

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pluscarden Benedictines</b> <b>No. 87-88 News and Notes for our Friends Sept.-Dec. 1990</b></p>
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**FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Reader,

Due to my absence in America, the June newsletter was very late in appearing. So much so that we produced nothing for September and by way of amends this is a double number for Christmas.

It has been a good summer. Here in the north we were free from the drought which affected the south of England. Moray remained green and we had an excellent crop of fruit and honey flowed from our hives. Work went ahead on the new St Scholastica Retreat house, and the new shop in the Information Centre was patronised by the many visitors. A rota of guides were on duty to help.

On 11th July, St Benedict's feast, Dame Andrea Savage made her Solemn Profession at Stanbrook Abbey. One of her brothers is our Fr Mark in Ghana, so I was invited to preside at this very beautiful and impressive ceremony, which was quite a Scottish occasion with a large gathering of Scots and of course the Abbess of Stanbrook herself hails from north of the Border.

Fifteen years ago Dr Mary Berry founded the "Schola Gregoriana" at Cambridge to foster the Gregorian Chant. To celebrate this "birthday" about a hundred people gathered at the Westminster Pastoral Centre at London Colney. They included about fifteen Oblates from various monasteries and I was invited as the guest of honour. The Centre is near St Albans and was a former Anglican Convent of the All Saints' Sisters. It is a large and very impressive building built around a great cloister with a beautiful Ninian Comper Chapel. On the Saturday afternoon we sang Vespers in St Alban's Cathedral – a former Benedictine

Abbey, at the invitation of the Dean and Chapter. The Dean was present in his choir stall vested in cope. This was followed by a modest festive dinner, and a recital of music in the Chapel. The main liturgical celebration was a sung Mass on the Sunday afternoon, at which I presided with Fr Richard Conrad, O.P., Prior of Cambridge Blackfriars and chaplain to the Schola, Fr Guy Nichols from Oxford and Fr Hilary Carter, O.A.R.

It was a great pleasure to welcome to Pluscarden a monk the Abbey of Pannonhalma in Hungary, Fr Vladimir O.S.B. He gave us a most interesting talk on history of his 1000 year old monastery and especially the trials of the community under Communist rule. Incidentally, he reminded us that St Margaret of Scotland was born near Pannonhalma.

Dom Dyfrig Rushton, the retired Abbot of Prinknash, died rather unexpectedly in his sleep on 3rd August. He had sung the Conventual Mass on the previous morning. He was in his 90th year. I went down to Prinknash for the funeral with Br Mungo and Br Gregory. There was a very large gathering for the Requiem which included most of the Abbots and a great many diocesan priests and friends of Abbot Dyfrig. The Anglican Bishop of Tewkesbury was also there.

During August a group of people from our twin town of Landshut in Bavaria were staying in Elgin and were here for Mass on the Sunday when Fr Hugh preached in German. Later in the week the President of the German Association, Frau Liselotte Winterling came out to Pluscarden with Peter Zanre the Elgin President and several others and presented us with a large donation for our restoration work. We are most grateful for this gift and for this friendship which inspired it.

The Church of Scotland at Urquhart was recently closed and converted into a private house. The Minister and Elders very kindly gave us a set of eight oak choir stalls which we have placed in the Lady Chapel. A Benedictine Priory dependent on Dunfermline Abbey was founded at Urquhart in 1125 but it never flourished and in 1454 had only two monks. Two monks do not make a community and normal monastic observance would not be

possible. Pluscarden also had only six monks in residence, so the two houses were united and Urquhart closed. The eight choir stalls are modern and did not come from the old Priory, nevertheless, they are a link with our past.

On 3rd September we sang Vespers in the ruins of Deer Abbey at the request of our Bishop. Deer was a small Cistercian house and now belongs to the Diocese of Aberdeen and since 1990 is the 900th anniversary of St Bernard, we sang votive Vespers of the Saint. Fr Peter Moran preached to the small gathering of pilgrims from the Deanery. It was a very prayerful occasion.

The following morning we welcomed our Metropolitan the Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh and his new Auxiliary Bishop Kevin Rafferty and group of pilgrims they were leading to places of Catholic interest in this area. They joined us for Mass and lunch for which we were joined by Bishop Mario Conti and afterward Archbishop O'Brien blessed and opened our new St Scholastica's Retreat House. Bishop George Sessford of the Episcopal Church, and Rev. Hugh Smith, Moderator of Moray Presbytery of the Church of Scotland, also took part as well as the members of our Appeal Committee and helpers.

