

<p style="text-align: center;">Pluscarden Benedictines No. 97 News and Notes for our Friends June 1993</p>
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FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

The last issue of Pluscarden Benedictines was given to the abbatial Blessing of the 8th of December, an event already more than six months in the past. Since then we have celebrated Christmas and Easter and Pentecost, and are now in the midst of the many solemnities of June. In particular, we look forward to celebrating with the diocese on the 27th the 900th anniversary of the passing of St Margaret, Queen of the Scots. A fortnight later comes the Solemnity of our holy Father St Benedict.

The Opus Dei is always our chief work, to which nothing is to be preferred, but never our only one. At Easter the construction of our new West Wing began. Its main function will be that of guest house. The site was blessed on Easter Monday, when we were honoured by the presence of Sir Iain Tennant, Lord-Lieutenant of the County, as well as by that of his deputy, Grenville Johnston, the Chairman of our Appeal Committee. By a happy chance, our Bishop Mario was making a brief retreat with us, and so was able to add episcopal dignity to the blessing. Details of the work, and of the Appeal, will be found on another page, but there is good ground for hope that building will be substantially completed by the end of the year. Perhaps, then, the new accommodation for guests that it will provide will be available for use by Easter.

From 22 January to 28 February, I visited our dependent house at Petersham, Massachusetts. It is dedicated to our Lady under the title of St Mary. The Community, which was begun in 1986, at present numbers nine and has real potential for growth. It adjoins a larger Community of Benedictine nuns, St Scholastica's

Priory, with whom it worships in common. The two Communities together form the Benedictine Monastic Centre of Petersham, occupying a property of some 200 acres. It is important that Pluscarden give full support to this venture, and we must pray that the Lord will prosper it. For the first four weeks of my visit, Fr Bede accompanied me. He has since returned to St Mary's, where he is working as Cellarer. I should extend my thanks to Fr Anselm and the brethren at St Mary's, as also to Mother Mary Clare and the sisters of St Scholastica's, for their welcome of me in the winter. The weather was cold and snow abounded, but all that one had heard of the warmth of American hospitality was proved true. I look forward to revisiting the Communities at the end of September.

Early in May, I attended the meeting of the Province's Council of Superiors. This was held at Ramsgate, and was an opportunity to learn more of the houses of our far-flung Province over which Abbot Alfred presides as Pro-Visitor. Fr Giles accompanied me on this visit. We were also able to call on the small but courageous Community of Benedictine nuns at Minster, some 3 miles from Ramsgate.

Our Community has generally been fortunate in enjoying good relations with other Christian bodies in the neighbourhood, and this continues. On the 22nd of May, three of us attended the induction of the Rev. Graham Brown as the new Episcopalian Rector of Holy Trinity, Elgin, and St Margaret's, Lossiemouth. We also await the arrival of a new Minister in our local Presbyterian parish of Birnie.

On the 28th of May, Fr Eddie Traynor, parish priest of nearby Buckie, gave us a moving account of his recent mission of mercy to Bosnia. A little over a week later, Fr Gerry Burns, a New Zealander working in Peru as a member of the Society of St James the Apostle, spoke lucidly of the situation in that country: a land of faith and devotion, but burdened by the repaying of its debts, by drug traffic, and by terrorism. At the time of writing, we look forward to the visit of Archimandrite Maximos, a monk of Mt Athos at present ministering to the Cypriot Orthodox of

Cambridge. Such visitors remind us of the world beyond the monastery (or the newspapers), and of our vocation to prayer.

Two of our younger solemnly professed monks, Br Benedict and Br Ambrose, are studying for the priesthood. On the feast of the Visitation, I conferred on them the ministry of acolyte. This happily coincided with the visit of Br Benedict's parents.

Mention of acolytes brings us back to the Liturgy. After the great feasts of our redemption come the feasts and memorials of the redeemed, the saints: St John the Baptist, Ss Peter and Paul, St Benedict, and many others. They remind us that we belong to a Body, and so can live the present and face the future confident that we are not alone, but upheld by the prayers of others and the Lord of us all.

In Him,

+ Fr Hugh OSB

THE EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

I am very grateful to the many people who responded to my note in the last newsletter, by sending subscriptions, donations to the West Wing Appeal, changes of address and Post Codes (especially in Germany) and criticisms. The latter referred to calling St Margaret, Queen of Scotland. Our Kings and Queens are, of course, Kings and Queens of Scots not of Scotland. The Editor can only plead that the offending phrase was written by a Lowland Scot and the article by-passed the Editor to the printers.

