

## **Pluscarden Benedictines**

**No. 102 News and Notes for our Friends September 1994**

### **FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

It is not long since our last Newsletter and the second half of the summer has been quieter than the first. So this letter can follow St Benedict's advice and be brief.

Br Meinrad returned from Kristo Buase, Ghana, in the middle of August. He has lost weight but kept his health, and was able to do much appreciated work while there. The community is gradually establishing itself. Another insight into Africa was given us by Fr Bill Russell, White Father, a longstanding friend of the monastery, who worked for several years in Tanzania and Zambia. He spoke of the strengths, weaknesses and difficulties of the Church in Africa; of its need for prayer, for deeper evangelisation and for the monastic life. How can Africa not be in our thoughts at this time?

The new guest wing is not only still standing, but much used and appreciated. It was a pleasure to have Bishop Mario and several of his clergy with us on retreat during August. Fr Terence Sheridan, a former Superior-General of the Betharram Fathers, led them in their reflections. We were also able to express our gratitude to the members of the West Wing Appeal Committee, and its allied group in Aberdeen, by hosting them and their spouses to supper one August evening. It was an enjoyable occasion to mark the completion of their work. Visitors will have noticed a new addition, too, to the north transepts of our church: a series of eight panels telling the history of the monastery in paint, print and photography. Mrs Elizabeth Petrie master-minded this appealing feature. It will be formally blessed early in October.

On the 14th of August, Fr James Birrell began his

novitiate, receiving the monastic tonsure and the name of Martin. Please pray that this year may be a time of grace for him. A few days later, at St Mary's, Petersham, Antonio de Souza was received into the novitiate, and given the name Michael. Our American community now has, beside its three solemnly professed, two monks in simple vows and three novices. This is encouraging.

On 3 September, the feast of St Gregory, I was privileged to attend in Inverness the consecration of Gregor MacGregor, the new Episcopalian Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness. On the 14th, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we will, please God, have witnessed in our own church the ordination to the diaconate of two of our monks, Brs Benedict Hardy and Ambrose Flavell, along with that of John McKeon, being ordained for work in Iceland. On the 20th – another Scandinavian touch – we will be receiving a group of Norwegian Catholics led by Mgr Georg Muller of Trondheim, their Prefect Apostolic.

Lastly, I cannot but add a special word of thanks to the many who have been so generous to us over the last few months, both financially and in other ways. It is a constant source of amazement to us. How can we repay our benefactors, and the Lord, except by living our monastic life ever more sincerely?

Yours in Him,

+Fr Hugh OSB, Abbot

### **BR ANDREW PRESCOTT OSB, RIP**

On Friday 8th July 1994, Br Andrew Prescott, OSB, the oldest Benedictine monk in Scotland, and one of the founding five monks of Pluscarden Abbey, died peacefully in his monastery in the presence of his praying Brethren, at the age of ninety-one, after more than sixty years as a monk.

Born in Lochee, Dundee, in 1903, one of a large family, Br

Andrew joined the Scots Guards, and saw service with the 2nd Battalion in Shanghai, as well as doing his stint guarding the Bank of England and Buckingham Palace. He always remembered with affection the young Princesses who had played around his feet, and retained a soft spot in his heart for them.

In the early Thirties he joined Prinknash Abbey, was professed in 1935, and in 1948 was sent to Pluscarden as one of the party of five Founders. He was fond of remarking that the family of monasteries was at that time called “of the Primitive Observance”, and that never was a name better earned, for Pluscarden in those early days had no sanitation, no running water, no electricity, and life was indeed primitive.

At Pluscarden his primary work, like that of any monk, was prayer, to which he was always very faithful, being one of the first at Vigils every morning. Latterly, one of his greatest trials was not being allowed to try to get up at 4.30am to come to Vigils! He was a great outdoor man, and loved working in the garden and the grounds, which he did daily until after he was ninety. He was Refectorian for many years, looked after the bees and was a good man with a pick and shovel, as well as taking his turn in the kitchen.

He was a man who made many and lasting friendships, locally and farther afield, and was much loved by the Brethren. His life was not free of suffering, and though he enjoyed good health, he felt his failing sight severely, as he was a great reader, and talking books were unable to fill the gap.