I was away again from the 4th October for the Visitations at Ramsgate Abbey and Fernham Priory, for the funeral of Abbot Leonard Vickers of Douai Abbey and the meeting of our Abbot President's Council in Rome.

On 21 October Br Cyprian Bampton made his Simple Profession. He is a much travelled man. He was born in Africa, has lived in Norway and his home is now in Essex. We look forward to Br Ambroses Solemn Profession on 8th December.

Many of you will have seen the Mass which was televised live, from the Abbey on Sunday 7th September. The chief concelebrant was Fr Hugh who gave the homily. A lay choir which was formed recently and sings here on Tuesday evenings augmented the singing. A video was by Grampian Television and is on sale at the Abbey.

On 13th October we welcomed Bishop Walmesley, Bishop to the Forces and Fr Gordon Beattie O.S.B., chaplain at RAF

Kinloss, for Mass and lunch.

We are indebted to Mrs Elizabeth Gill of Elgin for drawing our attention to a very attractive water colour of “The Priory, Pluscardine” by David Roberts RA. (1796-1864), signed, inscribed and dated 12 September 1884, size 9½" x 13½". David Roberts was born in Edinburgh and from simple beginnings, worked his way up through years of house decoration, scene painting, to recognition and fame. Before his death he received the freedom of his native city. He painted architectural scenes all over Europe and the Middle East. He was a prodigious painter in oils and watercolours. He was a friend of Turner. His painting of Elgin Cathedral is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, but so far we have not been able to discover the whereabouts of the Pluscarden picture.

Our Library has received a valuable gift of old books from Fr Roger Spencer of Barmouth. They are a welcome addition to our collection of penal day books. They include St John Fisher’s “Treatise concerning the fruitful sayings of DAVID the King and Prophet in the Seven Penitential Psalms”. Printed in the year MDCCXIV (1714). It seems this is the only recorded copy of an unknown edition. It is not in the British Library.

Another is “The Poor Man’s Controversy – a Posthumous WorkW MDCCLXIX by J. Mannock O.S.B.

Also “The Roman Martyrology” translated into English by G.K. of the Society of Jesus – 2nd edition. St Omers 1667, with the bookplate of Thomas Weld of Lulworth Castle.

We are indebted to Dr Christopher Burchill for the gift of “De Origine et Progressu Schismatis Anglicani” by Nicholas Sanders, Rome MDLXXXVI.

During the last week of October, Abbot John Moakler O.C.R. of Mount St Bernard Abbey gave our retreat. We are grateful to him for the help he gave us.

Over the last few months Fr Mark has suffered various tropical ills in Ghana so the doctors out there have advised him to return to this country for treatment. We hope he will soon be well again. The Abbot of Prinknash and Fr Leo will be going out to

Ghana in November to help and encourage Fr Martin.

Br Finbar will be returning to Pluscarden from Petersham in January and Fr Symeon is taking his place, while Br André arrived from Petersham for a two month visit on 29th October.

I was unfortunately away for the Aberdeen International Youth Festival Concert in August, and for the “Messiah” on 8th September, but on other pages you can read accounts of them by Brs Adrian and Michael.

Yours devotedly,

D. Alfred, Abbot

**ABBOT DYFRIG RUSHTON**  
**– SECOND ABBOT OF PRINKNASH**

Abbot Dyfrig’s monastic life witnessed the most important chapters of our history. He was born at Portishead Bristol, educated by Salesians at Battersa and the Jesuits at Stamford Hill. He always maintained that a Jesuit education produced the best monks. He eventually found his way to Caldey where he joined the aluminate and later entered the novitiate in 1919. This prolonged for six years after the resignation of Abbot Aelred. He was ordained in 1928 and it was then as Assistant Cellarer that he was involved in organising the move from Caldey to Prinknash. Here he became Cellarer and developed the farm, in which he took the greatest interest and he was also Master of Brothers and Claustal Prior to Abbot Wilfrid. He was largely involved in building up the Pottery and planning the new Abbey. In 1963 he was elected Abbot and immediately set to work to complete the new Abbey and move the community out of what then became the Grange. At his first General Chapter as Abbot, the Brothers were given Solemn vows and this was a great joy to him. At the same time Pluscarden was made an autonomous Conventual Priory and on

22nd November 1966 elected the first Prior. A few years later St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough was also made autonomous. Abbot Dyfrig watched the Community grow from about 28 when the move from Caldey took place, to over 70. He helped to guide the Community through the war years and difficult days following the Vatican Council. As Cellarer he did much to build up our Community at Pluscarden. He led the first little group up to the Priory on 13 April 1948 and in 1966 he installed the first Conventual Prior on 14th December. But he found Pluscarden a cold place and always hurried home to the warmer climate of Gloucestershire when his work here was done. But he never forgot the monks in the far north and a letter would always arrive from him on each one's name day. In fact I received one the day after his death.

