

FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER



January 2009

GOODBYE ...

During the autumn we said our 'good-bye' to Tony and Judith Hodgson. Tony and Judith returned to Little Gidding as Wardens in 2005, and their warm and generous hospitality has been a significant factor in re-establishing Little Gidding as a centre of pilgrimage and spiritual discovery for many people. We wish them well as they move to nearby Oundle, and expect to continue to see plenty of them at Little Gidding.



... AND HELLO



The new warden at Ferrar House is the Revd Catherine Lack. She first came across Little Gidding whilst a student at Clare College, Cambridge, Nicholas Ferrar's college, and she is also an Eliot person. A musician, she has brought a grand piano with her, as well as her dog, Foxy. She has held a variety of posts, including ten years as Chaplain at Keele University and, most recently, at Yarl's Wood Immigration Centre in Bedfordshire.

Catherine is settling in and making her presence felt in all sorts of ways and we look forward to her contribution to life at Little Gidding. Welcome!

THE T S ELIOT FESTIVAL 2008

Charles Bennett attended the Eliot Festival last May and wrote this review of the day, which like previous years was held in poor weather!

It was raining as I drove up the undulating lanes to Little Gidding. A mild and gentle rain, exactly the kind of rain George Herbert might have known. It's tempting to imagine him walking up to see his friend Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding. And tempting too, to imagine a meeting out of time between Herbert and T S Eliot.

Such meetings between poets were the focus of the third T S Eliot Festival, held at Little Gidding in May (to mark Eliot's visit in May 1936). The



Festival is a cross between a village fête, a wedding and a vicarage tea party. It's held for the most part in a marquee, where we sit on wobbly chairs and hear the patter of rain during the first speaker's event. Peter Stanford promises to talk about poetry and religion. But this is too vast a topic, and in thoroughly entertaining manner, he settles down



to talk about C Day Lewis and then, in conclusion, three religious poets: Blake, Milton and Dante.

The mention of Dante was perfectly apposite, as a theme began to emerge which gently insinuated the events of the day. After tea, Rosamond Richardson delivered a seriously delightful



and genuinely thought-provoking talk which imagined a meeting of Eliot and Dante (both stroking a cat). This was a powerful and really absorbing talk, delivered with moments of humour but searing with academic insight. There was a good deal of talk about fire, and being redeemed from fire by fire, which only made me shiver and turn up my collar. I wished I had worn warmer clothing. Not to mention waterproof shoes.

After a spot of delicious supper, thoughtfully prepared and served to the accompaniment of a jazz quartet, we returned to listen to Sean O'Brien, winner of the T S Eliot Prize in 2007. O'Brien is a marvellous poet and a really commanding but gentle and jovial character. His reading was the best I've ever heard, and he balanced longer dark poems with short witty



ones to manage the mood perfectly. He read some wet poems to begin with, from *The Drowned Book*, which really suited the atmosphere. He then read some of his translations of Dante's *Inferno* – which completed the day perfectly.

As I drove away to the sound of a robin, a late Beethoven string quartet could be heard drifting into the evening from a recording being played in Ferrar House. It was a charming and very good day. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Next year I'll wear my walking boots and a fleece!

Dr Charles Bennett is Programme Leader for the BA in Creative Writing, University of Northampton, former Director of the Ledbury Poetry Festival

Illustrated: facing page Peter Stanford and Rosamond Richardson; this page Sean O'Brien and (above) Giles de la Mare, who read an unpublished Eliot poem about his grandfather Walter.

Pictures by Tom Ambrose.

LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

Miriam Payne tells how she came to join in the Pilgrimage, and what it was like.

Originally I had not intended to go on the Pilgrimage but just to attend the Holy Communion service at St Mary's Church, Leighton Bromswold. It was a lovely service led by the Revd Jackie Duck, with well-known hymns by George Herbert being sung as the sun streamed through the tall windows of a flower-bedecked church. After the service those attending walked along The Avenue to the 'Green Man' where with fellow pilgrims we enjoyed a light lunch of delicious soup and cheese. As my friend Jan was intending to walk I decided that I would join her.

