

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 94 News and Notes for our Friends June 1992</p>
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FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

June is always one of the busiest months of the year – liturgically we have a succession of important feasts: Pentecost Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, St John the Baptist, the Sacred Heart and Sts Peter and Paul. As well the Aberdeen pilgrimage will be here on 21st June. This year we also look forward to the visit of our Abbot Primate from Rome, who will be with us from 23d. to 25th June as part of his visit to the monasteries of Ireland and Scotland.

With warmer days and long hours of daylight everything in the garden is growing rapidly. The gardeners were given extra work when the big cedar tree was brown down in a gale, falling on the frames and blocking the main path. It was probably planted by Lord Fife over 100 years ago.

It is the time of year when the bees attempt to swarm – when the lupins begin to flower. They were blessed at Easter with the traditional blessing from the old ritual which prays that “they may multiply”. At the time of writing, the beekeeper is out of action with a bad back.

St Scholastica's Retreat house is being very well patronised and the seven rooms for men in the monastery are also in constant demand.

A slip of the pen in the last newsletter referred to St Robert of Perth. This should have been St William of Perth. He was a baker who gave to the poor every tenth loaf. He spent a night at the Cathedral Priory of Rochester in 1201 on his way to Canterbury and the following day was murdered by the roadside. He was buried in the Cathedral and devotion to him developed so that in

1256 Bishop Laurence of St Mark's went to Rome and obtained his canonisation.

On 27th May Br Peter Protheroe made his Simple Profession. He comes from the parish of Heswall in the Wirral. Later in July it will be the turn of Br Augustine to exchange the grey habit for the white.

Before Easter our Abbot President's Council met in Spain at the monastery of El Paular to the north of Madrid. This was originally a Carthusian house founded by the King of Castile, whose statue is in the garden. It was a large house with cells for 40 choir monks and even more brothers. It was suppressed in the last century by the government and plundered. Our monks returned in 1954 and are slowly restoring the ruins. The lay-brothers' quarters around the little cloister is now a very fine hotel. The monastery is surrounded by mountains, which in April were covered with snow. We crossed them on the way to Segovia and watched the skiing. Segovia is an old Roman town famous for the aqueduct, the cathedral and the castle. We visited the monastery of the Heronimites and the Carmelite Priory with the shrine of St John of the Cross. From Segovia we went up into the mountains through forests to the Abbey of the Holy Cross in the Valley of the Fallen, built by Franco after the Civil War to be a place of reconciliation and a centre of social study. 50,000 of the fallen from both sides are buried here in the huge church. The monks belong to the Solemnnes Congregation and they gave us a very warm welcome. It is a very peaceful place with wonderful views over the mountains. The Abbot told us it is the quietest monastery in his Congregation.

While at El Paular we were reminded of the monks who were martyred during the Civil War by the Communists. On addition to those at Monserrat, almost the entire community of El Pueyo were put to death. Fr José Pascuel was an alumnus in the monastery at the time and knew those who died. He is working for their beatification and gave us books he had written. Those who were imprisoned with them and died with them, the Bishop and other priests and religious are to be beatified on 25th October, but the monks have been forgotten. Incidentally, Abbot Romanos

Rios, who was Abbot-Visitor of the English Province, had been Prior of El Pueyo.

The last newsletter had a portrait of the 4th Earl of Morton, who intruded his son James Douglas as lay-Prior of Pluscarden. On his death, the lawful lay-Prior, Lord Alexander Seton was reinstated. We reproduce his fine portrait, now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, painted in 1610 when he was 52 and Lord Chancellor of Scotland. We published a portrait of him as a young boy, in a family group, in our issue of September 1988.

Yours devotedly,

+D. Alfred, Abbot.

CREATION FOR ALL

The major fund-raising event for the West Wing Appeal this Spring was the staging of Haydn's Oratorio, *The Creation*, at the Abbey. As with last year's immensely successful "Messiah for all", the public were invited to attend the concert, either as audience or as singers in the chorus, in return for a suitable standard donation.

