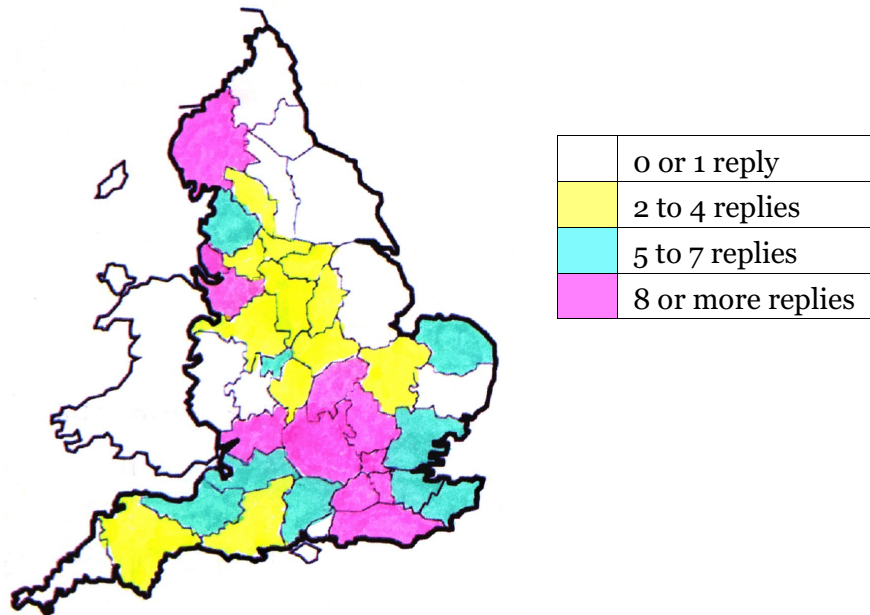
³ Op cit, Church of England website.

⁴ Op cit, item 1, *Trends* No 6, Table 5.6.2.

Responding Dioceses

Responses to the survey came from all but 5 Dioceses, and there were a further 6 Dioceses from which only one reply came. The largest response was from the Diocese of London, but responses in double figures came also from the Dioceses of Chester, Gloucester, Oxford, Peterborough and St Albans. The variation across the country is illustrated in the map in Figure 1, showing that the greatest response came from the evangelical Dioceses or where the evangelical strength is greatest, in the broad south-east corner of England.

Figure 1: Response to the CEEC Survey by Diocese



Dominant issues

“What are the dominant issues facing a Bishop today?” asked Question 26 and invited respondents to indicate the order of importance of the five issues presented. Answers are as given in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1: Dominant issues facing a Bishop today

Dominant issue	Order of importance					“Score”	
	First %	Second %	Third %	Fourth %	Fifth %		
Mission	84	10	2	3	1	1.3	👉 greatest
Declining church attendance	19	37	23	12	9	2.6	
Church Unity	4	28	24	22	22	3.3	
Homosexuality	4	24	27	23	22	3.4	
Financing Ministry	5	25	21	25	24	3.4	👈 least

The “score” is an artificial figure which nevertheless is a great help in sifting a large number of percentages. It is calculated by assigning the value 1 to the percentage in “First”, 2 to the percentage in “Second” and so on to the value 5 for the percentage in “Fifth” and then dividing by 100. The closer

the score is to 1 the greater importance it is deemed to have.

In this case, it was very clear that respondents felt that the overriding priority for Bishops was “Mission”, with declining church attendance on the positive side of neutrality but only just. The other three issues were all felt to have about the same priority, and all on the negative side of the middle value of 3.0, in other words the other three issues (unity, homosexuality and finance) were important but not of major importance. Mission was by far and away the most urgent issue.

A Bishop’s Priorities

The last question before the control questions was “What should be the priorities of a Bishop?” with respondents being asked to score them in order of importance as the previous question. Answers were as follows, with the “score” being calculated in the same way as before:

Table 1.2: Priorities of a Bishop today

Priority	Order of importance					“Score”
	First %	Second %	Third %	Fourth %	Fifth %	
To teach and defend the historic faith	55	30	11	3	1	1.7
To lead the church in mission and ministry	51	36	9	3	1	1.7
To be the voice of the church in the public square	9	24	28	27	12	3.1
To offer pastoral care for the whole Church	6	20	30	29	15	3.3
To manage church resources most effectively	3	10	13	22	52	4.1

☞ greatest

☞ least

The Bishop’s priorities were seen by respondents to be both teaching and leading in mission and ministry, and these were seen as of equal overall importance. Of about middle importance was the need to be public square, with slightly less support for offering pastoral care. Managing church resources effectively was not seen as priority for a Bishop!

So what does this mean?

The CEEC survey was completed by a reasonable number of respondents, 86% of whom were men, 69% of whom were ordained, and of whom half were aged 50 to 65 with a quarter who were either younger or older. Replies came especially where evangelicals are strongest.

The key dominant issue facing Bishops today was the need for mission, something re-inforced when respondents were asked what should be the top priority for Bishops. The answer was Mission and Teaching the faith. While the issue of declining attendance and the importance of speaking out in public were also seen as crucial they were nevertheless secondary to the key topic of mission.