The Pilgrimage began at the Hundred Stone which is situated just outside the church in Leighton. At 1pm we gathered around for the first set of readings, 1 Samuel 3.1-11 and 'an episode from the childhood of Nicholas Ferrar'. We left walking down the hill out of Leighton Bromswold to Salome

Wood (this part of Cambridgeshire isn't flat) about two miles away. The weather was perfect for walking and there was lively conversation as we walked up hill towards Salome Wood. We gathered by the side of the road which cut through the wood for the second set of readings, Acts 5.12-16 and 'Caring for the sick and needy at Little Gidding'.

We continued to walk, at a gentle pace, through the lovely, peaceful countryside until we reached The Village Hall at Hamerton: a distance from Salome Wood of about another two miles. Jackie Duck was there to greet us and we were pleased to be able to sit down for a rest, while Judith Hodgson kindly offered water with lime cordial added if required (very refreshing).

After a short rest we gathered outside the village hall for the third pair of readings, Philippians 4.4-7 and 'the life of prayer at Little Gidding'. We proceeded out of Hamerton on the road to Sawtry but as we neared the Hamerton Wildlife Park we turned left onto a wide track which led across the fields to Steeple Gidding. Again the scenery was lovely and the conversation very enjoyable. Before reaching Steeple Gidding Church we had to cross a field which contained a herd of cattle. The Pilgrims had spread out by this time and I was walking beside a gentleman. All of a sudden the cattle

began to run towards us very quickly, it seemed like a stampede! We stood still and at the last moment the cattle veered off, running up the hill to the far end of the field. We reached Steeple Gidding safely but all the time whilst in that field I kept a keen eye on the cattle.

Steeple Gidding Church is lovely and I was able to sit in a pew and have a time of quiet contemplation before we assembled for the fourth readings, Ecclesiasticus 39.6-11 and 'Study and Teaching at Little Gidding'.

The next part of the Pilgrimage was truly amazing – we walked together almost two by two and sang the Litany. This was something that I hadn't done before; what a wonderful experience walking through the countryside singing and praising God in the midst of his wonderful creation. We arrived at Little Gidding and proceeded to St John's Church with the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar immediately in front of the entrance to the church. Here we gathered for the final readings, John 12.24-26 and 'the last days of Nicholas Ferrar'. Before going into the church the Venerable Hugh McCurdy, Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech, laid a wreath of flowers on the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar.

Evensong followed and brought a wonderful end to the Pilgrimage with beautiful singing from the choir, the Hurstingstone Singers, leading the

singing with music and anthems from the time of the Ferrars, and for me a 'Now' word given by Hugh McCurdy which was very inspirational.

The whole day was rounded off with a delicious tea and enjoyable conversation. For me, who had not been to Little Gidding before, the whole experience was truly uplifting. I was so pleased that I made the decision to be part of the Pilgrimage. The Pilgrimage gave one the opportunity to walk with and talk to so many other pilgrims, and everyone was so welcoming and friendly which added to a great day.

Would I go on a Pilgrimage again? The answer is a resounding 'Yes'. I hope there is another next year.

A truly memorable day. My thanks to all who made this experience possible.



NEWS FROM FERRAR HOUSE

Little Gidding is a wonderful place. The atmosphere, the people, the round of prayer, the endless washing-up, the Poetry evenings, the variety of people who share the dinner table is very special, and surely unique.

‘... You are not here to verify, instruct yourself or inform curiosity, or carry report, you are here to kneel where prayer has been valid ...’ I’m quite sure that every person reading this will be familiar with those words, but they bear repeating for what they say to each person who comes here. We are part of the living stream of history here, making it as we go. I write this on the day after Barack Obama’s Inauguration – made the more special for me by the presence at Ferrar House of Annah, a Ugandan volunteer, who is so excited about what is happening.