He died in his 89th year – peacefully in his sleep after singing the Conventual Mass on the previous morning. The Abbey Church was filled to capacity for his Requiem; Abbots, monks, diocesan priests and his many friends from far and near. He was laid to rest in the new monastic cemetery with his brothers who had gone before him in the peace of Christ.

## **PLUSCARDEN ABBEY WEST WING**

### **Excavation of West Range: 27th August – 21st September 1990**

Our plans for building a new guest-house along the west side of the cloister have provided an opportunity for close examination of Pluscarden's medieval past. Towards the end of August the SDD Historic Buildings and Monuments Department in Edinburgh sent a team of six archaeologists, under the direction of Dr Finbar McCormick, to excavate, with instructions to clear the site threatened by new building and to investigate all archaeological features.

Many readers of these pages will be familiar with the site, which was for many years Fr Abbot's flower garden. It runs the length of the present guest wing to the west of the cloister and

includes a small corner of the old nave, outside our shop, and the ramp leading down from the guest door to the back drive and greenhouse.

Work began with the removal of shrubs and garden soil with pick and shovel to a depth of five or six inches. Almost immediately we found that cross-walls dividing the flower beds were ancient. Careful cleaning with trowel and brush revealed the threshold of a door with the bottom stone of the eastern door jamb still *in situ* and partly incorporated into the huge ruined wall, running the length of the west cloister, which we had assumed until that point to be part of the medieval fabric of the west range. This door jamb was to take on greater significance towards the end of the excavation when a visiting expert was able to date the style of the moulding to the late 15th or 16th century.

The next stage was to clean back the areas to the north and south of these walls in the hope of finding floor levels. In this we were disappointed, the ground had already been dug out in the past and we found that the garden soil rested directly on top of the natural glacio-fluvial sub-soil; but it appears that the ruined wall, mentioned above, had been built directly on top of the medieval surface and so had preserved a length of the irregular stone flags of the original floor. It must, therefore, date from after the 16th century and may even be part of the Earl of Fife's work in the 1820s.

Having found internal walls running east - west, we extended our trench eastward through the rockery with expectation of finding a more substantial outer wall running north - south. In this, once again, we were to be disappointed, but the trench was not without interest as we found three shallow graves, probably dating from the 17th or 18th centuries when the priory was used as a burial ground for local inhabitants. These skeletons have been taken to Edinburgh for study, but will be returned for reburial in our cemetery. Not far from these was found the most interesting feature the entire excavation: an irregular pit about five feet deep containing a dark organic fill which had been built up gradually in layers. Amongst the finds were dog and cat skeletons, some off-

cuts of woollen fabrics, medieval window glass and fish bones. Near the top we found two parallel dry-stone walls, about two feet apart, and one likely explanation of their function would be that they supported a seat over a latrine pit.

While work continued on that site a small area was opened at the south-west corner of the nave aisle which is also under threat from rebuilding. Here we had a very definite objective in view: to determine whether the nave had ever actually been completed. Visitors no doubt have been struck by the fact that the choir, transepts and east range survived almost intact while the nave exists only as a line of foundations scarcely two feet high. A Catholic visitor to the Priory ruins in 1761 records a local tradition that when the church was all finished except the western part, the builders heard a mysterious voice saying

“The Monastery of Pluscartie  
Begun; but ne’er shall ended be”

and promptly stopped work. John Geddes was writing only about 160 years after the last pensioned monk of Pluscarden died and so his “tradition” deserves some credence. Would archaeology help settle the question?