Tribute must be paid, as ever, to the extraordinary generosity of our appeal committee, who freely give of their time, talents and influence to produce events such as this. On this occasion, through their efforts, a conductor, a chamber orchestra and a trio of soloists, all of them ready to give their services free of charge, as well as a chorus, nearly one hundred strong, were gathered together, for our benefit. In an undertaking of this sort, where rehearsal can at best be minimal, well-meaning intentions must be combined with the highest standards of competence, if the result is not to be an embarrassing disaster. The event was to prove, again, a success that would be hard to over-praise.

Graham Treacher, conducting from the harpsichord with infectious enthusiasm, established, from beginning to end of this

performance, an atmosphere of irrepressible fun. Nobody present could fail to sense, and be caught up by his sheer enjoyment of the music. The mood of romping jollity did nothing to diminish appreciation of the solid worth of the piece; indeed, it seemed to add an entirely appropriate sparkle to this hymn of happiness and wonder in praise of God. Many agree that this is Haydn at his best; his music sings, on our behalf, and not without humour, of the prodigality, the variety, the achievement, the glory of nature, uncomplicated by the blight of sin, misery and destruction which followed from the Fall of Man. The libretto follows the account of creation in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, according to the Authorised Version, interspersed with poetic descriptions, in more or less Miltonic style, and acclamations of praise taken from the Psalms. It may sound quaint, naive and old-fashioned to some, but it marvellously conveys the desired sense of innocent pleasure and unalloyed delight in this marvellous world of ours. Here is a brief example to give you an indication of the general flavour:

(Soprano) Recitative: And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

Aria: With verdure clad the fields appear
Delightful to the ravish'd sense:
By flowers sweet and gay
Enchanced is the charming sight...
With copious fruit th'expanded boughs are hung;
In leafy arches twine the shady groves;
O'er lofty hills majestic forests wave.

(Tenor) Recitative: And the heavenly host proclaimed the third day praising God, and saying:

Chorus: Awake the harp, the lyre awake, and let your joyful song resound...

Who could fail to be cheered up by that? Now just try it with the music...

But the best is yet to tell. By mishap, the lead violinist's part was not available until the eleventh hour. Colin Saddington therefore came on stage to play virtually from sight. It was a joy and a treat to watch him: he played with tremendous zest, but with every appearance of complete familiarity and ease, giving an exciting display of virtuosic brilliance, with never a slip. What perhaps above all lifted the spirits, though, on this uplifting evening, was the performance of the youthful soloists. Marianne Hellgren, Jeremy Ovenden and Simon Kirkbride are still students at the Royal College of Music, at the very beginning of their singing careers, scarce out of their teens; and yet they all sang with the sureness and maturity of tone, the sustained power of production and also the sensitivity of expression that one associates with long established professionals. We felt we were witnessing in them the "new strength and new delights" which the Creator's breath bestows when "life with vigour fresh returns".

Then let our voices ring, indeed, united with their song.

Some £1,250.00 was raised by this concert: a significant advance for the appeal. Dan Air helped by flying up our soloists for a token fee only. Clearly, however, Haydn cannot attract the crowds in quite the same way as Handel can. Is this perhaps rather unfair?

D.B.H.

LITURGY FOR ST COLUMBA

St Columba (c.521-597), the first Abbot of Iona, is one of the most popular of Scottish Saints. He is commemorated on June 9th, which we celebrate as a Feast in our liturgy at Pluscarden. Hitherto we have used the texts for an Abbot from the Common, though a need has long been felt of finding a set of proper texts and chants

for the Feast, as was done recently for St Aelred.

This 12th Century saint is also of Scottish interest, as he spent his youth in the service of King David and because ten of the mediaeval Cistercian Abbeys of Scotland, including Kinloss, which is near Pluscarden, were descended from his abbey of Rievaulx. A set of proper chants for St Aelred were taken from the old Cistercian Antiphonal and were edited for use on his feast day, which we keep as a Solemnity as it marks the anniversary of the reception of our Community into the Catholic Church.

