

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No 106 News & notes for our friends September 1995</p>

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

The local farmers are already completing the harvest. Last year, some were still doing so in October. Such has been our summer – here as elsewhere. There are also many events to record.

In the week after Pentecost, Rev. Dr Paul McPartlan gave 4 superb and well-attended public lectures on the theme: "the Eucharist makes the Church". On 17th June, Musick Fyne, a local choral group, sung a Mass of the 16th century Scottish composer, Robert Carver. Over 100 attended this. On 25th June, we were happy to host the annual diocesan pilgrimage in honour of our Lady, led by Bishop Mario. On 28th June, my predecessor, Abbot Alfred, reached the grand age of 80.

These happy events were followed by two deaths. On 29th June, we learned of the decease of a much-cherished oblate and benefactor of our community, George Barr, for many years bursar at Gordonstoun School. Over 200 people, including a representative of HRH the Duke of York, came to his funeral. Fr Prior presided in my absence. We extend every sympathy to his widow, Sheila, and family. The following day news came that Fr Columba Wynn, a monk of our Community, had died at Nazareth House, Cheltenham. Dom Columba had resided at Prinknash since 1967. An obituary appears on a following page. He is now buried here, among the brotherhood he served so well in earlier years.

In early July we were happy to welcome back our friends the Belgian Scouts from the Jesuit College in Antwerp. They arrived in time for the feast of St Benedict and stayed for a few weeks of excellent camping weather – marred by only one day of rain (the day they went to the Elgin Highland Games!) They cut wood,

worked with the bees, helped with the stained glass, painted the new loft, picked fruit, put up new sign-posts and generally had a enjoyable and energetic time. We look forward to their next visit. They left us to hike round the Highlands for a few days before returning home.

On 11th July, Abbot Alfred, I and three other brethren were in Gloucester Cathedral for the Vespers celebrated to mark the centenary of the Prinknash Community. Over 120 monks and nuns took part, and the Cathedral itself was full. Cardinal Basil Hume gave the address.

On 25th July, Br Augustine Holmes made his solemn profession as a monk of Pluscarden. Br Augustine is 30, a graduate of St Andrew's University and a convert to the Catholic faith. Before coming to us he taught history and religious studies at Downside Abbey School. Many of his friends made the long journey to be with him for the occasion. The following day, Br Meinrad Gibson left us on his way to Kristo Buase monastery, Ghana. Last year, Br Meinrad was "lent" for three months to this young Community. He made such a valuable contribution that he was asked for again. His silver jubilee of profession fell on 24th August. We look forward to celebrating it with him on his return in November.

On 7th August, we bade farewell to our longstanding and much esteemed parish priest, Canon Robert McDonald, who moves to head the pastoral team ministering in Inverness. We look forward to welcoming his successor in Elgin, Fr Alistair Doyle.

On 15th August, Fr Martin (James) Birrell made his first or simple profession. Fr Martin, who has had a long connection with our monastery, was working as a priest in our diocese until joining us.

On 24th August, crowning the summer, we had the joy of the priestly ordinations, by Bishop Mario, of two of our monks, Doms Benedict Hardy and Ambrose Flavell. Over 20 priests and 100 layfolk and religious joined us for this happy and prayerful event. Please keep the two new priests in your prayers.

Finally, we should mention the visits of Dom Pius Fathinathan of Asirvanam monastery, near Bangalore, India, and of Fr Anthony Mensah-Brown, founder of Divine Providence Monastery, Jamasi, Ghana – a longstanding friend of Pluscarden. “You crown the year with your goodness”, as the Psalmist says.

Yours in the Lord,

+Fr Hugh OSB, Abbot

THE EDITOR’S JOTTINGS

In our March newsletter I appealed for subscriptions to the *AIM Monastic Bulletin* which appears twice a year, subscription £9, 112pp. I am very grateful to the 10 people who responded. The latest number has a new cover and again has excellent articles on monastic life in the Third World. Some of the monasteries in the disturbed areas of Africa (especially Rwanda and Algeria) need our prayers. There are reports from both places.