We found very substantial foundations and so there can be no doubt that a nave was intended and begun; but large churches are traditionally built from east to west over a period of decades so the foundations alone would hardly be conclusive. Two new items of evidence can now be added to the argument in support of a finished nave: firstly the surface of the foundations were found to be shattered into a crazy paving effect, consistent with them having borne a great overburden of wall; secondly, a visiting architectural historian (Richard Fawcett) was able to demonstrate convincingly that the choir was rebuilt in the 1270s, about forty years after the foundation date, on a grander scale, and that before that extension eastwards the choir stalls extended into the nave to about the distance of our present front door. This is consistent with early Cistercian practice, where the monks’ choir stretches from a



screen across the first bay of the nave to the eastern arch of the tower crossing. Dr McCormick hopes to include the architectural evidence for this theory in the excavation report.

The third area investigated was on the ramp leading down from the guests' door to the back drive, which we already knew to be covering a flight of stone stairs as they stuck out through the revetting wall of the greenhouse garden. Here we found at least two major building phases: the flight of stairs between the south range and a range jutting out from the south-west corner of the cloister fell out of use and was partly dismantled and the south-west range demolished before a much cruder and heavier structure was built over them. The small size of this trench made it impossible to identify the nature of these buildings. Dom Edmund found a fine medieval buckle and some painted stained glass in this area some years ago.

What can we conclude from all this? Firstly, that a substantial west range was not a part of the original (13th century) plan, but that a flimsy structure was built against the west wall of the cloister some time after the Priory changed hands from Valliscaulian to Benedictine ownership in 1454. This would be quite consistent with what we know of Benedictine adaptations elsewhere at Pluscarden after it became a dependent of the Royal Abbey of Dunfermline and entered a new phase of relative prosperity after some sixty years of decay. The revised ground plan has a close parallel in that of Dryburgh Abbey in the Borders, a house of Premonstratensian canons. It too was designed without a west range, but had cellars added to the west wall of the cloister in the 16th century. In the semi-standardised Cistercian layout of the thirteenth century the west range provided accommodation for the lay brothers of monastery, giving direct access to the nave where they had their services. It may be that our plan reflects a less rigid distinction between choir monk and lay brother in the Valliscaulian houses.

Secondly, we now know more about the building sequence of the surviving fabric and the relative dates of its parts. One possibility is that the nave was dismantled after the disastrous fire

of 1390 (which still leaves its mark in the red staining and shattered stone work of the south transept) and never rebuilt due to slender resources. There were only six monks at Pluscarden in 1453 and probably not many more sixty years earlier. Further archaeological work in the future should settle the question once and for all.

We are most grateful to Dr McCormick and his team: Jamie Hamilton, Kay Ibbetson, Jon Henderson, Chloe Dondos, Martin Crowther and Cairene Sutherland, for the information they have given us and we look forward to the published report with the results of the specialist studies.

DAF

## **ST SYMEON THE YOUNG**

“A brother-loving poor man, upon begging a friend of Christ and receiving some money, joyfully ran to his brothers in misery and told them, ‘Run, make haste, so that you too may have some!’, while he pointed to the one who had given him the coin. When they did not believe this, he opened the palm of his hand and showed it to them. In the same way I, who have nothing of myself, have experienced the love of God and His compassion for man. I cannot endure to be alone and to hide this Grace. Through my words I disclose it to you in the palm of my hand, and I cry aloud, ‘Run brothers, make haste!’”

In these words St Symeon the Young, often called the New Theologian, reveals to us his personality, the outline of his teaching, and his sense of having a special mission to others. One thousand years ago he was in his early forties. He was abbot of a small monastery in Constantinople, then the greatest city of Europe and proud to be the Christian continuation of classical civilisation and considered the New Rome. Yet Symeon’s writings have a freshness and simplicity which appeals to many people today. As you read them, Symeon speaks to you directly, offering in his open palm the possibility of an intimate personal,

communion with Christ. He insists that this is for all Christians. The saints of former times, he says, had nothing more than we have today, and the Apostles themselves had no advantage over us, since Christ is present in the Church and her Sacraments: the one difference is our insensibility.

Symeon argues that if Christ is really present and we are unaware of Him, then something is wrong in us. The Lord promised to dwell in us and make Himself known to us. Many Christians, however, serve Christ as if He were absent in this life, whilst the priests presume to stand at the altar and to give absolution without entering into what they are doing, and intellectuals speak of God from book-knowledge instead of experience. Views such as these made Symeon enemies in high places. Soon after he became abbot he faced physical violence from a clique in his monastery, and fourteen years later in 1009 archbishop Stephen of Alexina, a powerful Court official and famous for his erudition, began a public controversy with Symeon. Stephen felt the sting of the abbot's words and had him sent into exile across the Bosphorus. Although Symeon was soon rehabilitated and they even offered to make him a bishop, he chose to remain in exile, seeing voluntary banishment as the fulfilment of his profession.

