

FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER

November 2012



BISHOP LEADS LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE



About a hundred people gathered for this year's Pilgrimage, back on a cool day in May. Each year since it was revived in 2006 numbers have grown, as more and more people return bringing their friends to experience the beauty and holiness of Little Gidding and the surrounding countryside.

This year, Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely and President of the Friends, led the day, preaching at Leighton Bromswold and Little Gidding, and giving short reflections at the five stations on the walk. Despite the cool weather a great day was had, and we look forward to next year.

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

As another membership year draws towards its close, may we encourage everyone to consider setting up a Standing Order, and where possible, to 'Gift Aid' your membership and other donations to the Friends? For further details, please write to Sally Seaman, our Membership Secretary, at <membership@littlegidding.org.uk> or c/o Ferrar House (address top left).

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Contemplative Prayer was in the news recently when the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about it. In July 2013, in the run-up to the Pilgrimage, the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer will lead a two-day retreat at Little Gidding, and share their approach with us. It will take place from Wednesday 10 July to Friday 12 July and further details are available from Tony Hodgson on <hodgsons@phonecoop.coop>, or 01832 275343.

STEEPLE GIDDING

Steeple Gidding Church was closed in the early 1970s, but remains a consecrated building in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

On Sunday 2 December 2012 at 11am, a service of Holy Communion is being held to celebrate the Feast of St Andrew, the apostle to whom the church is dedicated. All are very welcome.

Nicholas Ferrar Day and the 2012 AGM

Nicholas Ferrar died at Little Gidding in the early hours of Monday 4 December 1637. This year's commemoration and celebration at Little Gidding will, as usual, be held on the nearest **Saturday, 1 December**. The AGM of the Friends will follow in the afternoon. We hope to see many of you there.

The Revd Mary Jepp, who is incumbent of the group of parishes that includes Little Gidding, will preside at a celebration of the Eucharist at 10.30am, assisted by the Very Revd Mark Bonney. We are very pleased to welcome Mark, who was installed as the Dean of Ely in September, and managed to mention Little Gidding



and Nicholas Ferrar three times in his installation sermon. The Dean will also give the address. This will be Mark's first visit to Little Gidding and we very much look forward to having him with us.

After lunch (soup, rolls, fruit) the AGM will be held in Ferrar House, commencing not earlier than 1.30pm. The officers and committee for the coming year will be elected. If you are interested in helping out a little then do get in touch – but first and foremost come and commemorate Nicholas Ferrar.



Pictured above, the Very Revd Mark Bonney; top right, the Revd Mary Jepp



THE DAILY OFFICE SSF

“To share in the daily prayer of the Church is to be drawn into something that shapes and forms us. It strengthens our hold on eternal life. It deepens our communion with Christian brothers and sisters and our experience of the mystery of God.”

This is the opening paragraph of the foreword to the second edition of *The Daily Office SSF* published in 2010, written by the Bishop Protector of SSF (the Society of St Francis) Michael Perham, Bishop of Gloucester.

For much of our 50 years of married life, Margaret and I have shared in the daily office, using material from various sources, including Taizé, the Northumbria Community, Little Gidding as well as SSF (of which we are Third Order members).

The Daily Office was first printed in 1970 for the use of the First Order brothers and sisters of the European Province of SSF and many members of the Third Order availed themselves of that book. Two revisions were made in the 1970s and a third in 1981, after the publication of *The Alternative Service Book* 1980. In 1992 a further revision of *The Daily Office SSF (DOSSF)* was produced alongside *Celebrating Common Prayer (CCP)* reflecting the advance in liturgical understanding within the church at large as well as in SSF.

Throughout these revisions and particularly in the last 20 years, DOSSF



has provided a richness of psalms, canticles and prayers that has sustained our prayer life each morning. DOSSF provides materials for midday, evening and night prayer as well as morning prayer, but it is the start of the day we have found to be the best place for our office.

The 2010 edition uses the Common Worship lectionary taking the user through the colour and rhythm of the seasons, providing a wide selection of canticles from scriptural and other sources. For those wishing to follow the Franciscan celebrations an *Ordo* is available at a modest annual cost from the Hilfield friary, allowing

one to pray alongside the Franciscan communities.

It has been an enormous privilege to have a lifelong companion to share in the daily office and on those relatively rare occasions that we have not been able to start the day together, the DOSSF (or the pocket edition of CCP when travelling) has been our ‘staple’. Often shared with our children as they grew up has been the night office (Compline).

