

FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER



November 2009

DOUBLE FESTIVAL TIME AT LITTLE GIDDING



The height of summer was celebrated with our two Festivals: first, the Eliot Festival at the end of June, and two weeks later the annual Pilgrimage to the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar. Our newsletter this time has pictures and stories from both events.

We also say farewell to Catherine Lack, temporary warden at Ferrar House, and welcome her temporary successor, Allan Bell.

The highlight of the summer was by common consent the reading of 'Little Gidding' by Seamus Heaney and Robert Crawford (pictured above with Ronald Schuchard) standing in front of 'the dull façade and the tombstone': it was the crowning moment of a wonderful weekend that must surely rank among the most memorable in the history of Little Gidding for a very long time.

T S ELIOT FESTIVAL & LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

What a hectic but brilliant Summer we enjoyed at Little Gidding. Separated by just a fortnight (giving the organizers just a weekend off between them) these two events were truly memorable: a festival of music and poetry, lectures and food; and a pilgrimage of commemoration and companionship, praise and prayer.

First up was the Festival at the end of June. Nearly a year in the planning, I would love to say that everything went according to plan. Apart, that is, from the poet at the evening concert pulling out with just a few weeks to go. And apart from the news on the Saturday morning that our second speaker had been confined to quarters with flu. Remarkably, we were able to overcome both these potential setbacks and present a full programme of talks and concert. Riding to our rescue was, first, poet Grevel Lindop who, alongside the musicians of RipRap, delighted us with his own poetry; and secondly, an impromptu talk by Professor Park Honan, who had thought he was just coming to listen to other speakers, and ended up delighting and intriguing his audience with his thoughts on ‘the young man on the boat’ – a picture of Eliot as he crossed the Atlantic to come to Britain in 1914.

The Festival had begun as usual, with the rain arriving right on cue – but it then cleared up to give us a

glorious English summer weekend, and Professor Hugh Haughton fed us snippets from the as-yet unpublished collected letters of Eliot. In between, several festival-goers read us a variety of passages from the poet.

And Sunday: what can one say? Teachers and students from the Eliot Summer School in London joined us for the day, and we all felt we were in poetry heaven as, standing in front of ‘the dull façade and the tombstone’, Seamus Heaney and Robert Crawford had us savouring every word, every moment, with their reading of ‘Little Gidding’.

After Ron Schuchard’s talk on the background to the poem, we were then treated to a fascinating panel discussion featuring Lyndall Gordon, Jewel Spears Brooker, Crawford, Heaney, and Denis Donoghue. After these fireworks the day ended more calmly with Evensong, at which the music was gloriously sung by Oundle School’s Schola Cantorum. Truly, a weekend that will be remembered for a very long time.

(continued on page 10)

Opposite, Festival pictures clockwise from top: the marquee and the church; Oundle School Schola Cantorum process to the church for the Festival Evensong; festival-goers in the marquee on Sunday afternoon; Hannah finds somewhere to sit; (main picture) poets Robert Crawford and Seamus Heaney. Pictures by Simon Kershaw and John Cutting.





LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

Bishop John Flack led this year's Pilgrimage to the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar in July. We are pleased to reprint the sermon he preached at Evensong.

The first third of the seventeenth century was a golden age for Christian spirituality and church music. This can be clearly shown by the components of this afternoon's evensong. We are commemorating Nicholas Ferrar and George Herbert; two contemporary giants of spirituality. The service also includes music by Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Weelkes and William Henry Smith.

But nobody lives in one context only. What else was happening while Ferrar and Herbert were at their peak? This early part of the seventeenth century was also a golden age for literature. It was the period when William Shakespeare composed the greatest of his dramas. In 1611 the Authorized Version of the Bible was produced, still in use today. Most of us here were brought up in the generation when the literature of the early seventeenth century was at the top of our teachers' minds. Along with literature the early seventeenth century was also a revolutionary age for science. Supreme among the scientists was Galileo who was discovering facts about the universe which were too uncomfortable for his contemporaries to swallow. His own Church – the Roman Catholic Church – made him face the Inquisition for teaching unpalatable truths. At the same time philosophers such as Descartes were rejecting received dogma in favour of the world of ideas and concepts.

The social life of England in the early seventeenth century was being challenged by a new pastime – smoking. Sir Walter Raleigh brought the tobacco leaf from Virginia to London in 1616. King James I called smoking 'a loathsome habit, the root of many diseases'. He was indeed prophetic! Emigration from England to the eastern shores of America rose sharply during this period and the Virginia Company was formed to ensure that the new colony was administered from London. On the continent of Europe all the countries of the west were involved in the protracted Thirty Years War. This was basically a war between Catholics and Protestants which resulted in many civilian deaths.