We aim to appear four times a year, at Easter; June for St John the Baptist; September and Christmas. As this will be the June issue, we include one of Peter Anson's delightful pen and ink drawings of the little monastery in the desert where he is said to have spent his youth. St John is the patron of Pluscarden and his feast occurs in midsummer on 24 June. The Carthusians dedicate all their houses to Our Lady and St John the Baptist and the

Valliscaulians, who were founded by Bl. Viard, who was a Carthusian, followed the same tradition. There was a Medieval fresco painting of him in our church, in the corner near “the squint”, but it has faded away. We have a photograph taken perhaps 50 years ago.

The last newsletter referred to the meeting in Padua of the Superiors of the Subiaco Congregation. Since then we have received some photographs which I hope we can reproduce. The group picture was taken in the “Painted Cloister”, while the Bishop of Padua, who has the personal title of Archbishop, since he was previously Nuncio in West Africa is seen with Abbot Andre of Koubri in Burkina Faso who is the first African Benedictine Abbot and Prior Godefroi of Dzobegan in Togo. He was delighted to meet again the monks he had known in Africa.

After Easter the Abbot President’s Council met at the Abbey of Kornelimünster near Aachen in Germany. The church was built in 1953 and its white walls and tower can be seen from a great distance, standing as it does on a low hill in rather flat country. But the monastery was founded originally in the centre of the town (or more truly the town grew up around it) in 814-817 by Louis the Pious for his friend and counsellor St Benedict of Aniane. It was suppressed in 1802 by Napoleon and refounded by monks of our Congregation in 1906.

The old Abbey is now the parish church. It is an unusual building with five aisles and a forest of pillars which means it is a difficult place for today’s Liturgy. The monk’s choir was upstairs at the West end of the church and quite out of sight – there was virtually no garden or grounds around the monastery. There is a curious rotunda at the east end of the church which was built to enclose the relics of Pope St Cornelius, who was invoked as the patron of horned cattle (Latin *cornu* = horn). There is an open gallery round the top of the church, as at Aachen Cathedral, from which the relics of the Passion are shown during the pilgrimage which takes place every seven years at Aachen and at Kornelimünster.

At the new abbey, a new wing has been built which is very

impressive. The old monastery and school is now a guest and retreat house.

Aachen was the City of the Emperor Charlemagne and the Cathedral has his golden shrine and his throne and many other treasures, among them a splendid golden chest with relics given by the English Richard of Cornwall when he was “King of the Romans” in 1257. He had been on the Crusade in 1240. His election was recognised in the Rhineland which had trade relations with England and he married a German Princess. He was a younger brother of Henry III of England and of Joanna, the wife of Alexander II King of Scots and Pluscarden’s founder. Joanna died whilst on a trip to England in the presence of her two brothers who laid her to rest at Tarrant Abbey in Dorset (cf Plus Ben No 55 Winter 1981). It was fascinating to find this link with Pluscarden in Aachen. The city has some fine buildings, fountains and gardens and is twinned with Norcia in Italy, St Benedict’s birthplace.

We are always grateful for books sent for review and over the years the *Analecta Carthusiana* has been our principal benefactor. Recently we received *Heraldry in the Vatican* by Cardinal Jacques Martin – a splendid volume, the gift of Dr Peter van Duren who is responsible for the Orders of Knighthood at the Vatican. He noticed our picture of the Knights at Fr Abbot’s blessing and hopes to include it in a book which is scheduled for autumn this year. We hope to review *Heraldry in the Vatican*. The other book is *Sempringham and St Gilbert and the Gilbertines* by Eric W Iredale. This too, we will review.

Dom Alfred, Editor

CHANT NOTES

**“Tertius iratus;
quartus dulcidine blandus”**

We have recently taken up singing third mode psalmody, as, for example, the “Nunc Dimittis” at Compline, according to the “tonus antiquus”. The “tonus recentior” was adopted here, temporarily,

about 40 years ago, at a time when the choir was rather weak. This “more recent tone” of the third mode was already common by the twelfth century, so it cannot quite be damned as a modern innovation: it is easier to sing, but it loses much of the beauty of the ancient, more authentic version.