Our last number also had some “Statistical Thoughts”. So I was interested to find in a French periodical *Mission Messages*, published by the French Capuchins, a map of France showing the more than 30 dioceses and giving the number of missionaries from each diocese. This shows a total of 8,656 Priests, Brothers, Nuns & Sisters, and lay missionaries. It is interesting to see where the most vocations come from. Brittany leads the way, followed by the dioceses nearest Belgium and Germany round Lille and Strasbourg, and in the South, Bayonne which adjoins the Basque area of Spain. Where do they work? 4,700 in Africa, 997 in Latin America, 921 in Asia and 1,615 in Europe. We forget that many parts of Europe are today “missionary territory”.

In his letter from Alton, Fr David mentions the sale of the Castle. This is not Alton Towers but a smaller castle, built on the ruins of a medieval building which adjoins our monastery. It was

used by the Sisters of Mercy as a Prep. School, and one of the Pluscarden monks is an alumnus. The now famous theme park Alton Towers is on the hill behind Pugin's chapel. Being over the valley it is hardly visible, though not inaudible.

One of the pictures in this issue is of the very attractive monk's choir at Alton. St Benedict calls his monastic church "the Oratory". He uses the word 17 times in his *Rule* and Chapter 52 is entitled "The Oratory of the Monastery" and he says "let the oratory be what it is called (i.e. the place of prayer) and let nothing else be done or kept there." Alton's oratory, in its simplicity and good taste, is truly the heart of the monastery. The primitive oratory of St Benedict at Subiaco discovered a few years ago, beneath the present Abbey church, is no bigger than that at Alton. And that must be true also of the other twelve monasteries or hermitages at Subiaco. St Benedict of course does not use the word oratory in the strict sense of modern canon law, for him every monastic church is the oratory, whether it be a great basilica like Monte Cassino or a humble chapel for a few monks. It is a place of prayer for the daily liturgy – which he calls "the work of God" – as well as a place "where a brother who may wish to pray privately may not be distracted by another's bad behaviour ... but may just go in simply, and pray, not with loud cries, but with tears and earnestness of heart."

It is the time of the harvest – "the fields are white for the harvest, pray that the Lord send labourers into his harvest." How appropriate then that our two young deacons were ordained to the priesthood on the feast of St Bartholomew. Keep them in your prayers.

Your editor,

Dom Alfred

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S

Work on our monastic church goes on apace. There is too much to relate in detail here. Two items will have to suffice as examples. The outer door of the church will be bronze. This is rather traditional for a monastery (or basilica or cathedral). However, the main door from the foyer into the actual church will be oak, made by a friend of ours, Mark McCurn. This door will be carved. Mark, Sr Mary Elizabeth and Fr Bede have designed this door. This main door is, in fact, two doors, which, on one side, will have the symbols of the four evangelists (angel, bull, lion, eagle) on them while above (in the transom) will be Christ seated in glory in an oval. Sister Mary Elizabeth has drawn, so far, the four symbols. Mark is not carving the door but has found a Greek, Dimitrios Klitsas, living in Hampden (!), Massachusetts, who will do this. We have been to the carver's workshop and his carving is excellent. The inside of the door will echo the outside but will be Benedictine in flavour – St Benedict in an oval plus four scenes from the life of St Benedict. The second item is that high up in the church there will be a circular window (7 feet diameter) in honour of Mary. This has been designed and will be executed by Marc Hamill and Edward LeSage. Br Gregory of Pluscarden met them during his visit here in May. The design is intertwined fleurs-de-lis, and is based on a drawing in the margin of a medieval manuscript. It is hoped that the church will be dedicated on 26 March 1996.