St Benedict talks about the naturally lovable qualities of the old, which Br Andrew exemplified. He was always grateful for the smallest service, apologetic about his needs, patient in his infirmities, well aware of his failings and tolerant of those of others. The “Fiat pax”, which had so often been on his lips, was established in his heart.

He was always proud of his Guards connection, always carried himself like a soldier. It was therefore very fitting that when he was buried at the Abbey on Tuesday 12th July, a piper from his old regiment was there to lead his coffin from the church

to his grave with a slow march echoing off the old stone walls and around in the stillness, to play him to his rest in the Abbey cemetery. May he rest in peace.

DGC

## **OUR MAN IN GHANA** **a letter from Br Meinrad**

Benedictine Monastery of Kristo Buase  
June 1994

Dear Fr Abbot & Brethren,

I flew to Accra via Amsterdam. The journey from Heathrow to Amsterdam went quite smoothly, as did the gilt to Accra. Flying over the Sahara was quite an experience, but since I did not have a window seat, I didn't see a great deal. We did pass over a couple of oases and they seemed huge and completely round in shape, which surprised me.

All the time I was a bit nervous about my arrival in Accra and naturally wondering if anybody would be there to pick me up. When we landed in Ghana I met once again a doctor whom I had sat beside on the flight to Amsterdam. He had with him his very charming Canadian wife, who works for the Red Cross in Ghana. They took me in hand and guided me through all the various controls at the airport.

As I was leaving the building, a man dressed in white came up and took my luggage trolley. The doctor immediately chinned him and asked what he was doing. He replied that he was airport staff and, since he said he didn't want any money, the good doctor let me go with him. But when he got me outside he pushed my luggage trolley into a bunch of his cronies who started demanding dollars. I said I didn't have any and wasn't allowed to give them foreign currency anyway.

In a bit of a panic, I went looking for my friend the doctor

again. Having found him, but no sign of Fr Leo or anyone else recognisable to me, he and his wife invited me to join them in their vehicle leaving the airport. The situation was pretty grim, so I gratefully accepted their offer.

They first of all took me to an army compound where we were inspected by an armed guard and allowed to pass on. We passed by a lieutenant-colonel's residence and on to an English Major's. Here we had refreshments. After an hour or so with the Major, the driver was told to take me to the SVD guest house at the back of the Cathedral. So, off we went and I finally arrived where I was to spend the night. All this time Fr Leo was searching frantically for me and eventually established with KLM that I had arrived. Later he turned up at the SVD house and so ended a day to remember.

Next morning, having had Mass and breakfast we set off on the road going north to Techiman. Some of the road was very good, so we kept up a reasonable speed. But other parts were quite atrocious. Occasionally Fr Leo didn't see the bad bits approaching and we'd hit them full on. All I can say is that our cars at Pluscarden wouldn't be able to stand up to punishment of that sort. However Land Rovers are built to take it, so there was no damage, just driver and passenger shaken up a little. The villages we travelled through were extremely poor, but the people seemed to be very happy.

Half way through our journey we ran into torrential rain which made driving very difficult. You could hardly see through the windscreen. Overtaking a broken down lorry, another vehicle appeared travelling south. Fr Leo decided not to overtake, but pull in behind the lorry. He applied the brakes but it just kept going and we smashed into the back of the stationary vehicle. We had aquaplaned on the water, and there was nothing Leo could do about it.

Fortunately there was no-one standing at the back of the lorry, otherwise we would have been in serious trouble. The damage to the lorry was only slight and, fortunately, the large bull bar at the front of the Land Rover took most of the impact, so we

were able to back off and continue on our way with a bent bar, damaged wing and damaged bonnet; the engine was unaffected. The other driver received 50p for the repair of the damage done to his lorry and seemed to be quite satisfied.

The second night here we had a tremendous thunderstorm, torrential rain with sheet and forked lightning. It was scary at times, especially when it was directly overhead. However one benefit was that the temperature dropped dramatically. It is like being in a sauna 12 hours a day here: sweat, sweat and more sweat.