Nicholas Ferrar was very much part of this world. Early in the century he was a brilliant scholar at Clare College, Cambridge. After university he travelled widely, especially in Holland, Germany, Italy, France and Spain. His experience

of human life, history, geography, politics and theology was thus immensely widened. On returning to England he became Deputy Treasurer of the Virginia Company. Already the master of six languages he was in great use as a translator. He became a Member of Parliament and his views on a whole variety of issues were sought.

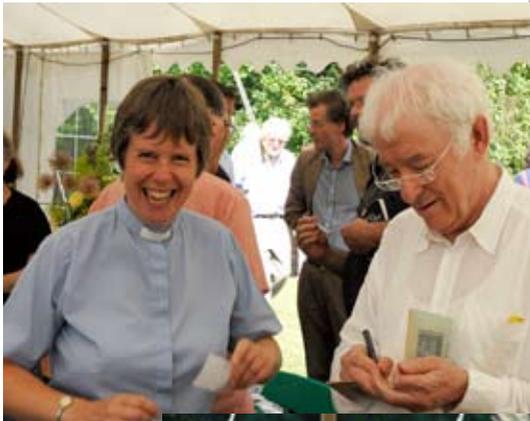
In 1626 Nicholas, his mother, and his brother John purchased this estate at Little Gidding. Their intention was to live an ordered life of prayer in a quiet rural place. They achieved this aim wonderfully, but they were still very much part of the world in which they found themselves. It is said that over sixty visitors a week came to the house at Little Gidding to seek Nicholas's advice on a range of issues. Some of them were bishops and senior politicians, travelling on the Great North Road, just a mile or two to the east. Every week Nicholas invited the children of the surrounding villages to come here for a broad education. Boys and girls were included equally, against the fashion of the time. He also offered medical services to the villages, having studied medicine himself. He was involved in disputes over land usage in the area. He had to deal with several family troubles. These involved his nephew Edward Collett and his younger brother Richard Ferrar, who both ran up debts through living irregular lives in London.

It will be clear from all this that Nicholas Ferrar did not reject the world or withdraw completely from it. Indeed he discovered that the more you pray the better you understand the world around you. In this he was following St Teresa of Avila who lived in the century before him. A modern exponent of this affirming spirituality could be Thomas Merton, who spent twenty-five years in a Trappist monastery only to find that his appreciation of the world was hugely deepened.

Nicholas Ferrar had the remarkable ability to be God-focussed and to direct everything and everyone he encountered towards God. His life-long search to discover the will of God and to follow it was his whole existence. God was a measuring stick for everything he did.

Appropriately the second lesson this evening was from the First Letter of John. This letter emphasizes the incarnational aspect of the Christian calling. It describes how we can best love God. The truth is that you cannot know the nature of love if the world and its peoples have no place in your life. Today's pilgrimage to Little Gidding reminds us all of the challenge of Nicholas Ferrar. Like him we are to become more God-focussed and in so doing to re-order the priorities in our lives.

For an account of the Pilgrimage, see Tony Hodgson's report on page 10.





More pictures from June's successful Eliot Festival, clockwise from top left: Catherine Lack and Seamus Heaney; Hugh Haughton; Steeple Gidding church; Grevel Lindop; Lyndall Gordon; Kevin Flanagan and RipRap; Denis Donoghue; Park Honan, Seamus Heaney and Malcolm Guite; Jewel Spears Brooker; Alexander Kershaw; Rosie Martin, Malcolm Guite; supper at Little Gidding; Lyndall Gordon, Jewel Spears Brooker, Robert Crawford, Seamus Heaney

NICHOLAS FERRAR DAY AND THE AGM AND TALK



Nicholas Ferrar Day
Friday 4 December
11 am
Festival Holy
Communion
followed by lunch

Friends' AGM
Saturday 5 December
10.30 am
Holy Communion
AGM followed by lunch
2 pm Talk by Trevor Cooper
'You are here to kneel:
the church at Little Gidding'

The Friends of Little Gidding
www.littlegidding.org.uk

Communion, starting at 10.30 am. At the AGM the committee will give an account of the past year, and new officers and committee will be elected for 2010. If you are interested in finding out more about serving on the committee please do contact us by email to chair@littlegidding.org.uk or by post, care of Ferrar House. After the AGM, lunch will again be available – please inform Ferrar House.

On the afternoon of the AGM we are very pleased that **Trevor Cooper** will be giving a talk about Little Gidding. Trevor is a member of the Friends, and is also the Chairman of the Ecclesiological Society, which was founded in 1879 for those who love churches and are interested in their architecture, furnishings and use. Trevor has had a longstanding interest in Little Gidding, on which he has carried out considerable research, and will give an illustrated and guided talk on the building, concentrating especially on the way the church was used in the Ferrars' time, and relating that to the church furnishings surviving from that period. The talk will appeal not just to lovers of Little Gidding, but to all who are interested in church buildings and their use. Non-members are welcome to come: please invite your friends. Again, it would be helpful to let Ferrar House know if you would like to have lunch.

