

FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER



May 2010

SPRING COMES LATE TO LITTLE GIDDING



The long, cold winter and the late arrival of spring mean that the cherry tree outside Little Gidding church is only just starting to come into flower, as can be seen on close examination of our picture, taken in mid-April.

The picture also shows that the wall which lay towards the edge of the Ferrar House garden, and which had fallen into some disrepair, has been

demolished, and the lawn and garden have not yet been replanted. By the time the summer arrives we hope that the grass will have grown and the lawn is at its resplendent best for the annual Pilgrimage and Eliot Festival days.

We hope too that the spiritual seed planted at Little Gidding will grow and flourish this summer and on.

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.

MEMBERSHIP

A big thank you to all of you who have renewed your membership this year. It is particularly convenient for us if you can complete a standing order form so that your membership is automatically renewed each year.

May we ask all who have not yet rejoined to consider renewing your membership of the Friends for a further year?

The Committee is considering ways in which the knowledge of Little Gidding and Ferrar House can be spread so that its peace, beauty and spirituality can be made more widely available. Many of these suggestions will require extra funding, and although it is possible that grants might be available from various bodies we shall inevitably have to try and raise extra money ourselves.

We will be exploring these ideas over the coming months and will report back to the Friends. Meanwhile the Committee will be pleased to hear suggestions from members, both of activities for the Friends, and of possible funding.

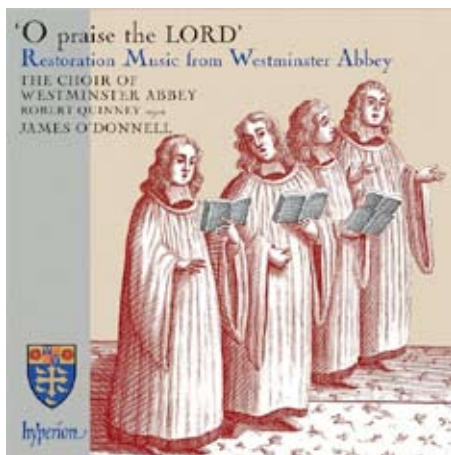
Membership brings no privileges other than that of knowing that you are furthering the work of the Friends in celebrating the life of Nicholas Ferrar and his family, helping to maintain and beautify the church and churchyard, and to promote the work of Ferrar House.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY – Sunday 30 May

Last year a number of us attended Evensong at Westminster Abbey on Trinity Sunday to mark the anniversary of Nicholas Ferrar's ordination as a deacon there on Trinity Sunday 1626. Ferrar was ordained by William Laud, then Bishop of St Davids and also a canon of the Abbey who had acted as Dean of Westminster at the Coronation of Charles I four months earlier. (The Dean himself was John Williams, the Bishop of Lincoln who himself played a part in the Little Gidding story and is commemorated in one of the windows of Little Gidding church.)

This year the Dean and Chapter have again invited us to join them on Trinity Sunday, which falls on 30 May. Precise details are still being agreed as we go to press, but it is likely that the service will be the Abbey's 6.30pm evening service, and that it will take as its theme the life of Nicholas Ferrar. As soon as details are confirmed we will circulate further information by email and on our website, as well as at the Pilgrimage on 22 May.

We hope that there will also be an opportunity for us to gather after the service in the Henry VII or Lady Chapel, where Nicholas Ferrar was ordained and make our own small commemoration. As the building is closed to visitors on Sundays we will be able to do this without the hustle



Seventeenth-century choristers at Westminster Abbey, from a new CD of sacred music to mark the 350th anniversary of the Restoration of King Charles II

and bustle that normally fills the Abbey.

If you are interested in joining us at the Abbey for this commemoration of the ordination of Nicholas Ferrar, or would like further details, please contact us either by email to chair@littlegidding.org.uk or phone the Secretary on 01832 275343. We will let you know as soon as we have confirmed the details. Friends and friends are all welcome, and we will probably need to let the Abbey authorities know roughly how many people we expect to attend, so that seats can be kept for us together.

We look forward to seeing you at Westminster Abbey!

LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

Saturday 22 May 2010

Born in London in 1592, Nicholas Ferrar gave up a life in commerce and politics to move to Little Gidding, with his mother and his brother and sister and their families, establishing a life of prayer and charitable works. Ordained deacon, he was the leader of the household, foremost in the life of prayer, study, and work, and setting an example of devotion and spiritual life to the English Church that has stood as a beacon to those who have followed. Nicholas died on 4 December 1637, and his devout life and example have consecrated Little Gidding as a holy place to this day. Our pilgrimage to his grave not only honours his memory and devotion, but also binds us into that same story.