To have God present and not to know Him is for Symeon like owning a treasure chest which we never open: if it is not impossible, it is at least unnatural. But now are we to raise the lid? First we need to recognise our state and to lament it in prayer, begging God with great desire that He may send us a helper. Symeon regards the help of a fellow human being as almost indispensable. He himself owed everything to an elderly monk both when he was an affluent teenager in the big city and ten years later when he began monastic life, taking the name of his spiritual father, Symeon the Pious. Such a helper need not be a priest (Symeon the Pious was not) but he must himself be a "friend of Christ" if he is to mediate Christ to another. The relationship is that of Father and son, and it has a sacred, almost sacramental quality. Symeon sees such relationships as reaching back and

linking us with the Apostles, who received the Holy Spirit from Christ. The spiritual father intercedes for his child and represents Christ for him, whilst the disciple obeys his instructions unhesitatingly and reveals to him all his thoughts.

The purpose of telling one's thoughts to the spiritual father is to distance us from them: once revealed they lose much of their fascination and so we are freed from their grip. Clearly this is quite different from our modern penchant for analysing and talking through everything, hoping perhaps to find a way forward though discerning the origin or the meaning of our inner workings. Symeon's spiritual father, unlike the psychiatrist, would say little or nothing in response. We confess our thoughts, not because they are necessarily sinful or virtuous, or even significant, but in order to clear our minds of them.

A similar misunderstanding may arise from Symeon's insistence on awareness of God present in the sacred rites and in our heart. This is quite different from a cult of religious "experiences" and emotions, or a persuasion that one is "saved". It is simply the perception (compare the Latin SENTIRE in the Roman Liturgy) of what is the case in a baptized person. But it implies that we utter the words of prayer in both love and awe, for these words, especially during Church services, are more than sounds which have a meaning for us to think: rather they have a certain sacredness in themselves and communicate Grace as we utter or hear them with devotion. Thus Symeon urges us to stand in prayer with great reverence and inner attention, our hearts pierced, and with tears, especially if we are to receive Communion.

Since his death in 1022 Symeon's writings have been treasured on Mount Athos, and thence they greatly influenced the blossoming of religious life in Russia a century ago. But the hesychast Method of Prayer attributed to him in *The Way of a Pilgrim* is probably a much later work. For Symeon the traditions of St John Chimas and St Macarius are living realities and provide a clue to many of his passages, whilst his outspokenness marked him out as a true son of St Theodore, in whose great monastery he was a novice under the elder Symeon. Not

infrequently he reminds the Western reader of St Augustine and his instructions for leading monastic life are very similar to the *Cautions* and *Counsels* of St John of the Cross. Rome and Constantinople remained in communion for a generation after Symeon's death. This occurred on 12th March in his place of beloved exile; but to avoid Lent his feast is usually observed on 12th October. A good way of meeting Symeon is to read his *Discourses*, translated in the Classics of Western Spirituality series by C.J.de Catanzaro.

D.S.B.

## PROCESSU CONVERSATIONIS

People sometimes wonder how a monk can stand the monotony of his life. Day after day after day: the same timetable, the same occupations, the same walls, the same faces. The amusements and distractions that fill every hour of our fast consumer society are largely denied him. Yet the unanimous experience of the centuries bears witness that monastic life is not boring. Also, that its subjects are usually fulfilled and content, more or less in proportion to the degree of strictness with which its principles are upheld. To explain this, it is not enough merely to point to the well-known balance and humanity of the Rule, its practical common sense and adaptability. There must be something more; something able to fulfil all aspirations and desires; some ideal capable of attainment by the weak yet always demanding further effort from the strong. This hidden principle, which underlies the life of grace, the Christian life, and therefore the monastic life, is hinted at by St Benedict in the last paragraph of the Prologue to his Rule. It is that we are to make progress in our spiritual lives. The monastery is established not as a paradise for saints, nor a prison for criminals, but a school for those who wish to make progress.

This liberating, fundamental idea of spiritual progress was apparently first formulated by Origen. Thereafter it was assumed by every subsequent Christian author. It means that the Christian

life is not, cannot be static. Grace works, and so must we. The monk is not to remain forever set in his habitual virtues and vices but is constantly to advance in his search for God. “*Magis ac magis in Deum proficiat*” (HR 62). His heart is to be expanded; he is to move from the fear of God to that perfect love which casts out fear; he is to climb the ladder of humility, offered not to the humble, but to those who would become so. He is to be a man filled with desire, a man of hope, a man who makes progress. The Rule is full of imagery of running, working, fighting: idleness and negligence are mercilessly castigated; for any standing still here is equivalent to sliding backwards.