DOM COLUMBA WYNN OSB 1909 - 1995

On Wednesday 5th July, Dom Columba (Peter) Wynn, monk of Pluscarden, was laid to rest in our cemetery, having died peacefully six days before in the care of the Sisters of Nazareth at Cheltenham. Since 1967 he had lived his monastic life at

Prinknash and to many who know us he will be only a name or less. Yet he was an important figure in our history. Born at Bannockburn in 1909, a graduate of Glasgow University, and teaching at secondary level until wartime service in the R.A.F., he was one of that generation whose experience of world war was their vocation and, even, novitiate. He entered Prinknash in 1946, at the age of 36. It had been an air force chaplain, Brendan McHugh, who had encouraged Peter in a Benedictine direction, and who, by the curious paths of Providence, was later to be his superior at Pluscarden. As Scot, Br Columba was a natural choice for sending to the recently re-established Pluscarden Priory in 1948 and so he became one of the pioneering members of our Community. He was the first Scotsman to make solemn profession here since the Reformation (1950) and the first to be ordained priest (1952). More significantly, as Novice Master for 11 years (1955 to 1966) and as Superior (Prior) for the last 5 of those, he played a decisive part in taking the young Community beyond its pioneering days – no easy task and in giving it its own distinctive physiognomy.

More than half the present Community, including myself, entered only after the monastery's Independence (1966). Dom Columba was therefore someone one met only on visits to Prinknash. But what most impinged was the abiding respect in which he was held at Pluscarden - a respect to which several of the older brethren gave moving testimony after his death. Nothing so opens a door on a person. His frequent references to Ps. 22 were recalled, some memorable evocations of great Christian figures (Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch) in community or novitiate conferences, his pastoral care for the wayfarers who have always been a feature of our life, his steady insistence on regular observance, enclosure and silence, his concern for the intellectual life. A younger monk at Prinknash, who had known him only in his last years, said simply: "He was a man of prayer. It stood out", and a close *familia* of Pluscarden, no less simply: "He was a real monk."

We owe thanks to our brethren at Prinkash who provided the man from Pluscarden with a home for so many years. We owe thanks to the Sisters of Nazareth who cared for him in the last 18 months of his life, and with whom – through the unhappinesses of old age – he achieved a final peace. We owe thanks to all those members of his family who joined us at his Requiem. But we owe thanks to Dom Columba also: a true monk who helped assure the monasticity of this Community. Pray for him, and you will be praying for us and for yourselves.

DHG

BOOK REVIEWS

Benedictines in Troubled Times

Modern Benedictine Martyrs of El Pueyo: Chronicle of a witness has been circulating in Spanish and French editions for a number of years, but until recently the only accessible information on El Pueyo in English has been the chapter on “The Forty-Five Spanish Martyrs of the Red Revolution: 1936-1937” in Dom Romanos Rios’ *Benedictines of Today* (published in 1946). Now the full text of Placid Miguel Gil Imirazaldu’s eyewitness account of the events leading up to the martyrdom of almost the whole community of El Pueyo has been made available in English through the labours of Dom Seraphim Sanz of New Norcia in Australia. Dom Seraphim is the brother of Fr Ramiro who was brutally executed, with his confreres, on the night of the 27th to 28th August 1936.

Until the war our monastery of El Pueyo, situated a few miles outside Barbastro in the northern Spanish province of Huesca, was a famous Marian shrine. Our Lady is said to have appeared there to a local shepherd in the year 1101, sitting in the branches of an almond tree and surrounded by a multitude of angels. She told him to go to the bishop and to ask for a church to

be built on the top of this strange conical hill overlooking the city of Barbastro. A sanctuary developed, focused on a beautiful Romanesque statue of a rustic-looking Madonna and Child, which continued to be venerated by the faithful until it was burned in 1936.

The book has an interesting introduction on the growth of the shrine, the coming of the Benedictines, and the political background to the events of the Spanish Civil War, but, as one would expect in a work published to promote their cause for canonisation, most of the material concerns their months of imprisonment, and the eventual execution of the community by the Anarchists. In an interview with an Australian newspaper reporter Dom Seraphim stated his opinion that the story bore comparison with any of the records of the early martyrs from the era of the catacombs. Certainly their account shares their sense of immediacy since the book is based on notes smuggled out of prison (in the back of a shaving mirror) only days before the monks were shot. It is recorded that their tremendous heroism, piety and ardour to die as God's true sons left an imprint even on their executioners. We read this book in the monastic refectory last summer and the rapt attention with which our guests followed the unfolding of the story was quite astonishing.

