

## **FR ABBOT'S LETTER**

Dear Friends,

This jubilee summer of ours has not been short of incident. Hence this “bumper edition” of *Pluscarden Benedictines*.

On 12 July, our brother Edmund Fatt passed away. He was our oldest monk, and though for long confined to the Infirmary very much a presence in the community. An appreciation of him appears elsewhere in this magazine.

Novitiates are by definition fragile, but still it's a strange and heartening coincidence that, as we have “lost” three monks to death in the last year, so we have gained three novices. The most recent of these – Br Paschal (James) Downs – was received on the eve of the feast of our Lady's Assumption. Since then another postulant has joined, and yet another is expected later this year. The day itself of the Assumption brought us the joyful solemn profession of Fr Martin (James) Birrell. As is well known, Fr Martin was for 15 years a priest serving in the diocese of Aberdeen and, many years ago, tried his vocation at Pluscarden more than once. Now at last the Lord has answered the desire of his heart. It is only right that he and we in turn should feel all the more obliged to pray in a particular way for the diocese to which we belong, critically short of priests as it is.

Six days after, on 21 August, we and many members of the Conacher family were able to mark the silver jubilee of Fr Giles' monastic profession. Fr Giles has, in his inimitable way, served his brethren and others in a variety of capacities: as librarian, ceremoniarus, cellarer and, more recently, prior. Even more, it is for his enthusiastic dedication to the monastic life that our thanks

go up to God.

By this time, some of our “colonial boys” were winging their ways home, and as 8 September approached Frs Anselm and Bede from Petersham, Massachusetts, and Fr Ambrose from Kristo Buase, Ghana were safely landed. A rare opportunity for a community photograph! It was on 8 September, 1948, that Pluscarden Priory was officially re-opened and monastic life resumed. The famous Dom Bede Griffiths, then a monk of Prinknash, wrote an eloquent account of the day in the following number of *Pax*. Something of the same sense of peace and blessing that he described there rested on our day too, even the rain courteously lifting as we emerged from the Mass of thanksgiving. Much work had been done by way of preparation, leaving the day to unfold itself with a gratifying – and slightly surprising – ease. For us, the presence of so many, more than 400, on what was after all a working weekday, was reward enough, and added to our general sense of gratitude. For the younger monks, it was good to meet many whose connection with Pluscarden long pre-dated them. And there were several folk there who had been present on the same day half a century before. If you can tell the age of a tree by the rings in its trunk, so perhaps with a monastery. It is ringed by neighbours and local supporters, by oblates and regular guests, by clergy and laity, by friends of other denominations, by its monastic Congregation and the wider monastic “ordo” – and by many others. And all of these were well represented at Pluscarden on 8 September. On the monastic side, we were able to receive our Abbot president, Dom Thierry Portevin, our Abbot Visitor, Dom Aldhelm Cameron-Brown (whose homily is reproduced later in this issue), and representatives from 8 of the monasteries of the Subiaco Congregation (including those in Belgium, Germany and the U.S.A.), from other monastic houses of Scotland, as well as Abbot Basil Matthews from the Anglican abbey of Elmore. Cardinal Thomas Winning and our Metropolitan, Archbishop Keith O'Brien, made the journeys from Glasgow and Edinburgh respectively, and – needless to say – our own diocese was present

in force. Bishop Mario added kind words at the end of Mass to his colourful gift of a few days before: a fine flag of the Abbey's coat-of-arms, the work of Dr Patrick Barden. After the Mass, there followed a buffet in a large marquee, then Vespers and Benediction at 4 pm, the remainder of the day moving gently towards Compline by way of a pleasantly protracted recreation with our monastic guests.

I would like to express here our thanks to all those who joined us for the day, to the many who wished to but, for one reason or another, were unable to, and to those who so kindly gave us gifts on the occasion. I have tried to acknowledge all of these last. Please attribute any failure to do so to incompetence and not ingratitude.

Pluscarden owes its refoundation to two people in particular: Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart who offered the property to Prinknash Abbey in the 1940s, and Prinknash's then abbot, Wilfrid Upson, whose imagination was seized by the idea of a Scottish foundation. With time, how that duet has become a chorus! Pluscarden, in its small way, is a triumph of the spirit of co-operation: of laity and monks, people from near and far, handymen and benefactors, Catholics and others. A co-operation both spiritual and material. All this, all these, in differing but complementary ways, have made it possible for the life of prayer to be reborn and to thrive within these walls. It was this that we were thanking the Lord for on 8 September, the feast appropriately enough of the Virgin Mary's birthday. As she was born to give birth to Christ, so a monastery is born to carry the life of prayer within itself for the sake of the world. Above all of course, the whole enterprise of Pluscarden's refoundation has been a co-operation with God, the Lord of history. And we believe He still has a work for Pluscarden to do, and will uphold us in the future as He so clearly has over the last 50 years.