Profession of vows, then, is the beginning, not the end of the monk’s road. Thereafter, little by little, with many a slip, certainly, on the way, yet inexorably, he is to shed his faults and failings. In a way different for each, often imperceptible but nevertheless sure, he is to be transformed. Gradually, increasingly, he is to put on Christ, until he can truly say no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. Yes, even minute by minute, he must set himself to acquire an ever closer adherence to God, an ever more habitual awareness of His presence, within and without. His constant cry is “Lord, take possession”: not only of all my exterior actions, but of all my judgements, attitudes, reflections, reactions. This preoccupation becomes more detailed, more intimate, as it begins to take over. It comes to fill every moment of every day, for a lifetime of days. It will never be finished, because our prayer is in effect not that “I should become like Him”, but that “He should become me.” This is wholly absorbing; utterly satisfying; sufficient in itself. There is no time for wanting anything else, or even remembering it.

It breaks down, of course, continually, because nature gets tired and drops out, seeking escape from this continual compulsion, this ever more complete dying to self. St Benedict simply exhorts us not to give in, to begin again, and to persevere in patience. Then as grace gets to work, the breakdowns become less frequent, and for the saints, or those who can become selfless enough, perhaps disappear. This explains why monks are prepared

to put up with silence, enclosure, monotony. Indeed, they cannot live without them.

Pray for us, that we may not falter in this work, which may God in his mercy bring to completion.

D.B.H.

## **“MESSIAH FOR ALL”: AT PLUSCARDEN ABBEY**

The evening of Saturday 8 September saw the first ever production of Handel’s “Messiah” at Pluscarden Abbey. The event was organised to help raise funds for the Abbey's proposed new West Wing. The church was filled to capacity with over 200 singers and instrumentalists, and an enthusiastic audience eager to listen and to join in. “Messiah For All” was the title on the programme; and the aim was to allow everyone who so wished to participate in the choral sections of the work, for which there was a general rehearsal earlier in the day. Essentially a scratch performance, it could not have been possible but for the strong support given by the Moray Chamber Orchestra led by Peter Zanre and conducted by Graham Wiseman; who, together with soloists Frances Cooper (Soprano), Alison Young (Alto), Alistair Hardie (Tenor) and John Hearne (Bass), all volunteered their services free of charge and gave a professional lustre to the occasion.

In all, 37 of the 53 numbers were performed, including a dozen choruses, all of which held together well; though not without a little pulling and tugging in some of the choruses. “Hallelujah”, of course, needed very little polishing to attain its celestial brightness, and even woke up some of the monks in their cells, who were unsure whether it was the call for their Night Office or for the reward of their labours!

The end of a thoroughly enjoyable evening was marked by prolonged applause from the appreciative audience. Many thanks are due to the organisers of the concert as well as to the performers; especially to the Appeal Committee members and to Capel-Cure Myers for their generous sponsorship and to numerous

friends of the Pluscarden Community who gave their able assistance.

D.M.de K.

## **ABERDEEN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL**

As part of the Aberdeen International Youth Festival a double bill concert took place at Pluscarden Abbey last Saturday. Taking part were the Stord Ungdomskor from Norway and the Essex Youth Orchestra Brass Ensemble.

This was Stord Ungdomskor's second visit to Pluscarden, and it was very clear why this talented group of young Norwegian girls had come first in this year's Norwegian Choir competition, their performance had gained in power and polish since 1987, when they came 3rd in the same competition, but unchanged was their obvious spontaneity and delight in singing – true amateurs, they loved what they were doing.

Clad in their beautiful traditional Norwegian local dress, they performed a programme of sacred music ranging from the longest and most moving piece, a “Stabat Mater” by Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736) which he composed in the last year of his short life. This included solos, duets and trios, as well as full choruses. The most euphonious piece to Scottish ears was undoubtedly “Little Laddie Jesus”, words by Rev. Michael Crawford of Aberdeen, to music by Scott Skinner. They concluded their part of the concert with “Auld Lang Syne”, with the words of which they seemed more familiar than many of the native Scots present!

