
Pluscarden Benedictines
No. 110 News and Notes for our Friends September 1996

As Abbot Alfred mentions, Fr Abbot is away in Italy for the General Chapter of our Subiaco Congregation followed by the Congress of Benedictine Abbots. His usual Letter will appear in the next issue.

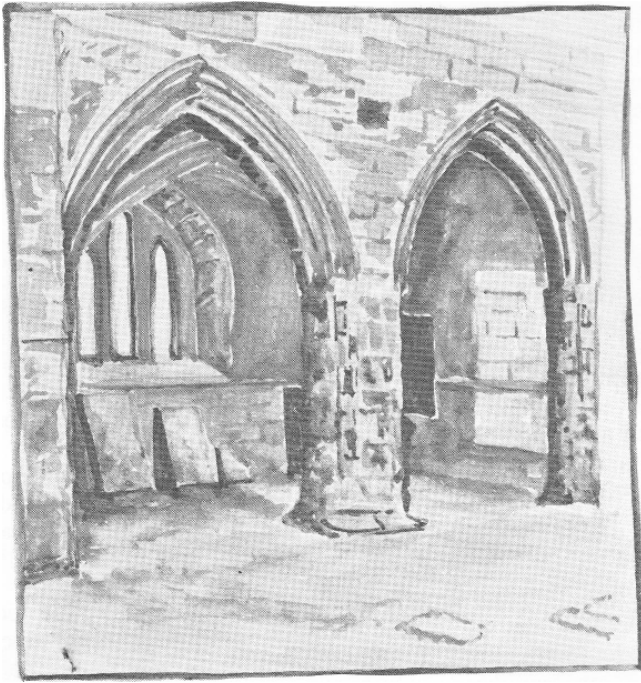
EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

Procrastination is the thief of time, but monks tend to say they have centuries before them. We are never in a hurry! In my jottings last June I mentioned the restoration work in progress on the aisle of the north transept to eliminate *pleurococcus*. I spoke too soon. The scaffolding has been removed and the work is unfinished. Coping stones lie on the green and rain water still flows down the walls.

When the monks returned here in 1948 they built “temporary” cells on two sides of the cloister. They are still there and still occupied by monks. However, they have just been given a new “temporary” roof, so no doubt they are good for another forty years.

About 1950, the late Abbot Wilfrid of Prinknash sketched the watercolour of the arches in the south transepts which is reproduced overleaf. I wonder what he envisaged as “the next step”? In fact these arches were given a “temporary” filling of breeze blocks which were then *harled*. The arches in the north transept were filled with a stone wall – which did not please our architect, Ian Lindsay, because it looked too permanent. Some years ago, we planned to open up the arches and put in wrought iron screens with glass. Our “twin town”, Landshut, in Bavaria gave us a generous donation and we were able to buy two beautiful screens made by the late Br Patrick of Prinknash for Farnborough Abbey which are no longer required there. They are still lying in the farm buildings, waiting for transport to bring them to

Pluscarden. Monks are never in a hurry.



In September, Fr Abbot and Fr Prior will be at the General Chapter at the Abbey of Praglia in Italy. It is our largest community in Italy with good facilities for the Chapter. It has recently made a foundation in Bangladesh – the first overseas from one of our Italian houses since the foundation of Ramsgate from Subiaco in 1856. Some years later Ramsgate monks worked in Bangladesh as missionaries but this new foundation is the first Subiaco monastery in the vast Indian continent. Pray for Dom Carlo and Dom Premananda.

After the Chapter, the Congress of Abbots takes place at Rocca di Papa near Castel Gandolfo, since S. Anselmo in Rome is now too small for the gathering of Abbots. There will be many new and young abbots taking part, so I have chosen for our cover a youthful St Benedict. The painting is in a Spanish monastery of

nuns at Jaca (Huesca) founded in 714. St Benedict was, in fact, a very young man when he founded Subiaco, probably in his twenties.