“Give Your servants, we beg You Lord, the gift of heavenly grace, so that those for whom salvation dawned when

Mary gave birth to Your Son, may receive an increase of peace on the feast of her own nativity.”

*In this place I will give peace*

Yours in Christ

+ Fr Hugh Abbot

## THE EDITOR’S JOTTINGS

Since this edition of the newsletter is a record of our Golden Jubilee celebration on 8 September we are adding a few extra pages and pictures. I am grateful to those who have written the articles and to Fr Giles for the photographs and especially to Br Dunstan who does the typing and the business with the printers. We are – as usual – late, September has become November, but I have been “out of action”; fading with the autumn leaf in my old age.

In many ways autumn is the best season of the year. It is a quiet time, the harvest and the crops are safely gathered and the autumn sun lights up the many shades of colour on the forest. And this year “St Luke’s summer” may well outshine the days we had in July and August.

So it is in old age. Young men see visions while old men dream dreams. Dreams of the happy days of the past – old friends, old places. And old monks especially should dream of the good things that lie ahead – the joys of eternity which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which God has prepared for those who love him. Let us pray for each other.

Your editor

*Dom Alfred*

# HOMILY AT JUBILEE MASS

*Abbot Aldhelm Cameron-Brown*

*The later splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I shall give peace (Haggai 2:9).*

Haggai stood in Jerusalem, looking across the ruins of the temple of Solomon, destroyed by the Chaldeans seventy years earlier. He had a vision of a greater building rising from the ruins, and he felt called by God to stir up the authorities to get to work on the building.

I would not like to compare Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart too closely to an Old Testament prophet. Nevertheless, he was a man of vision, and the ruined monastery of Pluscarden was in his possession. Indeed, those of you from south of the Border may be surprised to know that he held the legal title of Prior of Pluscarden. Like Haggai, he had a vision of a house of God restored; but he had not found a religious community willing to do the work.

Then in Abbot Wilfrid of Prinknash he found a man with vision equal to his own. So in April 1948 a group of five monks came up from Prinknash to start getting the buildings ready for habitation and worship. One of those five monks is still with us: Fr Maurus. As he was cellarer and novice master for many years, he has taken a big part in building up Pluscarden both materially and spiritually.

The work must have seemed daunting. I believe there was a big hole in the kitchen floor, and little that was really habitable. Some time later the Bishop came to welcome them into the diocese. He was warm and encouraging, but as his car went down the drive on the way home, he said to his driver, “I give them six months”. Fifty years later, they are still here.

Forty years ago *I* was living here, doing studies under that great monk, Fr Bruno Webb. In those days, the house had only two

storeys there was no central heating, and we had to use the Lady Chapel as our church. That was so narrow, that when the monks made a profound bow, the two front rows had to be careful not to knock their heads together, at least if they were as tall as Br Andrew. Now look around you and see what has been accomplished since then.

*The later splendour of this house shall be greater than the former.* Whether that is true in this case we cannot tell, since we do not really know what the medieval monastery was like. But those old monks have left quite a lot of splendour behind them. In the Middle Ages, war and fighting always seemed to be going on somewhere or other – but who are we, in this century, to look down on them for that? But while all the violence was going on, in these islands alone think of all the great cathedrals and churches that were being built, from Canterbury in the south to St Magnus in Orkney, which must have seemed then almost the northern edge of the world.

The modern community has restored much of that splendour, and added to it. That has been a great work of co-operation. Take the stained glass windows, to stand for the whole. Some of them were made by Fr Ninian and his successors here at Pluscarden. Some of them, such as the great windows behind the choir, which got into the *Osservatore Romano*, were made by Br Gilbert of Prinknash. Others were made by friends of Pluscarden, such as Crear McCartney who did St Andrew and others, and Sadie McLellan from Glasgow who did the great window of the Apocalypse, as a gift from the Petrie family.