2) The Role and Appointment of the Diocesan Bishop

The first section of the questionnaire, like all the sections, contained five statements, and respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each, and indicating the strength of that agreement or disagreement. The first section looked at the Role of the Bishop, and the second section with his Appointment.

Role of the Diocesan Bishop

Answers to the five statement about the Diocesan Role are given in Table 2.1, with the scoring worked out similarly to that in the previous chapter. A value of 1 is given to “Strongly agree”, 2 to “Agree”, 3 to “Generally agree” and 4, 5 and 6 to the Disagree categories. There are six choices with no neutral category in the middle. This means that the survey indicates either agreement or disagreement. The average value of the column weights is 3.5, so any “score” with a value less than 3.5 indicates agreement with the statement and any with a value higher than 3.5 indicates disagreement.

Table 2.1: Statements about the Role of a Diocesan Bishop

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Generally agree %	Generally disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Score
The Bishop should be accessible to his clergy	77	19	3	1	0	0	1.3
The Bishop should teach and explain the Christian faith	54	37	9	0	0	0	1.6
The Bishop should seek to visit each parish in the Diocese over a 5-year period	38	32	22	5	2	1	2.0
The Bishop is the key leader in the running of a C of E Diocese	35	33	26	4	2	0	2.1
The Bishop should handle clergy discipline	22	33	30	9	4	2	2.5

Roughly half-way between “agree” and “strongly agree” respondents felt the Diocesan Bishop should do two things – be accessible to his clergy (99% agreeing to 1% disagreeing) , and teach and explain the Christian faith (100% in agreement). Pastoral concern and clarity of message were the key factors.

The other statements also commanded general agreement, in terms of visiting all parishes over a 5 year period (92% agreeing), and acting as the key leader (94% agreeing). This latter would presumably suggest that a kind of “Chief of Staff”, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury has, would not generally be favoured. While there was more disagreement on the handling clergy discipline (85% agreeing, 15% disagreeing), the majority was clearly in favour of the Bishop handling discipline.

Appointment of a Bishop

The second topic on the questionnaire related to a Bishop's appointment. The spread of replies is shown in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Statements about the Appointment of Bishops

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Generally agree %	Generally disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Score
The Bishop should be interviewed about what he believes, proclaims and practises before he is appointed	66	22	7	3	2	0	1.5
All candidates who are short-listed to become a Bishop should be interviewed before any appointment is made	46	31	15	5	3	0	1.9
The Bishop should be elected to his position by the clergy of the Diocese	7	13	21	27	21	11	3.8
The Bishop should be appointed only for a fixed period (say 10 years)	6	11	23	31	19	10	3.8
The Bishop should be appointed by the Prime Minister and Queen	1	4	22	28	25	20	4.3

These statements were much more controversial. There were two which gathered general agreement, between "agree" and "strongly agree", which were that the Bishop should be interviewed specifically about his beliefs and practices before he is appointed (95% agreeing), and that all short-listed candidates should first be interviewed before a decision is made (92% agreeing). Less than 10% of respondents disagreed with either of these.

On the other hand, the other three statements were all *disagreed* with. That is to say respondents did not wish to see the Bishop elected by the clergy in the Diocese (the system used elsewhere in the Anglican Communion) (59% disagreed to 41% agreeing), nor that he should be appointed for a fixed term of say 10 years (60% disagreeing to 40%), and nor that he should be appointed by the Prime Minister and the Queen (73% disagreeing to 27%).

In summary ...

The results are:

- Universal majorities wanting the Bishop to teach the Christian faith (100%), and to be accessible to the clergy (99%).
- Strong majorities for the Bishop acting as the key leader in his Diocese (94%), visiting each parish in his Diocese (92%), and being responsible for clergy discipline (85%).
- Strong majorities for the Bishop to be interviewed about his beliefs and practices before appointment (95%) and that all on the short-list should be interviewed before reaching a decision (92%).
- Moderate majority who felt that the Bishop should not be appointed by the Prime Minister and the Queen (73%).
- Small majority for those who did not want the Bishop appointed for a fixed term (60%), or to be elected by the clergy in the Diocese (59%).

3) Suffragan Bishops

One set of questions on the form looked specifically at the work of Suffragan Bishops, their role and responsibility. This brief chapter looks therefore at just this one section, and gives the answers to the questions asked in Table 3.1, the “score” being worked out in the same way as previously.

Table 3.1: The Work of the Suffragan Bishop

Statement, all beginning: “The Suffragan Bishop ...”	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Generally agree %	Generally disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Score
... gives strong pastoral support to the local church	9	26	35	15	12	3	3.0
... lacks independence and authority	3	15	35	30	16	1	3.4
... should be based in a local parish church setting	7	13	28	30	18	4	3.5
... should be responsible for a much smaller area (say a Deanery)	3	12	22	31	25	7	3.8
... role should be abolished	3	4	8	30	35	20	4.5

Agreement was not strong for any of the statements in this section, with the strongest coming for the affirmation that the Suffragan Bishop gives strong pastoral support to the local church. There was just agreement (53% for to 47% against) that the Suffragan Bishop lacks independence and authority, and it was only just the other way (48% for to 52% against) for the Suffragan Bishop being based in a local church setting.