To continue from the last issue the tale of my pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I give on another page two pictures from there. Twice we had Mass in the open air. The first was on the Mount of the Beatitudes one evening on the beautiful garden of the Franciscan Fathers. The other at Tabgha by the Sea of Galilee. This holy place is in the care of the Benedictine monks of the Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem, who are assisted by Benedictine Sisters from Manila and I was pleased to meet the sacristan, Sr Stephen. There are two churches – that of the “loaves and fishes” with a beautiful mosaic floor, commemorating the feeding of the five thousand and the Church of the Primacy, where Christ entrusted his Church to St Peter. But our Mass, at which I was chief concelebrant, was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The altar was a massive basalt rock and there was a canopy of vines and the twittering of birds. I am told a heron and a “sea-eagle” flew over the Sea during the mass.

The other picture is of the very modern church at Capernaum built over the foundations of St Peter’s house. Both St Matthew and St Mark refer to the town as Jesus’ “own city” because he made it his centre for his mission in Galilee, staying at St Peter’s house. The Franciscans have excavated an extensive area of the city showing the houses built close together for protection and there are impressive remains of the synagogue built by the Roman centurion. Since the middle of the first century one room of St Peter’s house was used as a “house church” and later in the 5th century an octagonal church was built with a mosaic floor – later an apse and baptistry were added. In all these places, the gardens and grounds are beautifully kept by the Arab Christians employed by the Friars.

The Mass each day was certainly the high point of our pilgrimage. At Nazareth (where today there is a very large town) our Mass was in the simple chapel of the Little Sisters of Jesus; at Bethlehem, on the Sunday, our Mass was in the parish church with

the people and it was all in Arabic. Our leader Fr Dunn spoke (in English) and said we were guests of the Church in Jerusalem and knew how they had suffered and brought the support of our prayers. The people sang throughout the Mass and we met them afterwards. It was a very moving occasion.

On the way to Jerusalem we were able to visit the very beautiful city of Jericho, which is now the capital of the new Palestinian state, and to offer Mass in the Franciscan church of the Good Shepherd. When we arrived a flood of children from the school surrounded us – Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim. There is a big new mosque near the road. In Jerusalem there were Masses in the Cenacle, the Convent of the Sisters of Sion and finally in the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in the Franciscan Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament where I was privileged to be the chief concelebrant.

The basilica is an extraordinary place with its multitude of little chapels, blaze of candles and lamps and the throng of pilgrims. On our first visit, the Latin Patriarch was singing Mass with *Te Deum* and organ playing. We saw him emerge from some distant chapel and enter the Holy Sepulchre immediately afterwards a Greek monk and Franciscan each extinguished an enormous candle outside the Sepulchre.

One hears and reads much about the “rivalry” of the different churches in the Holy Land. But my own contacts were very different. There was a friendly Coptic monk in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Our African Abbots and monks had recently made a pilgrimage to the Coptic monasteries in Egypt. At the Chapel of the *Dominus Flevit* on the Mount of Olives, I was looking for a plaque on the outside of the chapel in memory of the Marquess of Bute who began the restoration of Pluscarden. His heart is buried in the garden. Lady Bute arranged the wording of the plaque which was put into Latin by Abbot Hunter Blair – I had not time to find it but I met a Syrian Orthodox priest who asked me if I knew Fr Brady in Glasgow! Then at Jacob’s Well the Greek Orthodox priest invited us to his house to show us his many artistic treasures. His predecessor had been murdered some months

previously by an Israeli fanatic. We were photographed with him but unfortunately I do not have a copy of this. On the way back to Jerusalem our coach stopped at a village where we were invited into the home of a Muslim family of many generations and were given coffee. Our own guide, Ammon Betsler, translated from Arabic to English – though one of the married daughters, home from California, spoke perfect English.

A visit to Ain Karem, the birthplace of John the Baptist, Pluscarden's patron, was another highlight. It is "in the hill country" as the Gospel records, and was once famous for its vineyards – the terraces are still visible on the hill sides. Karem means "vineyard" so I said a prayer for our own Fr Cyril Karam RIP. It is a stiff climb up the hill to the church of the Visitation where we were welcomed by the Father Guardian. Before we left the gardener gave me a cutting of rosemary which has taken root and is growing happily in the cloister garth at Pluscarden.