Of course all this had to be paid for, and I would like to remember that committee of local people, many of them not Catholics, who worked so hard at raising money for the building work. The work has been a co-operative venture in the fullest sense.

*The later splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, and in this place I shall give peace.* Words chosen as the motto of the Pluscarden community: *In loco isto dabo pacem*: In

this place I shall give peace.

My work takes me to many monasteries in various countries. Some of them have more spectacular natural surroundings, but I think in none of them do I find a greater sense of peace than I do just walking up the drive here.

But that's just the decor. What about the life? Sometimes at Prinknash a guest will say to me, "I do wish I could join your community: it's so peaceful here." To which I usually reply, "Yes, it does seem peaceful when you are a guest, but when you are a monk living at close quarters with twenty or thirty other men, it is not always so peaceful."

But if we do occasionally have a row, St Benedict, in his Rule for monks written fifteen hundred years ago, has the remedy for it: *make peace with your adversary before the sundown*. What a difference it would make to politics if politicians could put that into practice!

If there is an atmosphere of peace in a monastery, it is surely because we are all trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Benedict's Rule is nothing other than one interpretation of the Gospel, a way of living the Gospel, and he adjures us twice to prefer nothing whatever to Christ. Basically indeed the life of the monk or nun is little different from that of the ordinary Christian. Of course, *no* Christian is in fact ordinary, but our life as monks is organised in such a way as to make prayer possible, to make time for prayer. For most Christians, prayer is something which has to be squeezed in between earning a living and bringing up a family. For monks, the whole timetable is organised around prayer.

So for the monks here at Pluscarden, the day is split into various periods of organised, communal prayer. Eight times a day, from 4.45 in the morning until 8.30 in the evening, the praises of God are sung in this church, and the monks make intercession for the needs of the world. Eight times a day the Word of God is proclaimed in this church. And in the privacy of their own rooms, too, the monks are encouraged to follow the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. That is to say we take the life-giving Word of God,

we read it, we ponder on it, we chew over it, we allow it to transform our hearts and to lead us into deep prayer where we know ourselves to be held in the hands of God.

Of course, monastic life is not all sweetness and light, or it would be merely an escape from life. Anyone who seeks to be conformed to Christ has to walk with him the path to Calvary. Like everyone else, monks – and nuns too, of course, but I am speaking in the context of Pluscarden – monks have to follow the law of the Gospel: anyone who seeks to save his life will lose it. In modern terms, anyone who tries to centre their life on the quest for self-fulfilment will get lost, but those who are willing to lose their lives by giving themselves to God and other people will find fulfilment at a deeper level. And indeed it is sometimes in the very darkness that we discover a new depth in God, a fresh realisation of his love for us.

A monastery is also a place of peace because it is a place of meetings. I had a great-uncle who was a Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and it is a great joy to me that today we can come together from various churches to meet each other in worship and fellowship, and a monastery, with a large community and large buildings, can sometimes arrange this more easily than the average parish.

For this diocese, I know Pluscarden has sometimes been the venue for the annual Pilgrimage. And on a more intimate level, people come to stay, to get away from the stress of everyday life and think about final truths for a few days. We also get people who are searching, who would not go near a normal church, but who think a monastery might have a key to the contemplative dimension of life.

All these things have sprung from the vision of Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart and Abbot Wilfrid. The new Pluscarden was conceived, as it were, in their minds. And it came to birth fifty years ago today, when Pluscarden was officially opened as a foundation of Prinknash; and it has now been independent for more than thirty years. And guided for many of those years by



Abbot Alfred.

I am sure Abbot Wilfrid chose this particular day for the opening because in both the Roman and the Anglican communions it is the feast of the birthday of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God, the Mother of our Saviour.

There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and all grace comes through him. Nevertheless, in his gracious courtesy God invites us too to share in the work of redemption. We share in the work of redemption when we proclaim the saving Gospel. We share in it when we pray for one another. And we Roman Catholics hold the faith of the ancient Church of both West and East, that death, which seems a blank wall, a dead end, from our side, is transparent from the other side, and those who have gone before us care for us still, are still concerned for us, can pray for us, and Mary above all. We honour her because from the human side she started the whole work of redemption when she accepted God's invitation and said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to your word." May she continue to pray for this community, and may we all, like her, surrender ourselves into the hands of God, that his will may be done in us. In his will is our peace, and if we give ourselves to him, then in the home of everyone of us he will say, *In this place I will give peace.*

## **DOM EDMUND (SIDNEY) FATT**

### **1908-1998**

On 12 July, the day after the solemnity of St Benedict, Dom Edmund Fatt passed from this world to eternity. He was 90. And with this passing, we have lost, not only our oldest monk, but a brother who, in his idiosyncratic way, was very much a part of the community, very much a presence, and a last link with the Prinknash of the 1930s and the ethos of those days.