As we are reminded in the 2010 edition of DOSSF, *‘We are only able to pray because we are in the Spirit: the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the whole Church, the Spirit present in each baptized person. “We do not know how to pray as we ought but*

the Spirit intercedes for us’. (Romans 8.26)” No one particular scheme or prayer book can contain all that the Spirit wills for each of us in our life of prayer and we must allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit.

For anyone seeking a rich resource of material to help in individual or corporate prayer, the DOSSF can be recommended and experienced for any joining in morning or evening prayer in the church at Little Gidding, where it is used daily when the warden is in residence.

Richard Scott

The Daily Office SSF was published by Continuum International in 2010
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CLARE COLLEGE – Trinity Sunday 3 June

Some 20 or so members of the Friends joined others at Clare College, Cambridge (where Nicholas Ferrar had been an undergraduate and then a fellow) on Trinity Sunday, to mark the anniversary of his ordination as a deacon. The preacher was Canon Ver-



non White, pictured between his wife and the Revd Gregory Seach, Dean of Clare. Canon White, an old member of the College and now a canon of Westminster Abbey, elegantly wove together the themes of Trinity Sunday with those of Ferrar’s life, and his continuing relevance to today’s students. After the service we were entertained to dinner in the Hall at Clare, and then in the fellows’ Senior Combination Room, where a portrait of Nicholas hangs in pride of place.

All in all, an excellent evening, and we are very grateful to Dr Seach and Clare for their hospitality. We hope to continue to explore links with Clare next year.

LITTLE GIDDING CALENDAR

Saturday 1 December 2012 **Nicholas Ferrar Day**
10.30 am Holy Communion, followed by lunch

Speaker: the Very Revd Mark Bonney, Dean of Ely.

1.30 pm **AGM of the Friends of Little Gidding**

The AGM will begin after lunch, not earlier than 1.30pm.

Sunday 26 May 2013 **Trinity Sunday**
commemorating the ordination of Nicholas Ferrar in 1626. Details to follow.

Saturday 6 July 2013 **Eighth Annual T S Eliot Festival**
Sunday 7 July Details to follow – please mark the date now.

Saturday 13 July 2013 (TBC) **Annual Little Gidding Pilgrimage**
Note the proposed changed date for the 2013 Pilgrimage, planned as the climax of a week-long Festival at Little Gidding. Further details to follow.

Regular Services

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

30 December (3.00 pm), 31 March 2013 (6.00 pm), 30 May (6.00 pm),

29 September (6.00 pm), 29 December (3.00 pm).

A monthly service is held at noon on the second Friday of each month and is followed by lunch in Ferrar House. For catering purposes please email <info@littlegidding.org.uk> if you would like lunch. Services are held on the following Fridays:

9 November, 14 December, 11 January 2013, 8 February, 8 March, 12 April,
10 May, 14 June, 12 July (TBC), 9 August, 13 September, 11 October,
8 November.

Poetry evenings

Poetry evenings are held each month at 7.30pm in Ferrar House, as follows. For further information please email <info@littlegidding.org.uk>.

14 November, 14 February 2013, 13 March, 13 April, 15 May, 13 June, 14 August.

For further details about any event, or to book a place, please email <info@littlegidding.org.uk>.

To book your own event, please contact the Warden, Mrs Wendy Skirrow, at Ferrar House, telephone: 01832 293 383; email <info@ferrarhouse.co.uk>

For an updated calendar and diary of events see www.littlegidding.org.uk

COMPANIONS OF LITTLE GIDDING

What could be more tranquil than the Church and House at Little Gidding and the glorious unspoilt acres of Huntingdonshire surrounding it? It remains one of those rare places where apart from the occasional agricultural vehicle in the distance, the sound is of birdsong and the light is natural rather than diffused through sodium lamps. Why would one need a Quiet Day in such peaceful surroundings?

But of course although the body recognises and appreciates the peace and lack of stress, the soul must be nourished too. Thus it was that the Companions held a Quiet Day in the

LITTLE GIDDING TRUST

Whilst Little Gidding Church is the concern of the incumbent and PCC, Ferrar House and the properties to the north are owned by the Little Gidding Trust. For some years the House has been run by a subsidiary limited company, Ferrar House Ltd. Now the Trustees have decided to simplify things and dissolve FH Ltd and manage the House directly.