One of the jobs I have been given is to switch the generator on and off. Fr Leo took me aside to warn me about snakes and to tell me that, contrary to the general opinion, snakes move slowly, except when they are going to strike. They usually appear when it is dark and hate the light, so I must carry a torch with me when I go to operate the generator. If I see a snake, I have been advised to stand still and shout; there are sticks kept outside the cells for dealing with them.

I was also given a book to read all about snakes, so I discovered that only a few varieties are poisonous. The worst seems to be the green mamba, which drops out of trees on to its victims.

Coming back from switching off the generator one night, I was walking under a tree when, suddenly, something dropped with a thud at my feet. I froze and the hairs on the back of my neck went all funny. Then I flashed my torch on to a green and yellow thing which turned out to be an overripe mango. Was I relieved!!

I have become quite friendly with some of the villagers around here and have more or less been adopted by one family who come to collect water. Wonderful kids: Fati, Vida, Dina and Mum and Dad. Fati, a young teenager, carries tremendous amounts of water in a huge basin and she's always smiling and cheerful. I try to have a few nuts, sweets and the occasional bar of chocolate to hand out to them.

**HOMILY GIVEN BY FR ANSELM**  
**on the Assumption of Mary, 15 August 1994**  
**at St Mary's, Petersham**

In the Assumption of Mary body and soul into heaven we celebrate her full sharing in Christ's resurrection, her entry into the fullness of glory. She is the one human being we might say has already risen from the dead. Except that we don't say that. We don't speak of the resurrection of Mary – although what we celebrate is her participation in Christ's resurrection. We don't speak of the resurrection of Mary any more than we speak of Mary as our Redeemer or Mary as Mediator – although we believe in her unique role in our redemption and in the mediation of grace. But we don't use those terms of her because they are special to Christ. Yet it is when we consider the privileges that we do acknowledge in Mary that we really see the uniqueness of Christ – above all the uniqueness of his resurrection.

There is a certain sense in which we can say that only Christ rises from the dead. The resurrection of the dead which is the object of our faith, which is the gospel we preach, is the resurrection of Christ. In the New Testament, even the noun "resurrection" always means, in some sense, the resurrection of Christ. For Christ is the one who is raised from the dead by the Father, and he is the one who raises us from the tomb. Our rising is our participation in his resurrection and in the Assumption of Mary we see what resurrection means.

Resurrection is God's judgement. It is his vindication of his Christ, of his Messiah. It is victory if you like: final victory over sin, over death, over the grave, and in that sense only Christ rises, only Christ is the final victor, only Christ is vindicated. For us, our participation in this – our being raised – is a surrender. We are the trophies he carries with him.

And I think it is essential that we take this and apply it to the whole of our lives. The Assumption of Mary, and by analogy, the whole life of Christ, is a movement towards the resurrection. The resurrection is the consummation of all that Christ does, all

that Christ is. Everything in him is ordered towards resurrection. In the same way we can say of Mary that her whole life, her whole being, her every action, her every thought is ordered toward her assumption. In the resurrection of Christ and the assumption of Mary we see the same mystery, the mystery of the resurrection, but under two different aspects. For Christ the resurrection is a victory: the victory of the warrior who cannot be restrained, the triumphant shattering of the chains of death. For Mary the resurrection is a surrender, a yielding of herself into the arms of the one who raises her.

And as for Mary, so for us too. That our whole life, our whole being, is ordered towards assumption, towards resurrection, means that our whole life, our whole being, is ordered towards being taken up, towards surrender into the arms of the one who raises us from the dead.

I think we often don't think and act in this way. We can nurture a hope for vindication, a desire that we will somehow be proved right. We often have some kind of obscure sense that we are right and that he or she or they are wrong. Although nobody sees it now, finally, in the end, we will be vindicated.

Well, it simply will not happen – ever – because it cannot happen. Because only Christ is the victor, only Christ is vindicated. Because that is what God's judgement means. It does not mean that I will be proved to be right, to be true. It is Christ who will be proved to be right, to be true. I have to live here and now from that reality. I have to surrender here and now this desire for vindication, this desire to be proved right, the end of which is death. The only thing that can finally happen to this desire for vindication, this desire to be proved right, is that I can keep it, forever, in eternity. Or I can surrender it. Consign it to the oblivion to which it belongs and allow Christ to be vindicated. Allow him to be the victor and surrender myself, finally, into his arms.