Sidney Fatt was born in Norwich on 15 April, 1908. His

father was a soldier, a cavalryman, who had served in India and in the South African War (1898-1902), and had been involved in the siege and relief of Ladysmith. His mother was of Dutch origin. Dom Edmund's early years were spent in Warminster, Wiltshire, a place and area in which he always retained a lively interest. His first 'pull' was to the stage, and so to London and to tours with a repertory company. One monastic wag once remarked that having got on stage at a tender age, Dom Edmund had never really come off it. And there is no doubt that a sense of the theatrical and dramatic remained with him all his life, as well as a great and astonishingly well-informed passion for opera, Wagner above all. But there is, after all, what a well-known theologian has called "theo-drama", the divine drama, in which we are all called to play a part. And the young Sidney Fatt felt the stronger pull of this other stage. He was Anglican at this time, and High Church, and in 1927 joined the Society of the Divine Compassion, now defunct, but then active in the East End of London. Then another "pull": to the Church of Rome, into which he was received in October 1929. At first, he must have thought of the priesthood, and from 1930 to 1932 studied at the Jesuit-run Campion House, Osterley. But then Prinknash Abbey and the Benedictine life claimed him – a natural choice on his side – and there he entered on the feast of St Michael, 1932. And it was as a Benedictine that he was to spend the remaining 65 years of his long life.

This "long life" was itself – like the one who lived it – something of a mystery. Very early on in his monastic life, he was told he had only a year to live. A pattern of dispensation from the common moments of monastic life was soon established. But he always confounded the doctors. His latter years at Pluscarden were a catalogue of operations and illnesses: diabetes, gall-bladder, ulcers threatening gangrene, increasing blindness and deafness. But still this large, stately galleon of a man sailed on. On the afternoon of the day before he died, the experienced nurse thought he had two hours to live. Instead he lasted all through the night and to the middle of the following day, and she could not believe it.

His constitution was remarkable.

Another cause of wonder was his creativity. From Caldey days, there has been a strong strand of the “arts and crafts” in our tradition. Dom Edmund was one of its most notable representatives. His talents were considerable. He made many fine vestments, still in use. His great love, though, was weaving. He started this craft at Prinknash and taught it elsewhere. He spent almost a year in Ireland with the Cistercians at Roscrea doing that, and is still remembered. There was embroidery work too, and tapestry. And the famous silk-worms, from whom came some of the silk that went into the Queen’s coronation robe. To this day, I am told, she has Dom Edmund’s silk on her whenever she opens Parliament. He never produced anything shoddy. Prinknash’s *Pax* contains 7 articles by him on these matters. But neither the loom nor the tailor’s cutting-table exhausted all this gifted man’s abilities. He was a master in kitchens and gardens too: a “renowned horticulturalist” as once, to his amusement, he was described in a Society magazine. During his long monastic life, he lived in every house within Prinknash’s orbit: Prinknash itself, the two overflow houses of the ‘40s at Bigsweir and Millichope, and the two foundations of Farnborough and Pluscarden. He came to Pluscarden in 1962 and stayed. And over and over again, in these various places, he was Cellarer or in charge of kitchen or garden. Here, our garden and greenhouses owe much to him. Visiting his cell, even in the infirmary, was almost a visit to some Botanic Gardens: beautiful things growing on top of boxes crammed with tapes of scientific and musical interest. He will have had a hand even in this year’s courgettes and tomatoes. How many beautiful and nourishing things came into being over the years through the work of Dom Edmund’s hands!

The greatest mystery, though, was the man himself. His temperament often worked against his gifts. He had many loyalties and they could not always be reconciled. His spiritual life often seemed well-concealed. But the “work”, the real work, the “work of God”, was going on, and Dom Edmund sweetened and

mellowed with the years. As he became more dependent on the services of his brethren, the disaffection and cynicism in which he had often dressed himself began to fall away. He was not a burdensome patient and a very grateful one. For years his liturgical life had been rather private and attenuated, but as long as he could he made it to an early Mass and daily communion – that costing him more physically than the “seven times a day” would cost a healthy man. Somewhat to his brethren’s surprise, he accepted the sacrament of the sick with real eagerness, and in passing remarks would give glimpses of the mildly unorthodox but real life of intercession that went on in him. Perhaps the most touching thing of all, literally, was the way that, in his last years, he would stretch out a hand to those who visited him, and hold on. The hands that had made so many fine things were satisfied in the end to take the hand of a brother, the sacrament of God’s. And so a breakthrough to simplicity was marked.