In Jerusalem I stayed at the Abbey of the Dormition near Sion Gate. The monastery has a fine church built by the German Beuronese monks (with financial help from the Kaiser) in 1900. There are rich golden mosaics in the Upper Church and the crypt with its effigy of Our Lady "in Dormition". The community is small but is helped by several young people who join the monks in choir and refectory, caring for the guest house and the shop. I was able to join them for office – in German – and for Mass one morning and also for a splendid concert of Bach and Monteverdi given by an Israeli choir and orchestra. Abbot Benedikt and his monks could not have been more hospitable.

All good things come to an end and on the last day we had there was to be a strike at Tel Aviv airport so the plane was to leave early. This meant an early departure at 5am from Jerusalem and we were unable to offer Mass at the Benedictine Monastery of Abu Ghosh as we had hoped. But all ended well. Breakfast in Jerusalem – supper in Pluscarden.

Your Editor,
Dom Alfred

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY PETERSHAM

We are now settled in the new monastic church, and it is a joy to sing God's praises in such a place. With the building of the church the community has started to move into two buildings much nearer the church. In Holy Week of 1989 we moved into a new building which was to become the guesthouse. So this redbrick building is now about to be used for the purpose for which it was built. So the brothers have been busy hauling and moving furniture etc. The new quarters will give a more monastic space with a decent kitchen for the first time.

September brings a new school term for Br Gregory. He is studying for a Master of Divinity degree at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge (Massachusetts). However, he is able to take courses at any University in the Boston/Cambridge area. This term he hopes to study with Jaroslav Pelikan who is visiting Professor at Boston College.

BLESSED ILDEFONSO SCHUSTER (1880-1954)

Pope John-Paul II beatified the Benedictine monk, prior, abbot, archbishop and cardinal, Ildefonso Schuster at St Peter's in Rome on 12 May this year. The following thoughts are inspired by the researches of Mgr Mariano Magrassi OSB, the archbishop of Bari-Bitonto, who entered Benedictine life at our monastery in Genoa at a time when the reputation of the new Beatus as a holy ascetic and renowned spiritual teacher was widely diffused. He broadcast a series of talks on the Cardinal during Lent this year on Radio Milan, in preparation for the beatification.

Alfredo Ludovico Schuster was born "in the shadow of St Peter's" (as he would note in his diary) on 18 January 1880 and was baptised in the Basilica two days later. His father was a tailor in Rome and although his parents both had German origins, his father coming from Bavaria and his mother from Bolzano (Bozen in the Austrian Sud-Tyrol), young Alfredo had a thoroughly

Roman childhood. His father died when he was still very young and his mother was responsible for his upbringing. He was educated at the Cassinese monastery of St Paul's-outside-the-walls from the age of eleven, subsequently entering the novitiate there and taking the name Ildefonso and making profession on 13 November 1899. Studies at St Anselmo followed and he was ordained on 19 March 1904. Major influences on him during this period were the saintly Blessed Placido Riccardi (1844-1915), whose confessor and spiritual guide he was later to become at St Paul's, and his abbot Boniface Oslaender. He was successively novice master, prior, procurator general of the Cassinese Congregation and then in 1918 abbot of the monastery. In 1929 Pope Pius XI made him archbishop of Milan and a cardinal priest of SS Silvestro e Martino ai Monti.

Blessed Ildefonso was a renowned liturgical scholar and monastic historian and his output of books, articles and other writings was to become phenomenal.

As archbishop he undertook such a prodigious workload as to exceed the activities of his illustrious predecessor St Charles Borromeo. During his twenty years there he visited the whole of the archdiocese five times, celebrated five diocesan synods and a provincial council, consecrated 275 churches, 154 altars, ordained 21 bishops and 1265 priests. His writings have been accumulated to comprise 121 volumes: history (13), pastoral (20), liturgical (5), ascetical (16) etc, plus about eighty thousand letters, notes and messages.