10.30 am: Pilgrimage Communion at Leighton Bromswold Church

whose restoration was funded by George Herbert and directed by the Ferrars. David Thomson, Bishop of Huntingdon, presides.

12 noon: Lunch

Enjoy lunch with fellow pilgrims at the historic Green Man at Leighton Bromswold, or bring a picnic lunch if you prefer.

1 pm: First Station at Leighton Bromswold

Gather at the 'hundred stone' outside Leighton Bromswold churchyard for the start of the Pilgrimage Walk to Little Gidding.

2 pm: Second Station at Salome Wood

2.15 pm: Pilgrimage Walk continues.

2.45 pm: Third Station at Hamerton

3 pm: Pilgrimage Walk continues, cutting across the meadow to Steeple Gidding

3.30 pm: Fourth Station at Steeple Gidding Church

3.45 pm: Pilgrimage Walk continues to Little Gidding. The Litany is sung.

4 pm: Fifth Station at the Tomb of Nicholas Ferrar

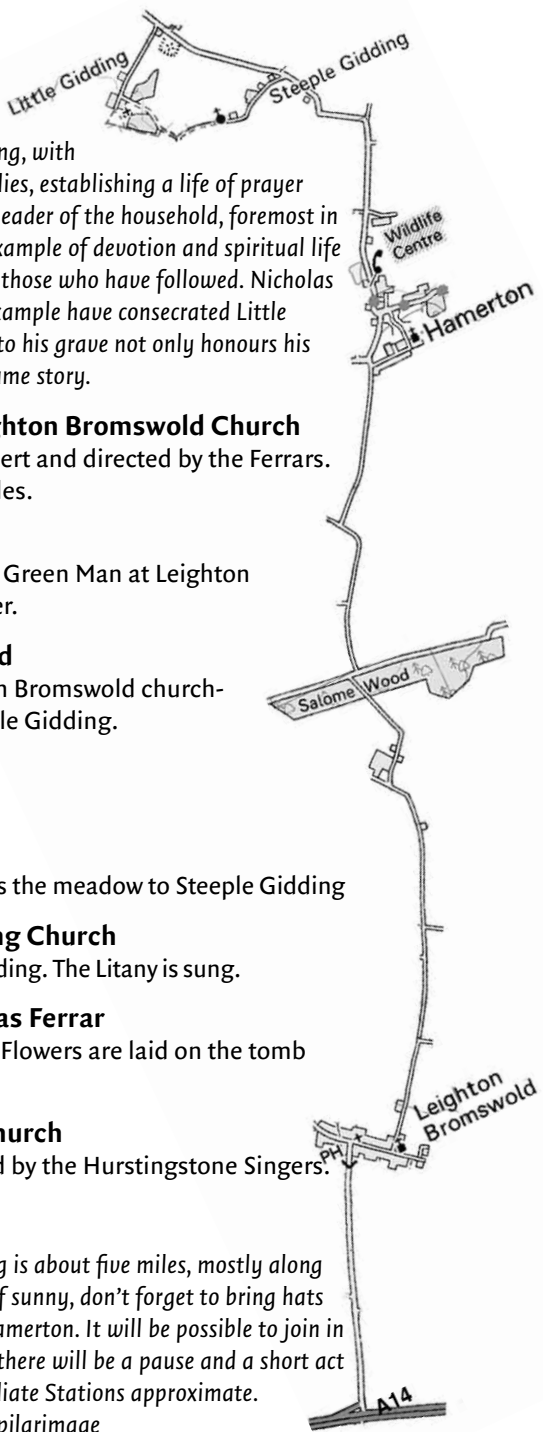
All gather around the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar. Flowers are laid on the tomb and prayers are said. Followed by ...

Pilgrimage Evensong at Little Gidding Church

Address by Bishop David Thomson. Singing led by the Hurstingstone Singers.

5 pm: Tea at Ferrar House

The walk from Leighton Bromswold to Little Gidding is about five miles, mostly along the country roads. Sturdy shoes are recommended. If sunny, don't forget to bring hats and water. Drinks and toilets will be available at Hamerton. It will be possible to join in along the route, particularly at the Stations, where there will be a pause and a short act of worship and commemoration. Timing of intermediate Stations approximate. For more information see www.littlegidding.org.uk/pilgrimage



BOOK PREVIEW – MEETING DANTE

Ingrid Soren, better known to some Friends as Rosamond Richardson, who was keynote speaker at the 2008 Eliot Festival, when she lectured on Dante and Eliot has just had her book *Meeting Dante* published. Here we quote the description from the back cover, and we hope to carry a review in a later Newsletter.