He died as he would have wished: in the infirmary, and with brethren beside him. He had always been proud of his stability. May he rest in peace.

DHG

## **INSTALLATION OF THE NEW ORGAN**

On Saturday 25th July, just before Vespers, Fr Abbot blessed our new pipe organ, built by Kenneth Tickell and Company of Northampton. The organ had arrived via special carrier four days earlier and we unloaded the two dozen or so crates and packages, the large wooden pipes and various pieces of framework, which looked an enormous amount to fit into quite a small organ. Even at this stage it seemed quite obviously the work of master craftsmen, with all the internal workings of the organ looking as well finished as the external. As the days passed, everyone watched the growth of the organ as Kenneth Tickell, with the help of his wife and

daughter and a colleague, gradually assembled it in the sanctuary of the church.

On the Saturday, the organ was tuned and ready to play; and the first performance on it was by Kenneth Tickell himself, who played the Bach Choral Prelude “Herr Jesu Christ Dich Zu Uns Wend” BWV 709 during the blessing ceremony, while Fr Abbot incensed the organ. Present with the community for the occasion was Dr John Rowntree, who had been the consultant for the whole project, and Joseph Cullen who was to play the organ at the inaugural recital in September. Everyone was delighted with the new organ, with its gentle refined tone and with the superb craftsmanship of the casework. Accompanying the chant, the organ is very supportive, with several soft ranks which give a good lead without being obtrusive. Next day at Mass, we also heard how good the organ is for accompanying solo violin: Dr Rowntree accompanied his daughter Rachel playing “Pièce Cinq” by César Franck. The idea of performing an organ concerto with strings seems very tempting! The organ also works extremely well with a trained solo voice, as we discovered when Sara Egan, an operatic Soprano, sang for us a piece of Vivaldi: she sang “Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera” at conventual Mass, accompanied by Joseph Cullen, her husband.

On September 9th, the day after our jubilee celebrations, Kenneth Tickell and another colleague, John Furniss, returned to do some final preparations in readiness for the inaugural recital. Some more tuning and voicing had been planned for after the initial “settling in” period; and it had been foreseen that the extreme dampness of our church (a small river had recently run underneath the North door, across the transepts and out of the West door!) would necessitate some extra work to ease the fit of some of the wooden panels. By the morning of the 12th, the organ was quite ready for the evening’s recital, to which about 200 people came.

Joseph Cullen’s programme was designed to demonstrate all the different tonal qualities of the organ, and he gave a short

introduction for each piece to draw attention to the particular features of the organ which came into play. A piece by William Boyce demonstrated the Sesquialtera, a mixture stop which gives a very agreeable reedy sound for solo work. Herbert Howells and Jean Langlais showed us the Romantic elements of the organ, particularly the Celeste and the swell box.

We enjoyed also two notable works of Bach: the Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C, and his organ transcription of Vivaldi's Concerto opus 111, BWV 596, both of which allowed some colourful registration.

One of the items performed was a new piece, *Gaudeamus In Loci Pace* (let us rejoice in the peace of the place), composed specially for the occasion by James MacMillan, who offered it as a gift to the monastery for the Golden Jubilee, and was present for this first performance of his work. Joseph Cullen, who is a friend of James MacMillan, had worked with the composer to ensure that the resources of the organ matched the requirements of the music. The result was a very successful poetic essay upon monastic life at Pluscarden, based on the Introit *Gaudeamus*, which was the Introit for the Jubilee Mass on our Lady's Birthday. The schola sang the Introit to introduce the piece.

A setting by Peter Philips of the Pentecost Sequence "Veni Sancte Spiritus" also allowed the monastic schola to perform *alternatim* with the organ in the renaissance style. The programme was completed by a modern toccata of Christopher Steele (who died fairly recently, having been for many years a music teacher at Bradfield School), after which an encore was demanded: two short pieces by Jan of Lublin, a Polish composer of the 17th Century, which served to round off a most enjoyable evening. Kenneth Tickell was loudly applauded together with Joseph Cullen and James MacMillan.