Cardinal Gerlier of Lyon (with tongue in cheek) called him a “mal vivant” (=one who lives badly/poorly, as contrasted with bon vivant) since he “doesn't eat, doesn't sleep and he works all the time!”

He promoted the Ambrosian liturgy in Milan, founding the Institute of Ambrosian Chant and Sacred Music and the Ambrosianeum and Didiscaleian cultural centres. It was in the period 1919-1929 that he produced his great work the *Liber Sacramentorum*, comprising nine volumes (five in the later English translation, *The Sacramentary: Historical and Liturgical*

Notes to the Roman Missal.) In 1943 he published *St Benedict and His Times* which further spread his scholarly renown.

There was some criticism of the Cardinal for living somewhat too happily with the Italian Fascist regime in the 1930s. He accepted the regime for pastoral reasons and not from political motives. He was the first bishop to swear allegiance to the King following the Concordat, but then as a promoter of the role of the laity in the parishes and in Catholic Action he denounced the Fascist interference in this organisation. From 1938 onwards he stood against the racist views and other “Germanisations” of the Fascists. Speaking of the racial laws he said, “A kind of heresy has been borne in foreign countries which is spreading everywhere ... it is called racism.” After the German occupation of Lombardy in 1943-1945 it was he who advised the German Commandant to surrender. And at a last interview with Mussolini on 25 April 1945 he urged the dictator to make peace with God and man – advice that was, unfortunately, spurned. The years of post-war reconstruction were difficult in Milan as elsewhere and he was much involved with the social problems of the age. He founded the “Domus Ambrosiana” to provide inexpensive housing for the newly married.

A few days before he died he withdrew to the Venegono Seminary addressing his last words to the seminarians, “You want something to remember me by. All I can leave you is an invitation to holiness.” He died on 30 August 1954 and his cause for canonisation was introduced in 1957 by his successor as archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini (Paul VI).

At his funeral oration Cardinal Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) used the words that Sulpicius Severus had used about St Martin (the first western monk, then bishop of Tours) and applied them to Cardinal Schuster (first of all a monk and abbot, then archbishop of Milan). Martin was praised for being able to combine so well the monastic/contemplative life with his pastoral ministry. As well as accomplishing this, Cardinal Roncalli additionally praised him for combining the two traditionally Benedictine activities of *ora et labora* – even to exceeding the

activity of St Charles.

From the beginning of his pontificate John Paul II has been known for his dictum, "Open the door to Christ." Decades earlier Blessed Ildefonso, speaking of the secularisation of society voiced very similar sentiments; "The times are illusory today there is a feeling of security neither on the banks of the Thames, in the Kremlin, nor at the White House, we need a programme of reconstruction for the polis, for the city: Christ or death." Continually preaching on Our Lady as Mother of Christ and of the Church he articulated this title of Mary that was later to become associated with his successor Pope Paul VI.

At the beatification Mass last May the Holy Father, as always, concisely summarised the relevance for the Church of today of the new beatus: "Blessed Ildefonso offered to the Milanese clergy a shining example of how contemplation and pastoral activity could be combined. Today he continues to show every priest, and every person called to work in the Lord's vineyard, the supreme value of love for God, the basis of fraternal communion and of the apostolate. 'In the end,' he wrote, 'what counts for the true greatness of the Church and her children is love.'"

DGP

DIOCESAN CALENDAR 1997

This year again the Diocese has produced a fine colour calendar, showing buildings, people and events in the Diocese. The photographs are mostly the work of Canon Robert McDonald and our own Fr Giles, and so there are naturally a couple of pictures of Pluscarden, one showing the Schola grouped round the Talacre lectern in the Chancel, against the background of Br Gilbert's windows, and another showing the Abbots of the Province in statio in the Cloister at the Diocesan pilgrimage.

