

Jibe and a prayer

THERE HAS for a long time been an unspoken rivalry between the two London dioceses of Westminster and Southwark. Now, however, a light-hearted tribute to bus drivers in the Archdiocese of Southwark's newly launched newspaper, *The Pilgrim*, has given a voice to those sentiments.

In the latest issue, editor Greg Watts has included "The Bus Driver's Prayer" – a version of the "Our Father" that appears both to poke fun at the Archdiocese of Westminster and to hint at Ealing Abbey's recent troubles.

With a nod to the red leviathans of London then, here's the whole thing:

Our Father,
 Who art in Hendon
 Harrow be Thy name
 Thy Kingston come
 Thy Wimbledon
 In Erith as it is in Hendon.
 Give us this day our Berkhamsted
 And forgive us our Westminster
 As we forgive those who Westminster
 against us.
 Lead us not into Temple station
 And deliver us from Ealing
 For thine is the Kingston
 The Purley and the Crawley⁵
 For Iver and Iver
 Crouch End

Watts stumbled across this prayer when visiting an art gallery in Bermondsey Street, south-east London. The source of the prayer is unknown but it was recorded by the late Ian Dury in his 1992 solo album, *The Bus Driver's Prayer & Other Stories*.

"Southwark often gets rather overshadowed by Westminster. Westminster is seen as the more glamorous member while Southwark is the poor relation," he told us. "But we've got a lot going on in the diocese and we've also got a sense of humour. I think humour is very important in a diocesan paper."

Audience pending

AFTER MEETING an archbishop and religious sisters in Pakistan, the Conservative Party chairman is taking a major step further in forging links with the Catholic Church. Baroness Warsi, who is also Minister without Portfolio, is flying out to Rome in the middle of February for her first visit to the Vatican.

It is understood that the baroness, the first Muslim woman to serve in a British Cabinet, will be making a speech during the trip and there is the possibility of an audience with Pope Benedict XVI. Her spokeswoman confirmed that the visit was taking place.

When she was in Pakistan in January, Baroness Warsi discussed the persecution of Christians with Archbishop Emeritus of



Karachi, Evarist Pinto, and visited the Jesus and Mary Convent in the city.

It is also understood her itinerary was organised by Francis Campbell, the former British Ambassador to the Holy See who is now the Deputy High Commissioner in Karachi.

On the eve of the Pope's 2010 visit to Britain, the baroness spoke of restoring faith to the heart of society and last April addressed a conference on social action organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Ever ancient, ever new

OUR LADY OF the Park is an ancient place of Marian pilgrimage that for years after the Reformation was almost forgotten about. The shrine in Liskeard, Cornwall, has its origins in pagan times before it became a Christian place of pilgrimage. The site is an old deer park in the grounds of the property of Ladye Park, and was a popular pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages.

In 1979 pilgrimages started again and continued under the current owners, John and Judith Wilks. Now, however, the couple are selling the seven-bedroom property to move to a smaller, retirement home. They are very keen that the new owners will continue the pilgrimages. The house, which dates back to the 1300s and is set in three acres of land, is being sold via a sealed bid auction later this month and offers in the region of £750,000 are invited.

The shrine, which is Grade II listed, consists of both a holy well outside the house and a baptistery in the garden: a pool connected to a stream with an arch over it. Recently the pilgrimages have been ecumenical and in the 1990s an Anglican vicar is understood to have had a Marian apparition at the shrine.

Before the Reformation, Ladye Park had been a monastery and was where local people attended Mass. There is a path from Liskeard to the house known as "the Mass path".

Damned if you do ...

IT MIGHT have been a brother bishop, John Packer of Ripon and Leeds, who led the opposition to the Government's Welfare Reform Bill last week but it's the Archbishop of Canterbury who was singled out for particularly rough treatment in one red-top paper.

The *Sun*'s associate editor, Trevor Kavanagh, in an article headlined "Red revs out of touch with Britain today", describes Rowan Williams as a "Marxist Arch Druid", who has surrendered to "muscular Islam". The archbishop is depicted in an accompanying picture as Lenin in front of both a Communist flag and the interior of a church.

The "unelected bishops", according to Kavanagh, have been allowed to "bully an elected government" and as a result it is time to ask "why they are there at all". Bishop Packer and fellow Lords Spiritual successfully tabled a motion to amend the Government's bill, which would cap benefit payments at £26,000 a year.

It wasn't all bad press for the archbishop, however. In *The Observer* Victoria Coren said the bishops were simply "trying to say what they think Jesus would have said". She claimed that the "right-wing press" had been complaining for years that Christianity is "too weak and small a voice", but now the bishops were speaking out "they hate it". Dr Williams, who last year voiced opposition to the Government's benefit cuts, had, she added, a "vocational requirement" to worry about the poor.

Merseyside's marbles

INCE BLUNDELL HALL near Liverpool was once home to one of the largest collections of Roman and Greek sculptures in Britain. Most of the items – collected during the eighteenth century by the connoisseur, Henry Blundell – were given to the then Liverpool Corporation when the estate was bought for use as a nursing home by the order of the Augustinian Canonesses of Mercy in 1960.

But some remained in the hall and now the nuns who run the home have applied for planning permission to remove the remaining 67 sculptures with the intention of selling them. They include reliefs and pieces in niches, which conservationists claim are integral to the Grade-II-listed building and which are believed to be worth millions of pounds.

The nuns say removing the sculptures will make them easier to conserve and intend to replace them with replicas. A decision on the future of the sculptures is due to be made by the local council. A spokesman for the nuns said they were not being driven by commercial interests and were "extremely concerned" about the deterioration of the reliefs.