I have inherited a going concern, and the volunteers currently here are very special people: Annah, who has been here most of the past year; and Hannah, who (re-)joined a few weeks after me. I am now exploring, with others, where Ferrar House is going. I was appointed temporarily, but am now planning to stay longer, so the way is open. Some ideas include:

- Musical evenings: to complement the Poetry evenings
- Training: it’s an excellent venue
- Spiritual direction: continuing what I’ve done in previous ministry
- Quiet Days: it’s such a special place
- Between the front door and the church is a nearly empty (weeded) bed – ready for the gardeners among you who cannot bear to throw out cuttings, spare plants etc: our gardeners will then decide where to plant them finally.

Please do tell me what you would like to happen – I’d love to hear your ideas.

I am convinced that the prime purpose of our being here is to pray, so that will remain at the heart of all we do. To that end, we maintain the round of prayer at 10.00, 12.00 and sundown each day, so far as we are able (usually Wed–Sat).

NICHOLAS FERRAR DAY AND THE FRIENDS’ AGM

The feast day of Nicholas Ferrar was celebrated on Thursday 4 December. The Revd Tony Hodgson presided at Holy Communion in a bitterly cold church, followed by lunch in Ferrar House which was almost as cold as the church because the heating oil had not been delivered. Still, the food and the company were good and warming.

Two days later, on Saturday 6 December, many of the same people reassembled for the AGM of the Friends. The Revd Tom Gillum presided at Holy Communion, and the AGM followed.

Tom Gillum stood down as Chairman after three years and Simon Kershaw was elected in his place. We are very grateful to Tom for his hard work as Chairman, and for the benefit of his experience and wisdom. Tom remains on the Committee, so we shall not lose this. Susanna Ferrar also decided not to seek re-election as Secretary. Again we are grateful for

her enthusiasm and love of Little Gidding, and for her hard work. Susanna also remains a Committee member. As Secretary we were pleased to elect Judith Hodgson – we are delighted that Judith will retain a formal place in the workings of Little Gidding after her and Tony’s retirement as Wardens.

John Newman agreed to continue as Treasurer but will stand down in the spring when the Committee will appoint a new Treasurer.

Following this reshuffle among the officers, the remaining committee members were re-elected: Tony Hodgson, Mark Mills-Powell, Canon Paul Rose, and Bob Torrens, together with Tom and Susanna. (In addition, Richard Scott remains as the nominee of the Little Gidding Trust and Michael Keck has been nominated by the Giddings PCC; Catherine Lack is ex officio a committee member as Warden.)

Below, members of the Friends gather in the Eliot Room at Ferrar House for the AGM



2009 PILGRIMAGE

The Little Gidding Pilgrimage this year will be on **Saturday 11 July**. It will be led by Bishop John Flack, presently an assistant bishop in the diocese of Peterborough, shouldering much of the episcopal work during the illness of Bishop Ian Cundy (who himself led the Pilgrimage a few years ago). Before his retirement, Bishop John was Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy to the Vatican, and he was earlier Bishop of Huntingdon in the diocese of Ely. So he is well-known to many on either side of the diocesan boundary which runs alongside the Giddings.

It is expected that the Pilgrimage will take a form similar to last year's, in which Holy Communion was celebrated in Leighton Bromswold Church, and after lunch pilgrims walked the five miles to Little Gidding, with stations for prayer and readings, rest and refreshment. Evensong at Little Gidding Church was followed by the essential ritual of Tea at Ferrar House.

More details will be in the next Newsletter, but please put the date in your diary now: **Saturday 11 July: Little Gidding Pilgrimage**. We hope to see you there, and do encourage your friends to come as well.

1½ WARDENS, 18 TONS IN A FIELD, GOOD FOOD

Catherine lists some highlights (and lowlights) of her first three months.