At the same time the Trustees have invited representatives of the Church and the Friends and some others to form a 'Council of Reference' to give guidance to the Trust. The Bishop of Huntingdon has agreed to be the Chair.

A first meeting of prospective members of the Council has been held with

Church on 8 June, led by the Revd Mark Mills-Powell, now Vicar of Desborough. This attracted respectable numbers and for the most part was held in the Church with refreshments at lunchtime in Ferrar House. It was a welcome opportunity to strip away the concerns and worries of everyday life and concentrate on the witness of Jesus Christ to us all. It proved a hugely beneficial experience.

For further information about the Companions, which is a group within the Friends, please contact John Dunn on 07940 845800.

Neil McKittrick

very positive results, and a second is planned.

Meanwhile the Bishop of Ely, who is already President of the Friends, will also be Visitor of the Trust.

It is encouraging to see this closer co-operation between the different groups involved at Little Gidding, and no doubt there will be much more to say in a future Newsletter.



FERRAR HOUSE NEWS

One constant about Ferrar House in recent times is continuous change. Some of those changes have been forced upon us. Fire Safety, Health and Safety, Environmental Health, all work together to encourage the House to comply with best practice for the well-being of its guests. That is no small matter. We seek to maintain the highest standards which, although costly in terms of time and money, are essential.

Other changes have been initiated from the House itself, and from listening to, and being aware of, the needs and requirements of the groups and individuals who use the House, as well as having an eye on potential new users.

The most recent changes have been to do with the library. There was

a huge quantity of books overflowing from the shelves which lined the Herbert Room. These were carefully sorted and using criteria agreed with the Directors were streamlined into a manageable number, with a great deal of help from Bill Girard. At the same time the Crashaw Room was redecorated, with a donation for new shelves. With the addition of a settee and a table, the new library became a space which people use much more as a place of quiet, a meeting area, and to browse the books.

The old library, the Herbert Room, has been decorated and with the addition of two settees and curtains has become another much appreciated place to sit, relax, discuss and have small meetings. The Ferrar Silver cupboard, the font and the tapestries have

been relocated. Two large posters on the wall of the Herbert Room give, in words and pictures, an overview of the House and Little Gidding.

All the changes have been warmly welcomed and improve the work of the House. However, what more can be expected?

Decoration and upgrading will continue, of course. The Eliot Room will receive some attention and the House has received a generous donation towards new chairs for that room. *(The donation is a good one, but will not cover the replacement of all the chairs; we would like to use it to attract some other gifts so that the rest can be changed to match.)*

The Trustees are reconsidering the work of the House, seeking to secure its effective future in a changing world. A thoughtful and careful consideration of short, medium and long-term strategies will be a part of this.

Finally, once the House opens again after the winter closed period, we will welcome Berkeley Zych, a final year ordinand at Westcott House. He will be with us on placement for eight weeks from 1 February, experiencing the work and sharing rural ministry work with Mary Jepp. We will spend some time with Berkeley preparing a Study Day for after Easter, intended to affirm and encourage the important work of Parish Clergy.

In times of change we adapt, but stay with the imperative of enabling prayer and pilgrimages to take place in Little Gidding in the spirit of, if not in the exact pattern of, the Ferrars.

Paul Skirrow

Below, a panoramic view of Ferrar House, the marquee set up for this year's Eliot Festival, the Church and the wood. The meadow at the front shows the platform where the Ferrars' house may have stood.



ELIOT FESTIVAL 2012 – Saturday and Sunday 7 and 8 July



I've attended the last three T S Eliot festivals, and each time I've set off for one I've felt faintly mad. It's a fair hike from my home in Dorset to Little Gidding on the other side of the country. I now see the habit as an addiction, harmless but compulsive.

This is a unique experience, as dreamlike yet sharply real as an Eliot poem. People gather for a weekend in summer in a marquee on an English lawn. This lends a spirit of wedding celebration to the serious activity that goes on in it, under the benediction of



the historic church of St John which stands a few feet away. These people may be everyday local folk or distinguished international intellectuals. They are united in a love of the work of one of the greatest poets of all time, Thomas Stearns Eliot.

What I find magical is the mingling of such contrasts with the unifying core of the festival, which is the glorious and maddening poetry of this brilliant, complicated, funny and unfathomable man.

This is a weekend of treats and surprises. It may start damply, but the sun always manages to penetrate the greyness, and the marquee's skirts are lifted to reveal the exquisite flowers of the gardens of nearby Ferrar House. The audience may seem sparse on Saturday morning, but by Sunday lunchtime the place is bursting with students from an international summer school that come from London for the day, together with such fine poet-lecturers as Simon Armitage and Paul Muldoon.