The difference between ourselves and Mary is that for Mary to allow Christ to be the victor is sweet and easy and, as it were, the natural thing. There is no interval between the surrender of herself at the end of her life and her being taken up into glory.



For us there is an interval, there is a period of waiting, of purification or whatever. Why? Because of sin, because we resist, because we do not allow Christ to be the victor. But finally he will overcome. He will overcome our sin, our resistance. And then we too, like Mary, will enter into the fullness of life.

## PRIORS OF PLUSCARDEN PART II

### GEORGE LEARMONTH 1509-1531

Anson wrote that “very little has been recorded about Prior Learmonth” (p102) but we can add to his account information about his earlier life and there is also the solid evidence of his arms with a crozier carved in stone which is now built into the blocked arch between transepts and nave. Magister George Learmonth had been nominated to Pluscarden by James IV on 30 March 1509 and was provided by the Pope at some time between then and the letter of Julius II quoted in Part I. In this latter letter he is said to be a cleric of the diocese of St Andrews “who wished to enter it under the regular habit” (i.e. to become a monk and to be prior *in titulum* rather than to hold the benefice *in commendam* for which it was not necessary to become a monk.) It is also said that Pluscarden “by special privilege of the Apostolic See, as yet not derogated in any way, is of the patronage of the King of Scots for the time being”, thus illustrating the contemporary controversy between King and Pope over the nomination to Scottish benefices.

Learmonth matriculated at St Andrews in 1494 (Early Records of the Univ. of St Andrews, p 193) which, if he entered at the usual age of 15 or 16, would give his year of birth as c1478. He determined as BA in 1496/7, where he is noted as a student in the Pedagogy, and in 1498 he was licensed as MA. The Pedagogy was a house under the control of the Faculty of Arts for lectures and residence, which in 1538 was absorbed into the new St Mary’s College. After being licensed he was given a prebend in the Ladykirk of the Hench in St Andrews (4 December 1498: Regestrum Secreti Vol I No 297) which he exchanged in 1503 for

the Vicarage of Fordun (ibid. No 962). He obviously continued his work at the University while drawing on these benefices as he was named as Assessor to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts in November 1508 (*Acta Facultatis Artium*, p 288) and again, as Dominus Prior de Pluscardy, in November 1511 (AFA, p 301). The Prior's signature on documents such as the foundation of the chaplaincies in Elgin Cathedral on 2 September 1529 by Gavin Dunbar, Bishop of Aberdeen, shows that he played his part in the life of the North-East, and his career was crowned by his being provided as coadjutor Bishop and successor to Dunbar on 20 May 1529 (Dowden, *Bishops of Scotland*, p 139, ref. Vatican Archives). Anson wrongly gives 14 December 1529 as the date of his provision as coadjutor but this is the date of a charter witnessed by him (*Registrum Aberdonensis*, Vol I p 394 not 294 as Anson states). This is interesting as in the body of the document he is styled "venerabilis pater Georgius, prior de Pluscarte coadjutor episcopi et successor". This, with his signing the document in September as Prior of Pluscarden would seem to indicate that he did not resign as Prior when provided as coadjutor. This was illegal and so he may have become Commendator of the monastery when he was provided to the episcopate, as Robert Reid did at Kinloss, or he may have held on to it until 1530, then resigning in favour of Bishop Dunbar's nephew. The note of his death in the *Kalendar of Ferne* only says "obitus Georgii Lermond epi. Aberdonen. 1530 (ie 1531) 18 Martii", but this is not proof that he had resigned his inferior benefice. He predeceased Dunbar and so did not succeed him but if he was consecrated, as is likely, he has the honour of being the only monk of Pluscarden (so far!) to become a bishop. Although it is clear that George was Prior during this period, Anson (p 102) notes references to a Prior John in 1517 and Prior James in 1519. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this.