An eminently suitable office for St Columba was brought to our notice this year, quite by chance. In March the Scottish choir, Cappella Nova, gave a concert of chants in honour of the Saint from the Incholm Antiphoner in St Columba's Church, Largs. The Antiphoner is a manuscript choir book written in the 13th Century for the Augustinian Canons of Incholm Priory (made an abbey in 1240) in the Firth of Forth.

The Canons of the Abbey were from time to time troubled by attacks from the English and it is notable that in 1547 they had to retreat for safety to the Abbey of Dunfermline, then Pluscarden's mother-house. St Columba was the patron of the Community: although it is doubtful whether he visited the site despite its Celtic origins. The texts and music used in the concert were used for the solemn celebration of his Feast and its Octave. The Antiphoner is roughly contemporary with the foundation of Pluscarden but experts believe that the chants themselves may have been composed as early as the 8th Century, being preserved by aural tradition. The texts for the Lauds antiphons are mostly taken from the Life of St Columba by St Adamnan, which was written c. 690. The Antiphoner, an important source for Scottish ecclesiastical history, survived the great destruction during the Reformation period and is now in the Edinburgh University Library.

An oblate of Pluscarden attended the concert at Largs and sent us the programme. We contacted Dr Isobel Preece of Newcastle University Music Dept., who had edited the chants for

performance, and she kindly sent us a photocopy of the music. From the various items in this we selected the pieces needed for our liturgy, including a very fine hymn to St Columba with a memorable tune and a reference to *cara Hybernia* which delighted some of the brethren. The music was put into standard plainchant notation and the Latin orthography was modernised: e.g. *praenuntia* for *prenuncia*, *somnolentia* for *somnolencia* and *Hybernia* for *ybernia*. The results were then made into a small booklet which was produced in time for the community choir practice on the eve of the Feast. The next day the hymns, antiphons and responsories were sung in their proper place in the Divine Office for the first time in four hundred and thirty two years. The long years of neglect vanished in a moment and we were united with the countless monks and canons of pre-Reformation Scotland in praising God and honouring his saint.

O Pater patriae, Pastor egregie,
Columba tribue nobis spem veniae;
et labe criminum nostrorum omnium
nos munda sancte Columba.

O Father of this land, excellent Shepherd,
Columba grant us hope of forgiveness;
and from the blemish of the guilt of all of us
cleanse us O holy Columba.

from the hymn to St Columba.

Br Augustine

WEST WING APPEAL

Although building work has not yet started on the West Wing, the preparatory work is well advanced and is continuing. The architect is busy completing the working drawings, the building warrant is being sought and the quantity surveyor is doing the necessary

calculations. On the basis of his workings, tenders will be sought from contractors interested in doing the work.

A start has been made in gathering materials. Those who have visited the abbey recently will have seen large piles of local stone which have been heaped near the site of the West Wing. Its use in the new building will ensure that, when built, the new wing will harmonise with the rest of the Abbey. Much of the stone was donated by local contractors.

The roofing slates too must be appropriate for the type and age of the building. Like the stone, which came from demolished local buildings, the slates have come from demolition sites. In Elgin a new building to replace older inadequate premises is being erected at St Sylvester's School, which is run by the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters very kindly donated the slates from the buildings which were demolished so that, in the late spring, several relays of monks, all wearing the mandatory hard hats with their work habits, could have been seen in Abbey Street gathering, collecting and loading slates. We were also able to purchase a further 1,000 from Moray District Council. To date over 5,000 slates have been dedicated at £1.00 a time as part of our donate a slate scheme.

We have just issued a new series of five post cards which are being sold for the present on behalf of the West Wing Appeal. A distinctively shaped card showing the St Benedict Window in the North Transept sells at 45p., while the others are 30p. each. We also have 3 W. Heath-Robinson postcards giving his inimitable view of monastic building projects at 20p. They are also available as posters, a limited number of which are autographed by Alan Heath-Robinson, W. Heath-Robinson's son. These cost £25.00 including p&p. A new design of Appeal ties are now available, less exclusive than the previous set, but cheaper at £8.99 plus 50p. p&p.