And there is always music. On Saturday evening this year we heard a late Beethoven and a Barber quartet by the Bingham Quartet in Steeple Gidding church, then walked through the timeless wheatfields under a vast twilight sky, back to Little Gidding.

Janet Watts

Reprinted from the website of the T S Eliot Society (UK)



Opposite: Sandeep Parmar gives the Eliot Society lecture; Graham Fletcher, Eliot's nephew, in the audience. This page: Steeple Gidding Church; Paul Muldoon and Bernard O'Donoghue read 'Little Gidding'; Peter Cochran and Jenny Sargent read 'Ash Wednesday'; Bishop Richard Harries.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON GEORGE HERBERT'S MOTHER

In 2006 the National Portrait Gallery raised sufficient funds to purchase a portrait of John Donne. It is a surprising portrait, very unlike the portraiture characteristic of the age. Recently cleaned, this 1595 depiction has Donne, aged just 23, in a large, black hat and open collar, with ties falling down, as if just undone. The original Latin inscription on the frame translates 'O Lady Lighten our darkness'.

About the same time, in the mid-1590s, Donne wrote a number of poems on visits to Montgomery Castle, the home of the Herbert family, amongst them *The Relique*. *The Relique* makes explicit reference to St Mary Magdalene, and perhaps marks the beginning of an intense but chaste friendship between Donne and George Herbert's mother, Lady Magdalen Herbert, that lasted until her death in 1627.

Magdalen Herbert was a woman of remarkable character. Izaak Walton tells how Mrs Herbert, widowed in 1596, accompanied her two elder sons, Edward and George, to Oxford to oversee their education. Walton says this of her qualities, and claims that she and John Donne met there during this time:

For these reasons she endeared [George] to her own company, and continued with him in Oxford four years; in which time her great and

harmless wit, her cheerful gravity, and her obliging behaviour, gained her an acquaintance and friendship with most of any eminent worth or learning that were at that time in or near that university, and particularly with Mr John Donne, who then came accidentally to that place, in this time of her being there. It was that John Donne, who was after Dr Donne, and Dean of St Paul's, London: and he, at his leaving Oxford, writ and left there, in verse, a character of the beauties of her body and mind: of the first he says,

No spring nor summer –
 beauty has such grace,
As I have seen in an autumnal face.

In 1607, Donne wrote a series of seven sonnets, called *La Corona*, in which the different stages of the life of Christ are conceived as seven parts of a crown of prayer and praise. The introductory sonnet begins

Her of your name,
 whose fair inheritance
Bethina was,
 and jointure Magdalo:

Donne entreats Magdalen Herbert to identify herself with their devotion to Christ:

That they did harbour Christ
 himself, a Guest,
Harbour these Hymns,
 to his dear name addresst.

This was 1607 and Donne has moved into a more devotional style in his poetry. These sonnets are addressed to Christ, but yet Magdalen Herbert is very present, particularly in the letter that accompanies them: 'the example of your St Mary Magdalen, who rose early upon Sunday to seek that which she loved most; and so did I'.

Donne was brought up a Roman Catholic at a time when it was dangerous at worst (his brother died in prison in 1593), and discriminatory at least (Donne could not graduate from University). It could be argued that Magdalen had a pre-eminent place in Donne's affections enabling him to reconcile his passionate nature with his religious sensibility. He moved under her more puritan influence away from the Church of his upbringing and towards the Church of England where he found his home. When they met, he was a heady and sexually-charged youth; he was to become the serious, but still intensely passionate, Dr John Donne, Anglican priest and Dean of St Paul's, who, as Walton witnessed, cried as he preached at her commemoration. When he preached that sermon in 1627, Donne makes the same connection with Mary Magdalen:

To another Magdalen, Christ said upon earth, Touch me not, for I am not ascended. Being ascended now, to his glory, and she being gone up to him, after she awaited his leisure,



so many yeeres, as that more, would soone have growne to bee vexation, and sorrow, as her last words here, were, I submit my will to the will of God; so wee doubt not, but the first word which she heard there, was that Euge, from her Saviour, Well done good and faithfull servant; enter into thy masters joy.

The importance of this relationship between Donne and Magdalen has more often than not been undervalued and misunderstood. Rather, she was a profoundly formative influence upon John Donne's progression from young poet to theologian of imagination and gravitas.