#### ALEXANDER DUNBAR 1531-1560/61

He is first mentioned on 23 February 1532 as senior witness to the foundation charter of Gavin Dunbar's St Mary's

Hospital in Aberdeen. Although the genealogy of the Dunbars is complex and there were at least two other clerics with the same name in Moray during this period, one can discover the Prior's place in the family. The record of legitimation of the Prior's natural sons gives some clues as to his family connections. Robert and John were legitimated in February 1547/8 and were said to be the brothers of Patrick, Baron of Sanquhar. On 12 September 1560 a charter signed by the Prior, which MacPhail notes as lost (p 126) grants Westerton of Pluscarden to John, younger brother of Patrick D. of Sanquhar. If he had no heirs this was to pass to his brother Alexander, here first mentioned and perhaps the Prior's eldest son, then to Patrick, or in the event of all their deaths to "their cousin, David D. of Bennethfield". This is confirmed in an entry for 14 April 1542 in *Regestrum Magni Sigilli* (Vol III, (No 2642) which refers to John D. of Bennethfield as "frater germanus" of Alexander. John was David's father and thus Prior Alexander's brother and their father was thus Patrick D., Chancellor of Aberdeen, 6th son of Alexander D. of Westfield and brother of Bishop Gavin D. who was thus the Prior's uncle.

As there are no published documents concerning his nomination and appointment to the Priory there is also the question as to whether he held it *in titulum* or *in commendam*. Dom Mark Dilworth OSB in his article on the Commendator system (*Innes Review* XXXVII) notes that Dunbar was a regular Prior, although in the late 1550s there are references to him as Commendator. The latter is no doubt similar to erroneous references to the Priory as an Abbey from the early sixteenth century onwards and is an understandable confusion given the circumstances surrounding the appointment to benefices at the time. MacPhail (p 126) notes a summons in the Duff House charters of February 1561 which begins "after the death of Alexander the Prior", and the letter of 17 April of the same year appointing George Seton as *Economus* (*RSS*, Vol V p 193) notes the same and says that other Dunbars had wrongly intruded themselves into possession of the Priory after his death. The last evidence of Alexander being alive is the lost charter of September 1560 mentioned above and thus the

closest we can get to a date of death is the winter between then and February 1561.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus we can see that before the Reformation Pluscarden had only regular (i.e. monastic) Priors, a distinction shared with only six other Scottish monasteries. The general state of monasticism at the time however, meant that this was not necessarily a great advantage and the last two Priors took the habit on appointment. William de Boyis is the last Prior having been elected by the monks without papal provision, but he soon obtained the latter and regularised his position.

The method of choosing a Superior had changed much since the election in 1398 (Registrum Moraviensis, p 355) when the monks chose one of their number, Alexander de Pluscardyn, whose appointment was confirmed by the local bishop. The evidence concerning the Benedictine Priors is a catalogue of litigation and concern for temporalities spiced with conflict and scandal. One should be aware though of the limitations of the evidence which of its nature gives this picture. It would be like writing a history of a modern abbey based solely on evidence from solicitors. Unfortunately, unlike nearby Kinloss, there is no known evidence which could give more than minimal information on the state of religion and learning at Pluscarden in this period.

DAH

## BOOK REVIEWS

***The Undivided Heart – The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation*** by Michael Casey OCSO, St Bede's Publications

Fr Casey offers “undivided heart” as a translation of *puritas cordis*, rather than the more familiar rendering “purity of heart” in order to stress the dimension of inner harmony in contemplation. He defines contemplation as the engagement of the

whole person “in the act of communion with God” and identifies *puritas cordis* as an important concept in the thought of Augustine, Cassian, Benedict and Bernard, spiritual masters whose writings have largely given shape to the western tradition. “It is the tradition built around these spiritual giants which is explored in this book” (Preface).

*Undivided Heart* consists of 12 essays on aspects of prayer as understood within the monastic tradition. They are arranged chronologically and span the period 1982-88. All have been published elsewhere except the last two: “The quality of monastic prayer” and “Merton’s notes on inner experience – 20 years afterward”. Each essay is prefaced by an introductory paragraph giving the occasion and original purpose of writing, as well as information on other related pieces by the author. The notes which follow the body of the text are invariably useful. This book stands in close relation to Fr Casey’s earlier work *Towards God* (Collins-Dove 1989) in which he synthesises the various lines of development presented in this collection.