After an interval for wine and cheese in the Abbey's beautiful Cloisters, the Essex Youth Orchestra's Brass Ensemble performed a selection of music sacred and “sacred-ish”, in the words of their conductor.

The ensemble played a programme of antiphonal music written for St Mark's, Venice, the Bach and Purcell, concluding with “The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba”, of which the conductor



said, “Even if it’s not sacred, it’s biblical”; at any rate, it received such a resounding ovation that it had to be repeated.

Moray District Council sponsored the Concert in aid of the Abbey’s West Wing Appeal. Thanking everyone for coming, and the performers for such a fine concert, Mr Grenville Johnston, the Appeal’s Chairman, announced that the Appeal had now reached £127,000 and that the new St Scholastica’s Retreat Hostel, the first stage in the Abbey’s planned renewal of its guest and retreat accommodation, was to be opened on 3rd September.

Later, the Norwegian Choir presented a plaque bearing the arms of the Commune of Stord to the Abbey. Back in Aberdeen, the Choir went on to serenade Her Majesty the Queen on her arrival in the port of Aberdeen, where performers from the International Youth Festival gathered on the quay to greet her.

D.A.W.

## BOOK REVIEW

**THE GREGORIAN MISSAL FOR SUNDAYS, Notated in Gregorian Chant by the Monks of Solesmes** Solesmes 1990, pp.717, hardback.

For a number of years bi-lingual parallel-text Missals and Office-books have been available from Solesmes in French and Latin. Now they have produced the first of a promised series of Latin/English equivalents, in the form of a very handsomely-produced Sunday Missal, which contains, besides Propers of the Sundays, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, the Feasts of the Lord, the Solemnities of the Saints, the Dedication of a Church and Masses for the Dead. There are also the complete *Kyriale* (nos. I-XVIII), Creeds I-VI and an *ad libitum* section. The Ordinary of the Mass, with the four Eucharistic Prayers and the various Prefaces are given.

What makes this book uniquely useful, however, is its

provision of the music for all the chants of the Mass, together with their English translation, so that all can participate in all appropriate parts of the Mass. The fact that for each Sunday, besides the Proper chants of the day, there are given the texts of the Collect, Prayer over the Gifts, Prayer after Communion and any other proper texts – e.g. Preface – in both Latin and English, together with Scripture references for the Readings, makes this an ideal book to encourage and make possible the full, conscious and active participation of the congregation at Mass.

The price of this book has been subsidised (the equivalent French volume is well over £20), one gathers, and certainly it is cheaper than any other Sunday Missal available, and of far higher quality than most in content, legibility, presentation, layout and binding. As a bonus it will also be usable for the Proper chants on most of the week-days *per annum*.

Solmes and their generous supporters are to be congratulated on this latest gift to the Church, making accessible the treasures of that school of prayer and praise constituted by the Liturgy and Gregorian Chant. May they receive the blessings they so richly deserve.

D.G.C.

## **WORD & SPIRIT VOL. 12: ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX St Bede's Publications, Petersham, Massachusetts, 1990.**

In this well-produced collection of a dozen learned but very readable essays – published, à la festschrift, to commemorate the birth of the “Doctor Mellifluus” – an international cross-section of Bernardine scholars, mainly but not all Cistercians, examine various aspects of his “massive and many sided literary production”, as abbot, theologian and ecclesiastical statesman.

Fr Bernardo Olivera of Argentina – the newly elected Abbot General of the O.C.S.O. – provides a helpful “reading program” and masterly study guide, as an introduction to the Saint's writings – which are quoted from extensively in the articles

that follow.

These deal with his very practical and ever-contemporary teaching, on such themes as: Our Lady, with particular reference to the Assumption (by Fr Michael Casey O.C.S.O.); the spiritual journey (“From the tender heart of Christ to his glorified body” by Dom Jean Leclercq O.S.B.); how to “recover custody” of the hand tongue and heart; the path to perfection through the monastic life; transformation through petitionary prayer; how to counter the coldness of Satan in the heart; and how to live as a Christian with responsibilities in the world.

To transpose the words of one contributor (Sr O’Dell, O.C.S.O.): each offers “gems of spiritual direction”, that may “serve as a guide and inspiration”. In addition there are essays in his theology of history and ecclesiology, and – more controversially – on “Bernard, Merton and Peace” which argues against his so-called “consecration of violence”.