The difference between the two lies in the choice of the dominant, which is the reciting note for the sung psalmody. In the third mode this ought to be “ti”, or the seventh note of the scale; but this note is inherently unstable, having a natural tendency always to resolve itself into “do”. The distinctive character of the mode largely results from the feeling of imbalance that results. Thus in the *tonus antiquus*, recitation is on “ti”, but the cadences must make an extra jump for the ear to accept a conclusion based on “do”. This jump must coincide with the accent of the corresponding Latin word, with any spare unaccented syllables being squeezed in, as it were, in passing. The *tonus recentior* gives up the whole struggle, and simply recites on “do”. This sounds pleasant, but bland.

The third mode predominates among the Mass chants during Lent. As is often said, such chants are a means of meditating on, and praying, selected scripture texts, the majority of them psalm verses, within their liturgical setting. Third mode melodies are full of unresolved tension, roaming restlessly over a wide range of pitch, constantly confounding expectation, never approaching equilibrium, and terminating apparently inconclusively. As such they perfectly suit the Lenten themes of bewilderment in face of evil, with its heart-rending cries to God for help; of suffering, of the sense of helplessness and dereliction, of austere penitence. They are often exceptionally difficult to sing: a difficulty compounded by their often prodigious length, the invariable lack of accompaniment, and the fact that, as a rule, each is sung only once. But they have their own striking beauty: in many ways, the Lenten music of the Roman Gradual is the richest and most satisfying of the whole year.

During Paschaltide, the third mode becomes much less frequent: it is replaced probably most-of-all by the fourth mode.

This is related to the third, for they share the same tonic, “mi”, but its effect could scarcely be more different. Fourth mode melodies seldom leave final cadences far behind: they are in general calm, contemplative, unadventurous; if they sparkle, it is always with happiness. Yet they, too, have an inner tension, as the opposite attractions of “mi” and “fa” cause the melodic line constantly to slip the semi-tone interval between these two notes.

This tension, however, is suggestive not of anguish, but of a joy too overwhelming, too profound to express with mere exuberance. The fourth mode evokes an intense energy which is nevertheless completely controlled, like that lying behind the gentle, soothing hum of a nuclear reactor. This quality makes it well suited to those Easter texts which are at once simple and profound. A liturgical text, such as the Introit for Easter Day, “Resurrexi, et adhuc tecum sum, Alleluia”, is thus truly brought to life. The chant has not only facilitated, but itself become prayer, like that of the disciples who first saw the Lord, and were glad. Alleluia.

DBH

WEST WING APPEAL NEWS

The ceremony to mark and bless the start of work on the building has been described elsewhere in these pages. In the time since work began on the building, impressive progress has been achieved, as will be obvious to even the most casual visitor. The technique is to build the inner shell of brickwork, and then clad this with stone. This has given rise to needless fears that Pluscarden is about to degenerate into a red-brick Abbey!

There are reasonable grounds for hoping that, by the time you read this, the first floor will be in progress.

Out of sight round at the back of the Abbey, Mr R.A. Thompson, who built St Scholastica’s for us three years ago, is engaged in the rather more humdrum but very necessary task of building a new septic tank and renewing the associated drains; this

should be complete before the summer is out.

On Friday 6th August at 7.30 p.m. the Aberdeen International Youth Festival will visit us again, this time in the persons of the Poznan College Chamber Choir.