These essays have the merit of being short in length but, since they are superbly crafted and closely written, “long” on content. The prose is unfailingly precise and highly attuned to the material under study. The frequent recurrences of the same and similar themes do not detract or weary but are cumulative in effect. In fact, this very characteristic gives the collection great cohesion, creating a highly integrated and therefore mutually illuminating series of texts. A particularly striking and pleasing feature is the large place occupied by *lectio divina*, both implicitly and explicitly. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a more practical and deepened spiritual understanding of *lectio* may be gained from a careful reading of this collection than is the case with many other books specifically given over to the subject. The overall impression is that there is much here which is the fruit of the author’s own dedication to *lectio*.

Two essays deserve special mention: “St Benedict’s approach to prayer” and “Spiritual desire in the gospel homilies of St Gregory the Great”. In the first Fr Casey shows that the general

difficulty found in using the Rule of St Benedict as a text for the study of prayer is due not to its content but its form. The Rule which appears at first sight to be a dry, primarily legislative code, concerned with discipline and organisation, is not opposed to prayer. In fact it has provided the essential spiritual framework for the monastic life from the 6th century to our own time. Such longevity itself testifies to qualities beyond the merely structural or juridical. Prayer, though seemingly treated all too briefly in the Rule, is in fact all pervasive and infused into the very fabric of the monastic life which it regulates. To see this requires viewing from a respectful distance; only then does Benedict's method become plain. In the Rule holiness and prayer are the ground and object of cenobitic life. The monk's task, as envisaged by St Benedict, is to live prayer; a task his Rule is designed to facilitate and further, to embody. Given this insight even the most baldly juridical parts of the Rule can acquire spiritual and prayerful value.

In a similarly masterful fashion Fr Casey's study of St Gregory's Homilies not only provide a model of textual analysis but also a meditative investigation of "desire" and the meaning of *intentio cordis*. In this excellent systematic commentary the wealth of apposite quotations allows Gregory to speak to the heart of the reader directly, fulfilling Fr Casey's purpose in presenting the homilies as profitable and eminently suitable for *lectio divina*.

Fr Casey has succeeded admirably in this book by showing that "we cannot always generate our own solutions because our horizons are limited. The first thing we need to learn is to look at life from a different perspective. Here the ancient spiritual masters can serve us well".

DCB

*Analecta Cartusiana*: We have received these volumes on the Carthusian liturgy, *Particularites du Missel Cartusien* in French by Dom Emmanuel Cluzet, (1903-1993) monk of the Grande Chartreuse where he was Subprior. He lived for several years at Portes where, in spite of delicate health, he pursued his intensive research into the Carthusian liturgy. These three volumes must be

of prime importance for anyone interested in liturgy, and in particular the development of the Carthusian rite of the Mass which survived the reform of Vatican II.

Plus two volumes, 12 & 13, in the series *Scriptores Sacri Ordinis Cartusiensis* by Dom Stanislas Autore. The writing of the MS is very small and not easy to decipher. The cover of Vol 13 has a delightful photograph of the little chapel of Casalibus by Ingeborg Hogg.

These volumes are all available from the Editor, Dr James Hogg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria.

D A S

## NEWS FROM ALTON

During Abbot Alfred's last visit to Alton we took the opportunity of a free day to visit one or two places of interest in the area. Norbury, a hamlet three or four miles from here was one of the homes of the old Catholic family of the Fitzherberts. The hall of the 13th century manor house survives alongside a later house and the fine church contains several magnificent family tombs featured in Dom Bede Camm's *Forgotten Shrines*. Sir William Fitzherbert of Norbury died in the Tower of London in 1591 after suffering 30 years imprisonment for the faith. We then went on to Haddon Hall in Derbyshire – a perfect medieval fortified house and situated in an idyllic setting; the large chapel was virtually a parish church and has extensive mural paintings restored in recent years. Close to Hathersgate is another former Fitzherbert property called Padley. The isolated manor house has all but disappeared, although the gatehouse chapel still stands and has been carefully restored as a place of pilgrimage in memory of the martyred priests Robert Ludlam and Nicholas Garlick who were captured here and taken off to Derby for execution.