On a journey to Italy, Ingrid Soren glimpsed a face on a fresco in a medieval church. This encounter was to change her life. The man with the long nose was Dante. Assuming him to be highbrow, difficult and obscure, she picked up a long-forgotten copy of *The Divine Comedy* off her bookshelves at home, and discovered to her surprise a voice that was immediate, accessible, and of great beauty. She was amazed at how contemporary and human Dante is, and how acute his insights into the human psyche.

She decided to follow him through the cities he lived in during the nineteen years of exile while writing the 'poem of the cosmos'. She started to explore his world, his life-story, some-

thing about his character, and the drama of his great poem: above all, the story of his search for Beatrice, and his conviction that we work out our spiritual destiny through human love.

Meeting Dante is a multi-layered book: travelogue, biography, history, literary appreciation and a portrait of the times in which Dante lived. It is a reflection on the many varieties of love and fortune through the lens of a personal story of love and betrayal. Describing some of Italy's loveliest medieval architecture, sculpture and painting, Soren unfolds the narrative of Dante's love for Beatrice in a journey that, she discovers as she travels alongside Dante, is not just his, but hers but Everyman's.

Meeting Dante is published by Ivy Books, Saffron Walden. Copies can be bought direct from the author at <http://ingridsoren.com/publications/meetingdante.html>

ELIOT FESTIVAL 2010 – Saturday 17 July

After the memorable 2009 Festival, acclaimed by many as the most wonderful day, we are excited to announce that the Fifth Annual T S Eliot Festival at Little Gidding will take place on Saturday 17 July 2010, starting at 11am for 11.30.

The theme of the Festival is ‘an end and a beginning’, and features several items that explore Eliot’s spiritual journey. The Festival opens with an intriguing choral reading of ‘Little Gidding’, a marked contrast to last year’s reading by Seamus Heaney and Robert Crawford. The reading is coupled with a talk by Dr Joyce Ransome of Brown University, who has written a number of papers on Nicholas Ferrar and the seventeenth-century community at Little Gidding: her talk provides the context in which Eliot made his visit to Little Gidding ‘to kneel where prayer has been valid’.

After lunch there will be a panel discussion of the current project to produce a scholarly edition of the complete works of Eliot – not just the poetry and plays, but also the essays. The panel will include Professors John Haffenden (of Sheffield University) and Ronald Schuchard (Emory University) who are among the lead editors of the T S Eliot Research Project. The project will publish a number



Enjoying supper on the lawn of Ferrar House at the 2009 Festival

of volumes over the next couple of years and this will be an opportunity to hear details directly from the editors.

Professor Jewel Spears Brooker from Eckerd College in the USA, will deliver the annual lecture of the T S Eliot Society. The title of her lecture is ‘Epiphany and Return in Eliot’s Writing’, and she promises to try and uncover Eliot’s spiritual journey, and how this is reflected in his poetry and other writings.

After tea the formal programme will end as it began, with reference to the spiritual dimension of Eliot. We are still finalizing the details of what we plan to be a dialogue or conversation. Dr Ralph Townsend, headmaster of Winchester College, and formerly headmaster of Oundle School, will be

one of the participants and as we go to press we are waiting to confirm the second speaker. Check our website www.littlegidding.org.uk/eliotfestival for updated information as it becomes available.

The Festival will conclude with a service of choral evensong. The Hurstingstone Singers, who have accompanied the singing at the Pilgrimage in 2008 and 2009 will lead the singing, and it is hoped to include Stravinsky's 1962 setting of 'The Dove Descending', an extract from 'Little Gidding' – perhaps the first time that it has been sung at the place from which the poem takes its title.

Interspersed with music, lunch and afternoon tea on the lawns of Ferrar House, the Festival promises to be an inspiring and convivial gathering at the beautiful setting of Little Gidding, which has remained virtually unchanged since T S Eliot visited in 1936 and was compelled to write about it in his 'Four Quartets'.



Marquee and church at the 2009 Festival



*Professor Jewel Spears Brooker
at the 2009 Festival,
Eliot Society lecturer in 2010*

The Festival is a major literary and musical celebration of the life and work of Nobel Prize winning writer Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965). As in 2009, the 2010 Festival again includes students, lecturers and guests from the T S Eliot International Summer School coming to participate in lectures, discussion and poetry that offer the opportunity for festival-goers to share their interests and enthusiasms amidst the splendid setting of Little Gidding.