Nicholas Ferrar died on 4 December 1637, and that date is his feast day in the calendar of the Church of England. On Friday 4 December this year, a service of Holy Communion for **the Festival of Nicholas Ferrar** will be celebrated at Little Gidding Church, at 11.00 am. Afterwards, all are welcome to lunch at Ferrar House. It would be helpful if you could let Ferrar House know if you would like to stay for lunch. Contact details are on page 9.

The following day, Saturday 5 December, sees **the AGM** of the Friends, to be followed by a talk by Trevor Cooper. The AGM will be preceded by a celebration of Holy

T S ELIOT FESTIVAL & LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

(continued from page 2)

On Saturday 11 July, the Friends' pilgrimage started, for the second year, from Leighton Bromswold and proceeded to Little Gidding. The day began with a Holy Communion service at Leighton Bromswold, in the communion chancel seats in the church. Bishop John Flack presided and spoke about the Ferrars restoring the Church with money raised by George Herbert. Some of us oldies were taken back fifty years or so by singing the setting of the service by Merbecke which used to be almost universal in the days of our youth. The significance of Leighton Bromswold is that the church was beautifully restored and re-ordered by the Ferrar family under the direction of George Herbert. It is one of the few churches in the country which has two pulpits – one a prayer desk, as Herbert believed that praying was as important as preaching.

From the church we proceeded to the historic pub, *The Green Man*, which started life in the time of the Ferrars, where we were served an excellent lunch, many of us able to eat outside. Thus fortified we assembled at the old Hundred Stone which was the ancient judgment seat for Leightonstone, one of the four districts or Hundreds of Huntingdonshire. There we had our first station, a reading from the Bible and an extract from Alan Maycock's book *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding* about Nicholas' childhood. After a prayer we set off in beautiful sunny weather for the next station which was at Salome Wood, just by the Roman road. (*Salome* is here pronounced 'sollum', by the way.) From there we continued along quiet lanes to Hamerton village hall where refreshments awaited us. We had our third station there under a massive tree. Thence we crossed the field to Steeple Gidding Church for our fourth station. From there we followed the lane to Little Gidding singing the Litany, led by the Revd Bob Torrens, till we reached the church at Little Gidding for the traditional laying of the wreath on Nicholas Ferrar's tomb and the singing of Evensong, led by the Revd Catherine Lack – warden of Ferrar House, at which Bishop John Flack again encouraged us with his sermon, which we reprint on page 4. The singing was led by the Hurstingstone Singers (Hurstingstone is another of the four Hundreds). After a good tea in Ferrar House we dispersed, reminded of the importance of Nicholas's admonition that this was the good old way, in which we were to continue to walk. We are most grateful to all those who helped to organise this delightful afternoon, especially Simon Kershaw, the Chair of the Friends, who also chose the readings.

Tony Hodgson

COMINGS AND GOINGS

This has been another period of change at Little Gidding. The Revd Jackie Duck, priest in charge, has resigned from the Giddings, though she will remain as priest in charge of various other parishes in the area. The Revd Jonathan Young, Rector of East Leightonstone, will be licensed as priest in charge at Evensong at Steeple Gidding church on 29 November. Welcome Jonathan, and we expect to continue to see Jackie at Ferrar House.



Changes too at Ferrar House. Catherine Lack has moved to be chaplain at Newcastle University, and Hannah and Annah have also moved on. Our very grateful thanks to them all for their contributions. Standing in at Ferrar House we welcome the Revd Allan Bell, pictured above. A new warden is being recruited; for more information email office@stjudeschurch.com.

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.

‘IN A BLOOMSBURY SQUARE’: TS ELIOT THE PUBLISHER

The British Library explores TS Eliot's work as a publisher in a new exhibition to mark the eightieth anniversary of Faber and Faber.

Opening on 14 September in the Folio Society Gallery at the British Library, *'In a Bloomsbury Square': TS Eliot the Publisher* sheds new light on TS Eliot's roles as publisher, editor and author.

Bringing together for the first time material from the British Library's collections along with items from the Faber Archive and the Eliot Estate, the exhibition includes original manuscripts, correspondence, art-works and unique audio recordings, some of which have never been on public display before.

In the 1930s and beyond, Eliot used his roles as editor and publisher to promote modernist writing, successfully lending it authority, asserting its significance and making it both respectable and accessible to a wider public. In his long career with Faber and Faber, he exercised a profound and largely unparalleled influence on English literature. As well as being a published author himself, Eliot possessed sound business sense, an acute grasp of how literary reputations were made and a much-envied skill in writing effective publishers' blurbs. Throughout his career, he was indefatigable in his commitment to nurturing those writers whom he believed to be of lasting significance.

'In a Bloomsbury Square': TS Eliot the Publisher is open from 14 September to 6 December 2009, seven days a week, in the Folio Society Gallery at the British Library. Admission is free.

More information about the exhibition can be found on the British Library website at <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/tseliot/tseliot.html>



The way home from Steeple Gidding: photo by John Cutting