The Abbot of Caldey concludes his investigation of how Bernard skilfully uses the same Scriptural texts in different contexts – with a comment that (in this reviewer’s opinion) could well be applied to this volume: “It has certainly whetted my appetite”; and re-reading these essays more ruminatively – with the Saint’s “words of life” that “direct, explain, illuminate” – would surely, as Sr O’Dell puts it “repay our efforts with an increase in devotion and courage”.

M-J.P

## **MONASTERY IN NIGERIA**

How many monasteries in Europe or America have 36 juniors in Temporary Vows, 38 Novices and 15 postulants? But this is the happy state of the Benedictine nuns of St Scholastica’s monastery, Umuoji, in Nigeria.

Twelve years ago Sr Patricia Alufuo left the Abbey of St John the Baptist in Rome to return to her native Nigeria to found a monastery of Benedictine nuns at the request of Cardinal Francis

Arinze. By 1988 the Community numbered 45. Today there are 13 nuns in Solemn Vows in a Community of 100 – Mother Patricia has achieved this almost single-handed.

It is a contemplative community with no exterior works. The nuns support themselves by poultry farming, vegetable gardening, vestment making, manufacture of altar breads, candles and rosaries. Now they are hoping to build a guest house for retreatants.

The photograph is of the nuns who made their Solemn Profession on 2nd September; a further seven novices will be making their Temporary Profession on 1st December.

We have been able to help them by sending books, especially Psalm books for the Office and Daily Missals and they are very grateful to benefactors in Scotland who also helped in this way. Mother Patricia wondered whether any generous benefactor in Scotland might “adopt” a novice or postulant?

## **APPEAL AND BUILDING NEWS**

As will be clear from the photographs illustrating this number of the Newsletter, thanks to the efforts of our builder, Mr R.A. Thomson and his team of local firms, the new St Scholastica’s was opened on 3rd September, St Gregory’s day, in the presence of Patrons and Members of our Appeal, its Chairman and Committee and a large concourse of supporters and representatives of the local community.

If there had been any doubts in people’s minds about the demand for such facilities, they were probably put at rest by the arrival of our first guest, about an hour after the opening. Since then we have had guests from Canada, India, Hungary, Austria, East Africa... as well, of course, as from the Outer Isles in the west, from the east coast and the south of England, besides those in Moray and Nairn. All have been lavish in their praise of the new facilities, though some have regretted a loss of “character” compared with the old but – while admitting that a liking for it was

an acquired taste!

Still preparing for the West Wing, we obtained several lorry loads of stone from the former Rating and Assessor's office in Elgin; this building had a former lease of life as the Elgin Police Station and Prison, so it is once more reverting to use as cells, this time monastic ones, with voluntary occupants. Br Adrian and Br Mungo have been sorting it all out, and have unearthed a date stone with 1799 carved on it; on its gable the former building bore the date 1899, so it looks as though our forebears, too, were thrifty in their re-use of local stone.

Our various Patrons, Appeal Members and Committee have been active in contributing help, advice and direct support, and the results appear in the Appeal total, which is currently around the £150,000 mark.

We are often asked, "When will work start?", and the answer is that we aren't quite sure, yet. For those of you who haven't experience of a project like ours, it takes a while to go through all its preliminary stages.

First you have to get Planning Permission, (with the additional factors stemming from the fact that this is a Listed Building). This simply gives you permission in principle to put up a building. Once over this hurdle, you go to the stage of working drawings, on a larger scale, and with all the details shown (such as light switches, how many, where...) and structural details, too. A bit of thought at this stage can save years of headaches later. Once you've produced your drawings (or rather your Architects do all this, while constantly liaising with you), the drawings go into the System again, for Building Warrant – they are scrutinised to see if what you plan meets all the building regulations – is it strong enough, is it safe, will it resist fire, can the handicapped use it, is there enough light, air... do the water, electricity, alarm and other systems meet all the interlocking series of regulations, overseen by the various bodies? You have to establish a *modus vivendi* in all this, and reconcile the needs of your plans and those of the regulations; it takes time and several revisions.

This done, the Quantity Surveyor produces exhaustive lists

of all that will be needed for the building, which goes into a book about the size of a telephone directory, to be used as the basis of their estimates by the tenderers for the building. It takes a fair while to obtain and work out prices for everything, and get sub-contactors to do the same. Once the tenderers have put in their bids, the Quantity Surveyors get to work, check all the figures, and let you know what they are. Then you choose which one to accept. After that, you still have to find out when your contractor will be free to start work – and weather can play havoc with that. So we're still not sure when we'll start ...!