The ½-warden relates to my assistant, who has four legs, a loud bark, and lots of enthusiasm. She also loves chasing her second cousins (the foxes) through the fields. She has nearly as much to learn as I do.

18 tons in a field relates to the Pickfords van which, when delivering my furniture (including the grand piano), decided to come via Steeple Gidding, and slid into the field. Three hours later the same thing happened to the rescue vehicle ...

Lots of good food – Mary, the cook, ensures that we are well-sustained here.

Feeling like the foolish virgin when the whole house ran out of oil on one of the biggest days of the year – Nicholas Ferrar Day.

Introducing myself at a church a little way away, as the Warden of Ferrar House, 'The only warden I know of is in Trollope'.

Learning how to stand (fairly) safely on pews, to light the candelabrum in the church.

Doing battle with the fire alarm system.

Having a wonderful Evensong by candlelight in the church, when a group from St Paul's Cathedral arrived rather late.

(continued opposite)

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends

I first visited Little Gidding in 1986 and joined the Friends a couple of years later. The intervening years have brought plenty of changes here, but sterling work by many people over the last few years has revived the hospitality of Ferrar House, and the Friends have resumed their supporting role. Now we move to the next stage with a new Warden at Ferrar House. With your support we can build on the work already accomplished.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in the coming year, perhaps at the Eliot Festival in June or the Pilgrimage in July, or at some other event; do please feel free to write to me with your comments and ideas, either by post, care of Ferrar House, or by email to chair@littlegidding.org.uk.

With best wishes,

Simon Kershaw

(continued from opposite)

The numerous sightings of wildlife, including foxes, Woodcock, Red Kite, a family of moorhens at the bird-table (along with woodpeckers).

Reading and praying some of the contributions to our Prayer book in church – people speak from the heart, to God, asking for our prayers.

Catherine Lack

T S ELIOT FESTIVAL 2009

This year's annual Eliot Festival at Little Gidding will be the fourth. Preparations are well under way, and the programme is being finalized, and we will bring you full details in the next Newsletter. However, there will be the usual mix of speakers and poetry, and a live musical event in the evening in Steeple Gidding Church – lots to look forward to.

For now, please make a note of the date in your diary. The Festival will be held on

Saturday 27 June

We are hoping that the later date will improve the chances of warmer and drier weather!

On the next day, **Sunday 28 June**, the Festival will be followed by a day visit of members of the inaugural International T S Eliot Summer School, which is taking place at the University of London for a week beginning on Monday 29 June. The School is organizing a programme of talks for the Sunday and Friends and others are very welcome to attend. Sunday's programme will conclude with tea at Ferrar House and Evensong in the Church.

For more details of the Summer School see <http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events/TSE>. (The Summer School is not run by the Friends, Ferrar House or other Little Gidding based group.)

LITTLE GIDDING CALENDAR 2009

Poetry evenings are held at 7.30pm on the 13th of each month.

Friday 13 February	John Keats
Friday 13 March	A E Housman
Monday 13 April	Geoffrey Hill
Wednesday 13 May	Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A Day of Prayer will usually follow the Poetry Evenings, often on the same, or similar, theme. These are held from 10am to 4pm on either the 14th of the month, or the second Sunday.

Sunday 8 February	Day of Prayer
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Quiet Days led by Ken and Guinette Davies

Saturday 18 April	'Post-Resurrection Encounters'
Wednesday 1 July	'Life's Journey'
Saturday 19 September	'Recognising Pride and Learning Humility'
Wednesday 2 December	'Behold the King'

Regular services at Little Gidding

Sunday 29 March 3pm	Evensong at Little Gidding
Sunday 31 May 6pm	Pentecost Evensong at Little Gidding

Other Meetings and Events

Wednesday 18 February 9pm to Sunday 22 February 12.30pm (depart by 2pm)
'Enlightenment Intensive'

Cost £375, £75 non-refundable deposit.