The bicentenary of Oscott this year is being celebrated in various ways, and included a display of the religious orders

represented in the archdiocese of Birmingham. Fr Andrew and Dom Bede attended on Sunday 19th June and manned a display on our monastery. For our patronal feasts of St John the Baptist we were glad to have with us our parish priest, Fr John Kearns, and his housekeeper, Miss Cain. We were also joined by Fr Boniface Hill of Downside, who had brought a party of boys over from Alton Towers for the day. Early in July we were also visited by Doms Benedict and Ambrose of Pluscarden together with Tony Schmitz, their driver; they were heading for Maryvale. On the Sunday next to St Benedict's feast our choir assembled again to sing a polyphonic Mass; we hope to have them again before long.

In August Fr Kearns brought a group of Sisters of Mercy from Birmingham to see round their former home, and later on we were visited by the Staffordshire Heraldic Society who were interested to see the stained glass and brasses in the cloisters. During the last weekend of the month Fr David attended the Schola Gregoriana weekend held in Ely Cathedral, officiating at Solemn Vespers and Compline. Mass on the Sunday was celebrated in the Catholic church of St Etheldreda where a major relic of the saint – her hand – is preserved. Interestingly, the relic came in fairly recent times from St Dominic's Convent in Stone, Staffordshire. Among our visitors and guests during August we were especially glad to see John Slater, our former organist at Farnborough, and two families which for many years were involved with our Abbey choir. At the same time we had staying with us Fr Alban Leotaud, a senior member of the Prinknash community and for some years Novicemaster at Farnborough. On the feast of the Assumption a Latin Mass was celebrated in St John's Church, followed by sung Compline. About 40 people attended and joined us afterwards for Compline. It is hoped to provide such Masses on all holy days of obligation.

The Pugin Exhibition, *A Gothic Passion*, staged at The V&A throughout the summer has been given great publicity and has consequently attracted large crowds. St Giles' Church in nearby Cheshire, which is considered to be "Pugin's Gem" contributed a quantity of exhibits and several coach trips to



London were organised by the parish priest Fr Bede Walsh, for enthusiastic parishioners; Fr David went on one of them, St John's Monastery, the parish church, school and castle all being designed by Pugin. The exhibition was a comprehensive survey of Pugin's work as architect and designer in both the ecclesiastical and secular fields – a truly astonishing and magnificent achievement for a man who died at the age of 40! Of special interest was the altar and reredos depicting the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury and his Countess which once adorned the altar at Alton Towers and the Earl's funeral pall now preserved at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

After 15 years as chaplain to the nuns at Colwich Abbey, Fr Columba Thorne is due to return to his monastery, Downside, in September. Fr Columba was known to us when we were at Oulton, and so we invited him to Alton for a farewell visit.

DDH

## **MONASTERIES OF THE SUBIACO CONGREGATION NO 65**

### **St Scholastica Benedictine Monastery, "Peace & Joy", Nigeria**

St Scholastica Benedictine Monastery "Peace & Joy", Umuoji, Nigeria, was founded in July 1978 from the Abbazia San Giovanni Battista in Rome. Two Italians and a Nigerian were the founders sent from the Abbazia. The monastery was built by His Eminence, Cardinal Francis Arinze, the Archbishop Emeritus of Onitsha where the monastery is situated. He is now the President of the Secretariat for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Vatican.

God sent vocations straight away, so that on the second anniversary of the foundation, 8 July 1980, the first eleven postulants were clothed with the monastic habit as novices.

On 13 November 1982, after two years and four months novitiate, the seven novices who persevered made their first monastic profession. It was the year Pope John Paul II visited Nigeria. Since then, there have been professions every year. On 3rd September 1988 the first group, after six years of temporary

profession, made their solemn profession.

On July 13th 1990, the whole building having been completed, it was solemnly blessed and the church and altar were dedicated by the Apostolic Pronuncio to Nigeria, His Excellency Archbishop Carlo Curis. On 28 October 1992 Rome declared the monastery autonomous and on 13 November 1993 it was canonically erected as such by His Grace S N Ezenya, Archbishop of Onitsha. On 16 November 1993 the first abbatial election took place and M Patricia Alufuo, hitherto the Prioress, was elected the first Abbess.

The monastery is in its sixteenth year of life and the house that was originally built and meant for 50 nuns is presently housing 120, with 25 in solemn vows, 45 temporary professed, 30 novices and 20 postulants, and still vocations abound!