DMdeK

## ***Fifty years at Pluscarden***

### **A Commemorative Book**

We have been sifting through our photographic archives and have produced a book of pictures of the community over the past fifty years. There are over one hundred captioned black and white photographs reproduced, which include all the members of the community who have lived and died here as well as pictures of the restoration work in progress and many memorable occasions', including the Jubilee celebrations on September 8th. The book measures 18 by 25cm, printed on high quality gloss paper with a full colour cover. The cost from our shop is £3.50 incl post and handling from Shop Orders Dept.

### ***An introduction to Gregorian Chant***

This is the third in our series of Pluscarden Pamphlets. Fr Benedict wrote a series of articles for *The Chapter* (a magazine for Benedictine oblates) which we have made into an A5 booklet of 32 printed pages. Price £3 incl post and handling from Shop Orders Dept.

### ***A Liturgy for St Columba***

Our second CD is now available from the shop. This is the recording which the BBC made of the monastic schola last year and broadcast on Radio 3 over four weeks on the series "Sacred and Profane". Comprising the music for the Divine Office and the Mass of St Columba, it features all the chants on the radio broadcast as well as several additional pieces. The Office chants are taken from the medieval Inchcolm Antiphoner. See online shop.

## BOOK REVIEW

***GUIDE DES MONASTERES D'EUROPE II***, by Gian Maria Graselli and Pietro Tarallo, translated from the Italian by Colette & Jean Desternes. Pub. Pierre Horay Editeur Paris 1998. ISBN 2-7058-0254-1. pp. 481, price 140 French francs.

Editions Pierre Horay have long produced a Guide (now in its 14th edition) to the French-speaking monasteries of Europe. In this new pocket guide they extend their coverage to the monasteries of the 35 countries of the rest of the Continent. Despite weaknesses it must be welcomed as a move to supply a long-felt want.

Its first 50 pages explain how to use the guide, then give potted explanations of the Orders and Congregations whose houses figure in the guide. There are certain areas which are as the French say, *discutable* the English Benedictine Congregation's HQ is at Downside, and has no houses outside Britain. The Subiaco Congregation all wear black, and it has but three important monasteries in Italy. The Solesmes Congregation becomes that of Cluny. There are glossaries for the jargon of the Catholic and Orthodox Orders, ten pages of explanatory monastic lay-out plans, a couple of pages of useful "elementary advice" and a couple more on liturgies.

Then follows the gazetteer. There is a map of each country, showing main cities and routes, with numbers marking the various monastic sites followed by practical national details and a potted national religious history. For each monastery the place-name is given, followed by directions for getting there, the monastery's name, address and phone and fax numbers, the name of the resident Order or Congregation, a potted history, a "what to see", details of the liturgy, especially service-times, details of accommodation, and finally, after the products of the monastery, points of interest.

Unfortunately there are weaknesses. The original Italian edition depended, I think, on responses to a questionnaire. Where



no reply came, no entry followed. Thus there are only 9 houses following the Benedictine Rule in Britain, and three in Ireland, out of 25 entries. Then the Italian was translated into French.

The names assigned to houses are somewhat idiosyncratic: one finds Praglia as Bresseo, Downside as Stratton-on-the-Fosse. There are curiosities: Farnborough, “isolated from the neighbouring village by ancient trees”; Carberry Tower, run by “Canons of the Church of Scotland”; a suggested route to Pluscarden more torturous than tortuous: Ryde, populated by “Cistercian nuns of the Solesmes Congregation”. Illustrations are fairly sparse, but this too seems to reflect the provision or otherwise of suitable material by the subjects of the entries.

It is easy to make fun of such a publication, but, as remarked earlier, it is a gesture in the right direction. It is admirably comprehensive and ecumenical (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran) in its span; Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines, Cistercians and many more recent Congregations are mentioned. Greece, the Balkans, Baltic States and Eastern European countries (including Russia and the Ukraine) are surely covered nowhere else. Yes, it has its limitations, but these are at least in part the fault of its non-contributors, and are surely outweighed by its strengths. More complete coverage and more accurate information would make it invaluable, but even in its present state, whether you travel the monasteries of Europe from your fireside or in reality, this must be an indispensable pocket guide, always bearing in mind the adage, *caveat viator!*

DGC