For further details contact Sally Dearman-Cummings at: sallydearman-ei@yahoo.co.uk

Saturday 14 March 2pm	AGM of T S Eliot Society
Saturday 25 April 10.30am	'Eliot's Little Gidding' Day
Saturday 27 June	T S Eliot Festival
Sunday 28 June	visit of T S Eliot Summer School
Saturday 11 July	Annual Little Gidding Pilgrimage
Saturday 5 December 11am	AGM of the Friends of Little Gidding

For further details about any event, to book a place or to book your own event, please contact

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For an updated calendar and diary see
www.ferrarhouse.co.uk/fhwebpages/fhevents.html



This Newsletter is published by the Friends of Little Gidding.

The Society of the Friends of Little Gidding is a registered charity, number 1102857, Ferrar House, Little Gidding, Huntingdon, PE28 5RJ.

The Friends of Little Gidding was founded in 1946 by Alan Maycock, with T S Eliot as patron. The Society was reconstituted in 2003 and seeks to celebrate the life and memory of Nicholas Ferrar and those who in the seventeenth century formed the first Little Gidding community, making it a holy place; to help maintain the fabric of Little Gidding Church; to assist Ferrar House; and to celebrate the connection between Eliot and Little Gidding.

The main income of the Society is subscriptions and donations from its members – people who love Little Gidding, whether for its history, its air of spirituality, its peaceful beauty, its place as the inspiration for one of the twentieth century's greatest pieces of English poetry – or for the wonderful hospitality provided at Ferrar House!

Please help to support the Friends in their work by visiting and by encouraging friends and groups to visit, perhaps as pilgrims, for a quiet time, or for an organized retreat or conference; and by encouraging them to consider joining the Friends of Little Gidding.

A VIEW FROM LITTLE GIDDING

‘There are other places,’ wrote T S Eliot, ‘which also are at the world’s end, but this is the nearest in place and time, now and in England.’ If Little Gidding seemed like the world’s end to Eliot in 1936, how much more so must it have appeared to the Ferrars three centuries earlier, when they arrived at the old house and ruined church where Nicholas was destined to bring his cherished dream to fruition. Even as recently as the occasion of Eliot’s visit, the Great North Road was a narrow, winding, single lane and the road through Glatton, beset with right-angle bends, regularly disappeared under two feet of water at the foot of Glatton Folly. That is how I remember it still. Eliot recalls ‘a midwinter Spring and a short day, bright with frost and fire.’ But when on a January day some nine years later, my father was buried just a few yards from Nicholas’s tomb – a privilege he was allowed because of his descent from the Ferrar line – the December snow had turned the land into a sea of mud. At that time the only access to the church was through the farmyard gate and thence through an entrance, long since obliterated, into the churchyard.

The cattle were most interested when people used this path and to this day Little Gidding and mud are closely associated in my mind. During one short lifetime the rural Church has changed almost beyond recognition. In my younger days most country parishes had their own incumbent and the Giddings were a sole charge. It was common for clergy to stay for many years and to be valued and loved both as pastors and as members of the village community. I don’t really long for those days to return (in any case, they never will) but I do remember them with affection.

At this time of rapid change and general uncertainty about the future of the Church, I believe that Little Gidding is an important place: it represents continuity with a golden age of Anglicanism, the age of William Laud, Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert, John Donne, Richard Hooker and others like them, who embodied what was best in worship, spirituality and scholarship in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions. The Ferrars breathed the same air that they breathed and it was in that atmosphere that Little Gidding blossomed and flourished. Through this holy place Nicholas speaks to us across the centuries, for ‘the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.’

Because it is anchored in such a tradition it is no wonder that Little Gidding has become a centre of pilgrimage, inspiration and hospitality, or that in recent years especially, so many dedicated people have considered it worth pouring out their souls in its service. It may even make history again: for as the light fails on a winter’s afternoon, in a secluded chapel, ‘history is *now* and England.’

Bob Torrens