Br Gregory's stained glass gets a showing on the page for February, which features St Ninian's, Inverness; while Fr Martin's

talents get an airing in November, which features the church he built and paid for in Ullapool, when he was Parish Priest at Dingwall.

In the year celebrating St Columba's 14th centenary it is appropriate that one picture shows the stained glass window in the St Andrew's chapel at Fort Augustus of St Ninian and St Columba, as depicted by Paul Vincent Woodroffe (1875-1954) The latter was active in many fields. Probably his largest commission was for the stained glass in the Lady Chapel of St Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

One page is devoted to St Sylvester's School in Elgin, with an attractive portrait of Sr Pauline, the headmistress, and one of her pupils, and a view of the interior of the new school.

Also in Elgin there is Greyfriars, where the Mercy Sisters have their convent in the old Franciscan Friary, which like Pluscarden, was restored by the Marquis of Bute and Lord Colum Crichton Stuart. The picture shows the Choir, in which there is a Sacrament House; unlike Pluscarden's, this still contains the Blessed Sacrament.

The distinctive facade of St Thomas's in Keith, where the copper dome is currently being renewed, cheers up December with a sunny day, blue sky and white clouds, and there is a little portrait of Mgr John Copland, Vicar General of the Diocese and Parish priest. He has just celebrated his Golden Jubilee, and looks set to smoke his pipe a few more years yet!

Casting his net a little wider, Canon McDonald has also given us one of Pluscarden's Valliscaulian sisters, in the shape of Beaulieu Priory, which opens the year.

It is not surprising that the Bishop received a letter of commendation from the Vatican's Commission for the Cultural Goods of the Church, expressing their "sincere admiration" for last year's calendar.

Coming shortly: As some of our readers will have noticed, we have recently been recording for the BBC; Radio 3 broadcast Lauds of the Transfiguration on Sunday 4th August, and Radio 4

broadcast Compline on Sunday 1st September. These recordings were made in our church by an augmented Schola of monks, with Fr Benedict, our Precentor, rehearsing the group beforehand.

Philip Billson, the producer, was fairly demanding, but the marvels of digital technology and the skills of the sound engineer produced just under an hour of the highest quality recording without revolt occurring. We were told flattering things about the quality, and the programmes were favourably noticed in the Press, secular and otherwise. As a result we are now thinking seriously about making a CD (and probably a cassette, too). People are always asking when we will make another recording... If you want a copy (or several!) for Christmas, or even if you want to be kept up-to-date on progress with this project, drop us a line and say so, and we'll let you know what transpires.

MONASTERIES OF THE SUBIACO CONGREGATION: NO 66

The Italian Province:

No 14 Sadhu Benedict Math, Maheshwarapasha (Khulna), Bangladesh

Dear Abbot Alfred,

Thank you for sending us *Pluscarden Benedictines*. Being a new foundation, we are fairly unknown to the Benedictine world; yet here we are, trying our best in the service of the Lord. As is rather normal with regard to new foundations, our “problem” is to get some young men willing to join our way of life. This will take some time since – if we do not take into account last century’s short presence in the country – we are the first Christian monks they have ever seen. Moreover young people of today, even willing to consecrate their life to the Lord, are more concerned to find a religious order that will offer them better chances in education and an easier way of life.

Nevertheless we are happy being what we are, and try our best to live out our monastic presence. Our environment is among

non-Christians i.e. among Muslims and Hindus: we hope to be a sign of peace in their frequent misunderstandings, and, thanks be to God, they listen to us. Three months ago a Hindu young lady received Baptism and joined a Community of de Foucauld Sisters; this has been a source of great joy to us, and we hope the good Lord will make use of us in this way again in the future.

In these years we have translated into Bengali the Bible and the Monastic Divine Office (and of course the Rule of our Holy Father Benedict!) so we are happy to have all parts of the Liturgy understood by all who join us at prayer. Needless to say that the never dreamed there could be such richness in the Church; they especially like singing the Psalms and listening to the Patristic readings.

Please convey our best wishes to the whole of your community; keep us in your prayers as we remember you all in ours.

D Carlo & D Premananda