A ticket for the full day is £25, and includes welcome drink, lunch and afternoon tea. Further details about the full programme and bookings can be obtained from www.littlegidding.org.uk/eliotfestival

REVIEW – LITTLE GIDDING: THEN AND NOW

Little Gidding is today, as it has been for nearly four centuries, a haven, a place of stillness where all should find peace and refreshment. It is all the more important as we take on board the loss of Ecton retreat house near Northampton; St Francis House at Hemingford Grey; the threat to its future now, we hope, passed at Launde; and the closure of other retreat houses up and down the country.

This admirable compact booklet is written by a former warden of the community, still living nearby, who in his concern for the spiritual uplift which Little Gidding ought to be to all, is so well placed to inspire us in our hectic age with that spirit.

The breadth of this booklet which Tony Hodgson covers digs deep into the heart of what Gidding has meant to the community and also to himself over its past roots, its present situation, and what we all hope and pray is to be its future.

As we learn about the original household of Nicholas Ferrar the scene is set to see the inspiration behind the recent revival of the community, and our deep concern for its future as a necessary holy place well away from the noise and bustle; but a place for reflection where all are invited to recharge their spiritual and perhaps their physical batteries.

In mentioning the interests of TS Eliot as well as George Herbert, Tony Hodgson shows us how ‘Little Gidding may act as a bridge between those who look back and those who are more interested in fresh expressions’: as a place of healing and hospitality.

This beautifully constructed and thoughtful little book breathes the atmosphere of a very special place which must not be lost; and it is a compact as well as a delightful read.

Paul Rose

Little Gidding: Then and Now is by Tony Hodgson and can be bought from www.grovebooks.co.uk. It is also on sale at Ferrar House.

ELIOT’S ‘LITTLE GIDDING’ DAY

Graham Fawcett, now the President of the TS Eliot Society, has held three highly-successful and over-subscribed days at Little Gidding to study Eliot’s poem. A fourth day is being arranged and is planned for Saturday 15 May. If you missed this study day the first three times and would like to join, then contact Ferrar House for further details. You can download a leaflet from www.ferrarhouse.co.uk/fhwebpages/fhevents.html

LITTLE GIDDING CALENDAR

Regular Services

Evensong is normally said at Little Gidding when there is a fifth Sunday in the month.

Sunday 30 May 6.00 pm	Trinity Sunday Evensong
Sunday 29 August 6.00 pm	Evensong
Sunday 31 October 3.00 pm	Evensong

Poetry evenings

Thursday 13 May 7.30 pm	Kathleen Taylor on John Heath Stubbs
Saturday 13 June 7.30 pm	Hugh Black Hawkins on Shakespeare's sonnets
July	July details to be confirmed. Contact Lottie Taylor on 01480 211595 <lottie.taylor@virgin.net>.

Other Meetings and Events

Saturday 15 May 10.30 am Eliot's Little Gidding Day
(download leaflet from www.ferrarhouse.co.uk/fhwebpages/fhevents.html)

Saturday 22 May **Annual Little Gidding Pilgrimage**
The Bishop of Huntingdon, David Thomson, will lead the Pilgrimage, and preach at Evensong. Please note the date in your diaries – it is rather earlier than usual. See page 4.

Sunday 30 May 6.30 pm Visit to Westminster Abbey
to commemorate the ordination of Nicholas Ferrar in 1626. See page 3.

Saturday 17 July **Fifth Annual T S Eliot Festival**
See further details on page 6.

Saturday 4 December **Nicholas Ferrar Day**
10.30 am Holy Communion, followed by lunch
11.30 pm Talk by the Right Revd David Walker,
Bishop of Dudley
1.00 pm Lunch
2.00 pm **AGM of the Friends of Little Gidding**

David Walker is the Bishop of Dudley, in the diocese of Worcester. A Franciscan tertiary, he is the Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities. All welcome, including non-members.

NEWS FROM FERRAR HOUSE

The Directors have cast the net as widely as possible in their search for a new Warden. Most disappointingly, this has not yet borne fruit.

Back in the autumn, an advertisement for the vacant post was placed in the *Church Times*. At the same time, word went out to contacts, friends and others in the hope that a suitable person might be found. There was a most encouraging level of response and a number of people submitted application forms. From those, a short list was prepared and three people were interviewed. One of them was offered the job but following further discussion a negative answer came.

Allan Bell has, since September last year when Catherine Lack departed, been keeping things ticking over at the House and the Directors are grateful to him. He has agreed to remain until August, but no longer. Thus, the urgency to try to appoint a Warden is a very live issue and the Directors are meeting to draw up a plan.