Modern Benedictine Martyrs of El Pueyo, New Norcia (Australia) 1993, 148pp, illustrated, is available from our shop price £6.70 or £7.50 by post.

The other book I have been asked to review is *Dzieje Milosci Bozej*, a Polish edition of Theodoret of Cyrus' *History of the Monks of Syria* published by the Benedictine Abbey of Tyniec near Cracow as part of an ongoing series of classic monastic writings. I don't read Polish, and doubt whether many of our readers will either, but we include mention of it here in the hope that you may like to make a financial contribution to help Tyniec continue with this important project. They have made an international appeal for funds and Abbot Alfred will be happy to

forward donations.

Last year Tyniec celebrated the 950th anniversary of its foundation with an exhibition of Benedictine art and culture and an International Colloquium on “The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism” (both have been published by the abbey), but the history of the Benedictines in Poland has been anything but easy. In the 11th and early 12th centuries there were close ties with the monasteries of Italy and the Cluniac order, but growth was not sustained. Other orders attracted patronage and for most of the middle ages there were only six Benedictine abbeys in Poland. Tyniec was suppressed by the Austrian government in 1817, then, in a wave of secularisation by the state, nearly all the remaining religious houses were closed in 1864.

Two of the ancient abbeys (Lubin and Tyniec) have now been revived and both are receiving a steady stream of vocations. Nineteen professions took place in the two houses between 1981 and 1989. Tyniec was refounded from Belgium in 1939, but for nearly fifty years the activities of the community have been constrained by war, economic hardship and then the restraints imposed by the political situation. It is only since the collapse of communism that religious publishing in the Polish language has become possible once again. In 1993 the monks of Tyniec embarked on an ambitious scheme to publish key spiritual writings in the monastic tradition (mainly of the 4th and 5th centuries, but medieval works are also projected) in attractive paperback editions. Seven volumes have appeared so far, all of which have a direct bearing on the text of the *Rule* of St Benedict, and another seven (including John Cassian’s *Institutes* and Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of St Martin*) are forthcoming when funds permit.

DAF

NEWS FROM ALTON

During the summer we were pleased to welcome various groups: parishioners of St Mowin's, Burton-on-Trent, who came for Vespers one Sunday, and those who came to the evening masses we provide on holy days of obligation.; these masses are followed by Compline and then refreshments in the visitors' room.

On 16 June Frs David and Andrew went to St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, for the opening of an Art Exhibition. The work on display is inspired by the recently restored cathedral and some of its interesting furnishings. Some of our work was included.

Staffordshire and its neighbouring counties are rich in historical buildings and towards the end of the month we visited Boscobel House where Charles II was hidden by Catholics after the Battle of Worcester, and Stokesay Castle in Shropshire, a very fine example of a 13th century fortified manor house. Not far from Stokesay lies Millichope Park which Fr David last saw 50 years ago when he was living there as one of the overflow community from Prinknash. After the vicissitudes brought about by the war and its aftermath this elegant house eventually reverted to the Berry family who have restored it to its former glory together with the grounds and lake. Returning after half a century was reminiscent if *Brideshead Revisited*.

On our patronal feast we were fortunate enough to have the services of a small choir of professional singers from London. The choir sang music by Palestrina at Mass and by Lassus and Tallis at Vespers and Compline. During this month also extensive work began on the outside of the monastery buildings; it is being funded by the archdiocese.

Early in August we heard that after six years of lying empty the archdiocese had bought the Castle from the Sisters of Mercy. The former school will be used as a retreat house for school children, and at present a team of young people from Soli

House, Stratford, are beginning the enormous task of tidying up the many rooms and corridors.

DDH