ST JOHN IN THE DESERT

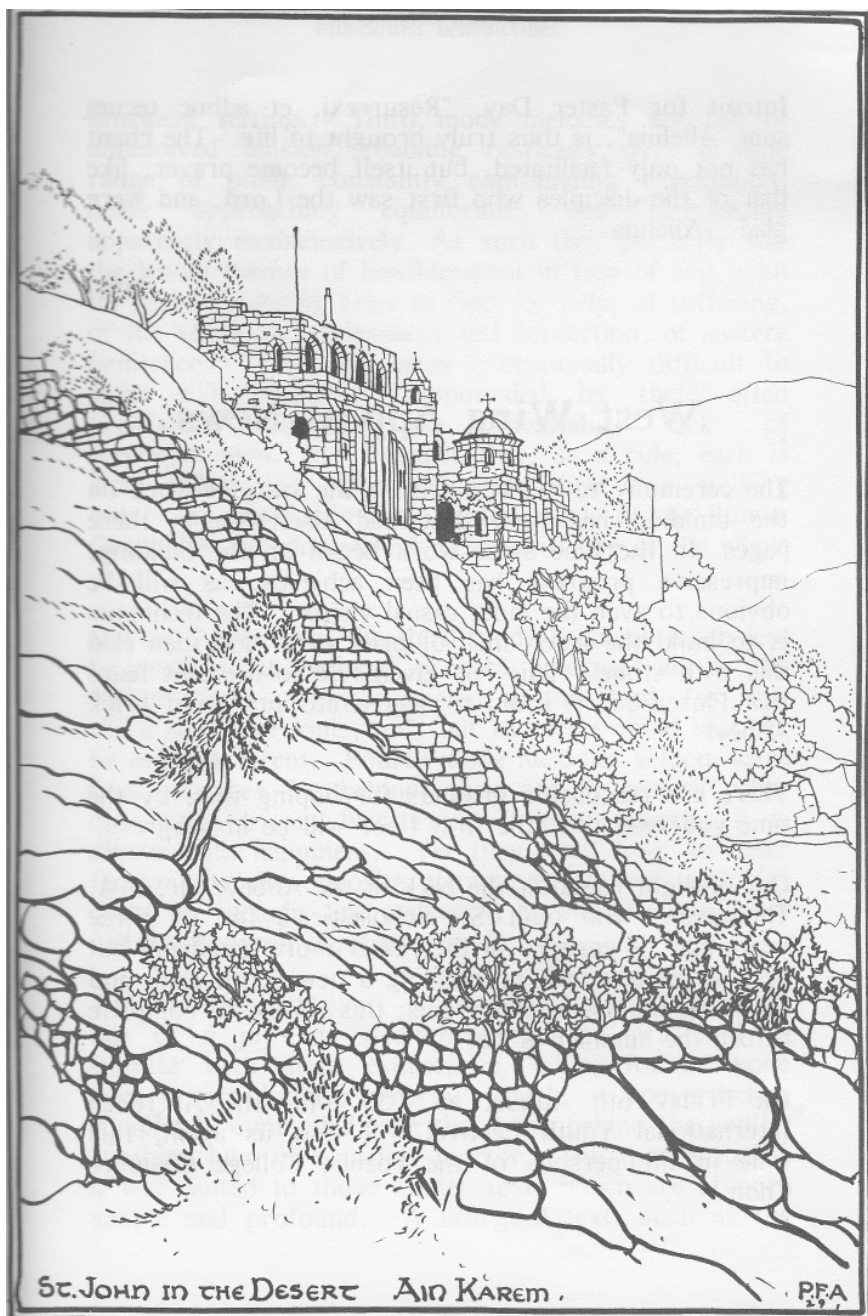
Ain Karim

Ain Karim where St John the Baptist is said to have spent his boyhood, is not on the normal pilgrimage route – it is hardly mentioned in the guide books. It is still a solitary hermitage in the desert. When Peter Anson found his way there one May morning in 1929 to make this drawing he had to climb up and down rocky gullies where, as he said, it is only too easy to miss the path, which like most paths in Palestine consists of bare rock and loose stones. But he arrived at last at the gateway to the enclosure of the hermitage which belongs to the Friars Minor and which is built on the picturesque slopes of a mountain.

Living here at the time of his visit were two old Franciscan laybrothers who spent their time working in the vineyard and cultivating the gardens, which are full of vegetables and fruit thanks to the spring of fresh water known as the Well of St John.

The little chapel of the hermitage is built over the grotto where the saint was said to have spent his boyish years “for the child grew and strengthened in the spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day when he should manifest himself to Israel” (Luke 1:10)

St John the Baptist has always been an inspiration for monks. His life in the solitude of the desert, given to prayer and the search for God alone, is the heart of a contemplative life. Thomas Merton left us a poem for the feast of the Visitation he called *The Quickening of St John the Baptist – On the Contemplative Vocation*. It is too long to quote in full.



ST. JOHN IN THE DESERT AIN KAREM .

PFA
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Sing in your cell small anchorite!
How did you see her in the eyeless dark?
What secret syllable
Woke your young faith to the mad truth that an
unknown babe could be washed in the Spirit of God?
Oh burning joy!
What seas of life were crossed by that voice!
With what new sense
Did your wise heart receive her Sacrament, and know her
cloistered Christ?

You need no eloquence, wild bairn,
Exulting in your hermitage,
Your ecstasy is your apostolate,
For whose kick is 'contemplata tradere'.
Your joy is the vocation
of Mother's Church; hidden children –
Those who by vow lie buried in the cloisters or the hermitage.
The speechless Trappist, or the grey granite Carthusian,
The quiet Carmelite, the barefoot Clare,
Planted in the night of contemplation,
Sealed in the dark and waiting to be born.

Night is our diocese and silence is our ministry
Poverty our charity and helplessness our tongue-tied sermon
Beyond the shape of sight and sound we dwell upon the air.

DAS