There was, however, very strong disagreement that the role of the Suffragan should be abolished, and almost two-thirds (63%) who disagreed that the Suffragan should be responsible for a smaller area, say the size of a Deanery.

4) The Bishop and National Life

The final two sections asked five questions each about the national role of the Bishop and about national issues. Some of these are very prominent in the press and media so the answers from this selection of CEEC members is especially interesting.

The Bishop and his National Role

Five questions were asked under this heading with the replies shown in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: The Bishop and his National Role

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Generally agree %	Generally disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Score
The Bishop should have regular contact with local community leaders	22	34	38	5	1	0	2.3
The Bishop should sit in the House of Lords	16	21	43	10	7	3	2.8
The Bishop should bring additional skills to his work	7	29	47	12	4	1	2.8
The Bishop is in touch with ordinary Church life	12	18	38	19	8	5	3.1
The Bishop should no longer live in a palace or specially large house	15	17	30	27	8	3	3.1

There was general agreement on all five of these statements, but especially very strong agreement that the Bishop should have regular contact with local community leaders, supported by 19 out of every 20 (94%) respondents.

There was also quite strong agreement that the Bishop should not live in a palace (62%) and that he was in touch with ordinary church life (68%).

The Bishop and National Issues

The final block of questions related to various national issues, and the answers to these are given in Table 4.2 on the next page.

Table 4.2: The Bishop and National Issues

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Generally agree %	Generally disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Score
The Bishop should lead the Church in ministry and mission	58	32	8	1	1	0	1.6
The Bishop should resign if he supports clergy in active homosexual relationships	52	25	11	8	1	3	1.9
Consecrating Women Bishops would divide the Church of England	32	18	25	17	6	2	2.5
The Bishop should be judged on performance and paid accordingly	3	6	11	32	25	23	4.4

There were very clear positives among this set of questions – the Bishop should lead the Church in ministry and mission was almost fully supported (98% agreed), and that the Bishop should resign if he supported active homosexual relationships in clergy (88% agreed).

Likewise there was wide disagreement that the Bishop should be judged on performance and paid accordingly (80% disagreed), exactly how that performance might be measured not being explicitly stated.

In summary ...

The results are:

- Virtual universal agreement that Bishops should lead in ministry and mission (98%) and that the Bishop should be in regular contact with local community leader (94%).
- Strong agreement that the Bishop should not support active homosexual clergy (88%), should bring additional skills to his work (83%), should sit in the House of Lords (80%) and should not be judged on performance and paid accordingly (80%).
- Agreement that consecrating Women Bishops could divide the Church of England (75%), the Bishop was in touch with ordinary church life (68%), and should not live in a specially large house (60%).

Appendix: About Brierley Consultancy

Brierley Consultancy began in 2007, after its founder moved on from being the Executive Director of Christian Research for 14 years and European Director of MARC Europe for the 10 years prior to that. He has been the Lausanne Senior Associate for Research since 1992. In 1972 he began what became in 1983 the *UK Christian Handbook* (still being published in the UK) and when with Christian Research compiled 7 editions of *Religious Trends*. Brierley Consultancy is committed to:

- Building vision for the future for individual churches and Christian agencies.
- Interpreting the results and suggesting actions from research so that the Kingdom of God may grow.
- Enabling strategic thinking in churches or agencies using the latest analyses of Christian life in the UK and the rest of the world.

A 6-page bi-monthly bulletin called *FutureFirst* is published by Brierley Consultancy “providing facts for forward planning”, a digest of contemporary statistical information on church and religious life. For a sample copy please write to the address below. It has received many plaudits from church and agency subscribers for its succinct but relevant articles.

We happily work with all Trinitarian churches – Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Independent, Catholic, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Orthodox and many smaller denominations. We do not work with non-Trinitarian groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons.

Peter Brierley is well known in the UK for organising and analysing large scale Church Censuses of church attendance held in the various countries of the United Kingdom, the most recent of which is the 2005 English Church Census, the results of which were published in September 2006.

Recent key publications include:

- *British Religion in the 21st Century*, *Religious Trends* No 7, 2007/2008, Christian Research, March 2008
- *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, *Religious Trends* No 6, 2006/2007, Christian Research, September 2006 [Tables from the English Church Census]
- *The Future of the Church*, *Religious Trends* No 5, 2005/2006 edition, September 2005
- *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, What the 2005 English Church Census reveals, Christian Research, September 2006 [Commentary]
- *Coming Up Trumps!*, Four ways into the future, Authentic Media, 2004

Forthcoming:

- *God’s Questions*, Vision, Strategy and Growth, Authentic Media, May 2010

Brierley Consultancy is headed by Dr Peter Brierley, a statistician with 42 years of experience in working on Christian evaluation, research and publishing. For more information either write to him at The Old Post Office, 1 Thorpe Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4PW or email peter@brierleyres.com or phone 01732 369 303. A website is in process of development.