It feels as if we are so near but yet so far. The interest is undoubtedly there and for the right person, the job is waiting. During the interview process, it came up a number of times of how exciting an opportunity for development there is. The draw to Little Gidding very much remains, indeed it intrigues many; and the facilities at the House have seen ongoing improvement. I look forward with great anticipation to the future.

This is evidently a very important time and we need to have a common mind amongst the Directors and also a clear vision of where we are trying to go. All prayers would be very much appreciated – and of course if anyone has a flash of inspiration of someone who might be suitable, that would be most welcome.

Tom Gillum



Allan Bell and Canon Bill Girard demolishing the wall at the south-east end of the Ferrar House garden. The wall, which was built in the 1980s or 90s, had become unsafe. The view, now that the wall has been removed, can be seen in the picture on the front page.

A VIEW FROM LITTLE GIDDING

Simon Kershaw reflects while on a recent trip to India.

As I type this I can look out of the window over the city of Pune in the state of Maharashtra in India, about 100 miles south-east of Mumbai. The view comprises high-rise tower blocks, green lawns and trees, concrete and glass. It could be anywhere in the developed world (though the 30 °C temperature and sun virtually overhead in a cloudless noon sky confirm that it is not England!). Just across the road are the shacks, corrugated steel sheds and tents that are everywhere juxtaposed with the lives and buildings of richer Indians and their western business partners. Pune today is a rapidly-growing city, the eighth largest in India, with half a dozen universities and growing hi-tech industrial, IT and commercial sectors.

It was in a very much smaller Pune, then spelt Poona, that in 1927 the Christa Seva Sangha made its first real home. Founded in 1922 by five Indians and an Englishman this ashram or religious community – whose name means the Community of the Servants of Christ – intended to form a life of common service and equal fellowship for Indians and Europeans. They soon attracted some attention in both India and England, enabling them to move to Poona after a few years. Originally dedicated to St Barnabas, the Society added St Francis as joint patron, a dedication that became more important as it adopted a formal rule and vows.

In 1927 the community was joined by a number of new recruits, including a young priest called Algy Robertson. Robertson was convinced that the Sangha should be a Franciscan community, but after a few years his health broke and he returned to England. Still a member of the Sangha, he became vicar of St Ives in Huntingdonshire, and his vicarage became home to several Brothers of the community and a refuge for visitors from Poona. There are still those in St Ives (where I have lived and worshipped for twenty years or so) who can recall the Brothers living in the vicarage and cycling around the town and to nearby villages. In 1936 Robertson's group joined with another Franciscan community in England to form the Society of St Francis, with a rule largely written by Robertson and based on the principles of the Sangha in Poona. In 1937 Robertson moved to the new community at Hilfield, near Cerne Abbas in Dorset, where he was based for the rest of his life.

The Franciscan ideal of embracing poverty and the service of the poor is one that comes swiftly to mind in the streets of modern Pune, just as it must have done in the very different Poona of the 1920s and 30s, to Francis in the thirteenth century, and just as it must have done to an itinerant preacher from Nazareth two thousand years ago. The poor are still with us, and the priority of working for the alleviation of hunger, homelessness, disease and injustice is as necessary now as it was then.

AGM AND LECTURE

The AGM of the Friends was held on Saturday 5 December. The Chair, Simon Kershaw, and the Secretary, Judith Hodgson, were re-elected, and Keith Presence was formally elected as Treasurer, having shadowed John Newman for much of the year.

We are extremely grateful to John for all the hard work that he has put in over the last few years since the revival of the Society – a revival in which John played an important role in setting the revived Society on a firm footing.

Also elected to the Committee were the Revd Tom Gillum, the Revd Tony Hodgson, the Revd Mark Mills-Powell, the Revd Canon Paul Rose and Richard Scott. Michael Keck continues as the representative of the Giddings PCC.

Standing down from the committee were Susanna Ferrar and the Revd

Bob Torrens, who have been committee members for several years. We are grateful for their contributions to the Society.

After the meeting, Trevor Cooper, who is Chairman of the Ecclesiological Society, gave a fascinating talk on his researches into Little Gidding in the seventeenth century. He first took us outside to look at the woodwork in the church, and then out into the field east of the church to consider where the old Manor House might have stood. Afterwards, in the warmth of Ferrar House, he talked about how the Ferrars' public and private expressions of faith were visible in the furnishings and the services in church and house.

We hope to publish a summary of Trevor's talk in a future copy of the Newsletter.