If you should be visiting the game fairs held in the North of Scotland this year, keep an eye open for the West Wing Appeal caravan, distinctive in purple and cream, which will be at many of these events to publicise the Appeal and to sell Appeal

merchandise.

KRISTO BUASE NEWS

When I was in Ghana, I often noticed parallels between Kristo Buase and Pluscarden. Both are in rural areas to the north of the major centres of population in their respective countries. Where Pluscarden is six miles from Elgin, the county town of Moray, Kristo Buase is eight miles from Techiman, the local district capital. The road which runs from each monastery to the town is of a similar width and construction, the Ghana road being wider than the Scottish.

The parallels did help to highlight the many differences. The village of Tuobodum, which lies in the same relation to Techiman as Miltonduff to Elgin, is itself a small town of 8,000 inhabitants. The rural population of Ghana is certainly more numerous than that of Scotland and, whereas one can wander all day round Pluscarden without meeting a soul, it is impossible to walk near Kristo Buase for half-an-hour without meeting someone. Our countryside is fenced off and laid out for the efficient use of machinery, while the Ghanaian farmer produces a crop with hoe and cutlass on cleared patches of ground, usually fighting a ceaseless battle with the encroaching bush.

The life of the monastery too is the same and different. The Office is at the centre of the life of both houses. Both say the complete Psalter once during the week, though according to different schemes. At Kristo Buase the Liturgy is in English, the only common language of the members of the community. In Britain, the ability to speak another language is comparatively rare, while many people in Ghana speak three or four or more. African instruments, like the korah – a kind of harp have been introduced to accompany the chant.

A new and small community has its own special problems, but there were times when the situations there echoed the stories the older brethren tell of the early days here at Pluscarden. Apart

from the three Europeans there are two African simply Professed, one Novice and a Postulant. Br Emmanuel, one of the simply Professed is in England at Prinknash for the present and is studying at the Mill Hill Missionary Institute.

Also a student, at over 60 and in Ghana, is Fr Leo Rood of Prinknash, who went out to Ghana in February this year to replace me because I had returned to Britain due to illness. Fr Leo is studying Twi, the language of the area around the monastery. He has written some very interesting letters from the Language School in Abetifi where he is a student.

Br Bartholomew, the Novice, is due for simple Profession, D.V., later this year. He is much engaged in the work of the monastery farm. Like Br Bartholomew, Br Joseph, the Postulant, was a welder before coming to Kristo Buase. He is an excellent drummer. The korah is played at the liturgy by the other simply Professed, Br Richard, who comes from the neighbouring country of Togo. Other young men have expressed their interest in the monastic life, so there is potential for growth.

With over 300 acres Kristo Buase has more land than Pluscarden, though much of it is farmed by local small farmers. In fact, I would hesitate to say anything about land tenure and use in Ghana because it is quite different from Scotland and confusing for an outsider. The monastery is hoping to derive much of its income from the land, and, to this end, has recently planted a number of cashew trees, which it is hoped will come into production in a few years time. Other industries are also being planned so that there will not be too heavy a reliance on agriculture.

Communications with Ghana and within Ghana can sometimes be a problem. With all the work to be done, it can be difficult to find time even to write and the nearest telephone is two hours drive away. In order to keep in touch both Abbot Aldhelm and now Abbot Mark of Prinknash have paid regular visits to Kristo Buase. Abbot Mark hopes to go out to Ghana in mid-November for a month. The Abbot Pro-Visitor, our own Fr Abbot, will also be making a Visitation in the autumn. The people

of Ghana are openly religious, much more so than the people of this country. The idea of a contemplative monastery is quite new in that country, yet many people readily understand what a monastery is and what the monks are trying to do. We ask you to keep this monastery and the Church in Ghana in your prayers.

D.M.S