Frances Ward is Dean of St Edmundsbury and Chair of the Little Gidding Trust. (Adapted from an article published in *Theology* in July/August 2011, Vol 114, No.4)

THE GARDEN AT FERRAR HOUSE

The garden is the first thing that strikes people when they arrive; the second is the view over the hedge across the fields. Having arrived and admired, people then use the garden as part of the whole experience of peace, quiet, reflection and prayer. Like the gliding swan, although the garden looks serene on the surface, it is supported and made successful by activity and hard work, mostly done by volunteers.

The garden here fits beautifully into the whole context – English rolling countryside. The style belongs here. Functionally it also fits into the work of the House, with quiet spaces and benches allowing quiet areas for sitting and musing.

Gardens created as quiet and beautiful places can be traced back about 6,000 years. The Persian gardens of about 4,000 BC were called *pairidaēza*. The word meant walled around – a walled garden – but changed through Greek and Latin to become *paradisus* – *paradise*. So the echoes of Eden are understandable; a place of fruitfulness, plenty, safety, wholeness, etc provided by God the Creator and sustainer of life. From the earliest times there was a conscious effort to represent something of heaven, of paradise, on earth. It seemed important to try and recreate the shape of the earth in the way that people thought God (or the gods) intended, but in a

small, accessible and controllable way. The walls protected the garden from malign forces, marauding animals or enemies, as well as from the heat of the sun or the driving wind and storms.

It is good to make a space where people can sense wholeness in themselves and harmony with the created order. It might be fleeting but it reconnects people to what we feel instinctively is right – God giving order to the world. As long as it inspires us to hope and act so that we work with God to bring order, that is wholeness, life, justice, freedom, to others.

When people are seen sitting in the garden at Ferrar House, exuding pleasure, it becomes clear that it is far easier to enjoy and relax in a garden for which you have no responsibility. If a garden depends on you to keep it tamed relaxing is not always simple. You will see weeds, pests, things out of place, a lack of water, too much water, pruning, feeding, etc. A strong will is required to ignore those things which we see as ‘out of place’.

The changes that have taken place over the years in the garden at Ferrar House have been about establishing what works best; which plants survive, which create the best effect, how to maintain a year of colour and texture, how to keep pests at bay. Most of the changes are subtle; some have been



more visible and obvious. They are all part of the gentle journey to make the most of the space for the sake of the visitors so that they can sit and feel that neither the plants nor the people themselves are ‘out of place’.

St Teresa of Avila, the 16th-century Carmelite nun and spiritual writer, reflected on a garden. Beginners in prayer, she tells us, are ‘starting to cultivate a garden on very barren soil, full of weeds’.

When people come to Ferrar House we want them to experience the fact that we are not ‘out of place’ with God; in fact we are truly ‘in the right place’ when we are alongside God. This awareness can be through the kind of intensive meditative prayer that St Ter-

esa practised, but it can equally well be through living the life we should be living in harmony with others, serving them as God does. Our contexts change, Ferrar House changes, the garden changes, we change ourselves and sometime we have to change. The space to become what we need to be, to cultivate what is right and remove what is out of place, is essential. Where the work of the House and its garden enables that then give thanks. When we learn how to be with God, then give thanks again.

Gardens remind us of the fragility of our control over chaos. Gardens, left to their own devices, set their own paths and destinations very quickly. Just go away for a week or a fortnight

and on your return everything has changed, especially the height of the grass and the amount of weeds and the rampages of the slugs. The very fabric, the soil, the atmosphere, the fertility of a garden takes over and reminds us that we have no final say, no final control.

That we are in control is one of the worst and most undermining myths of the modern age. We are not in control and we are dependent on God.

The scope for reflection on our gardens is endless. From Paradise and Eden, but also to Gethsemane, a place of suffering and struggle and betrayal. A garden reflects the rest of human life – a mixture of what is good and what is bad; the need to push in the direction of the good away from the pull of the bad; the fact that we only just hold back the chaos which sits in the background to come back and overwhelm us.

This is the heart of God.

God made flesh who lives among us.

God who struggles with good and bad and lives with joy and sorrow.

God who knows how we live because he lived as one of us.

God who gave up control and died on a cross to save us from chaos.

God who inspires us to live again.

Next time you come to Little Gidding, sit in the garden and rejoice in what it teaches you.

Wendy and Paul Skirrow

