

FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER

April 2012



BISHOP OF ELY BECOMES OUR PRESIDENT



We are very pleased that the Right Revd Stephen Conway, the Bishop of Ely, has agreed to become the President of the Friends of Little Gidding.

From the first foundation of the Friends in 1946, the Bishops of Ely were the President, but the position was left vacant when the Friends were reconstituted in 2003. Now, at last, the link with our diocesan bishop is happily restored.

Pictured, left, at his enthronement last year, Bishop Stephen told us, 'It is with delight that I accept your invitation to take up the role of President. I greatly enjoyed my visit to Ferrar House in the summer and look forward to learning more.'

The role of President is largely an honorary one, but Bishop Stephen has asked to meet the Friends Committee to discuss how he can participate.

Members will have an opportunity to meet our new President on Saturday 19 May, when he will lead this year's Pilgrimage to the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar. We hope that as many of you as possible will be able to come then.

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 has appointed Sally Seaman to the revived post of Membership Secretary, and we hope this will help us keep in touch with Members and encourage others to join. Sally can be contacted at <membership@littlegidding.org.uk> or c/o Ferrar House (address top left).

Thank you for your support for the continuing work of the Friends in celebrating the life of Nicholas Ferrar and his family, helping to maintain and beautify the church, and to promote the work of Ferrar House.

NEWS SNIPPETS

Many Members will know Jonathan Young (who was incumbent at Little Gidding for a year), and Margaret Scott (wife of Committee member Richard). Jonathan and Margaret have both been ill recently, and still are, and we send them prayers and best wishes for their recovery. We all look forward very much to seeing you both at the Pilgrimage in May if not before!

Nicholas Ferrar Day and the 2011 AGM



Little Gidding Church was filled for the Festival Day of Nicholas Ferrar, observed on Saturday 3 December, when the Rt Revd David Stancliffe (who recently retired as Bishop of Salisbury) presided at the Eucharist. As a former Chairman of the Church of England's Liturgical Commission, and one of the architects of its *Common Worship* modern service books, we were guaranteed someone who knew how to lead a service! Afterwards, in the warmth of Ferrar House, he talked inspirationally of his experiences as a diocesan bishop, and on the place of singing in worship (which he approves of!). We are very grateful to Bishop David for travelling down from County Durham to lead our celebration.

The AGM was held after lunch. Both the Chair (Simon Kershaw) and the Secretary (Judith Hodgson) were re-elected unopposed. The Treasurer,

Keith Presence, stood down as he had indicated last year. We are very grateful to Keith for his hard work as Treasurer over the last few years, and we hope to continue to see Keith and his wife Ann at Friends' events at Little Gidding. Newly-elected as Treasurer is Peter Powell, who is a paediatrician at Bury St Edmunds, and is also the husband of Frances Ward, the Dean of St Edmundsbury.

Elected to the Committee for the year were: Tom Gillum, Tony Hodgson, Paul Rose, Richard Scott, Bob Torrens, and Frances Ward.

Michael Keck continues to be a member of the Committee *ex officio*, as representative of the Giddings PCC, and at its first meeting the new Committee re-appointed Sally Seaman as Membership Secretary, and also co-opted Neil McKittrick to the Committee.

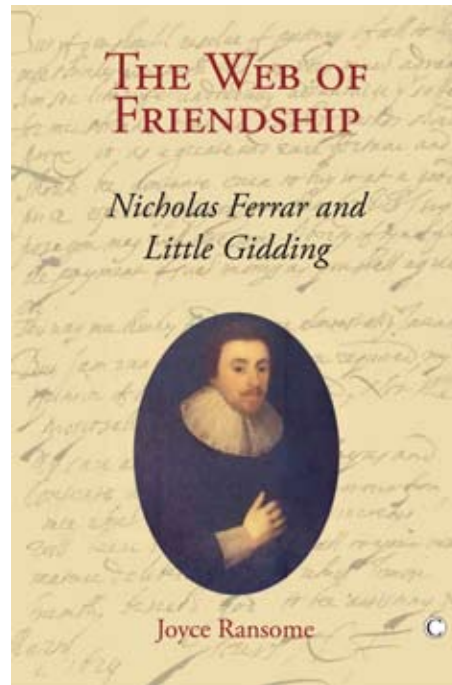
THE WEB OF FRIENDSHIP

Tony Hodgson briefly reviews Joyce Ransome's biography of Nicholas Ferrar, published last year by Lutterworth Press / James Clarke.

Dr Joyce Ransome, ably assisted by her husband Dr David Ransome, has produced a book which stands up well in the long line of biographies of Nicholas Ferrar which stretches back to the life written by Nicholas's brother John soon after the former's death and only preserved by a series of miracles.

Those of us who have come over the decades to believe that Alan Maycock's biography *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding*, written in the 1930s, was the last word on the subject, have found it quite wonderful that the Ransomes have been able to bring together so much exciting new material which to us comparative ignoramuses was totally unknown.

The research that they have put into this work has been painstaking and has given their book considerable authority. For me perhaps a major discovery was how the Little Gidding experience was by no means an isolated incident in the life of the Church, but how it led on to such important developments as the Church of England's involvement in education and the creation of voluntary missionary societies. For instance The Little Academy, to which some members of the



Ferrar household chose to belong, is shown by the Ransomes to have been influential in the formation of The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.

So, if you think that you know what there is to know, think again and you, like me, will be surprised how much there is to know. Be prepared for some detailed study, but it is infinitely worth while.

Tony Hodgson

The Web of Friendship by Joyce Ransome, was published by James Clarke & Co, 2011 ISBN 978 02271 73480 list price £25.50

LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE 2012

This year's Pilgrimage is on **Saturday 19 May**. The Pilgrimage leader will be the Bishop of Ely, Stephen Conway, who is the new President of the Friends. We are delighted that Bishop Stephen will be with us all day and we hope that many of you will be able to join us as pilgrims and meet our new President.

The day follows the now-established format: Holy Communion at Leighton Bromswold Church at 10.30, followed by lunch. The Pilgrimage Walk begins from the 'Hundred Stone' in the village at 1 pm. There are short stations at Salome Wood, Hamerton and Steeple Gidding, and we then sing the Litany on the walk to Little Gidding where the walkers are expected to arrive at about 4.15 pm. Flowers are laid on Nicholas Ferrar's tomb and

Choral Evensong follows. After Evensong, Tea is served in Ferrar House.

The Pilgrimage has grown in numbers since it was re-established a few years ago. Beginning with a dozen people, it has climbed to about 80 people last year, many returning each year and bringing friends. If you would like some leaflets to publicise the Pilgrimage, to give to friends, or to put in your church, please contact the Chairman, Simon Kershaw, chair@littlegidding.org.uk or download a copy from the Friends website. Why not suggest a parish group take part? To help us make practical and catering arrangements it is helpful if you can let us know if you are thinking of coming.

Below: Bishop David Thomson lays flowers on Nicholas's tomb at the 2010 Pilgrimage



LITTLE GIDDING CALENDAR

Regular Services

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

Sunday 29 April 6.00 pm Evensong
Sunday 29 July 6.00 pm Evensong
Sunday 30 September 6.00 pm Evensong
Sunday 30 December 3.00 pm Evensong at Steeple Gidding Church

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:

13 April, 11 May, 8 June, 13 July, 10 August, 14 September,
12 October, 9 November, 14 December

Poetry evenings

Poetry evenings are held each month, normally on the evening of the 13th. For further information please contact Judith Hodgson <secretary@littlegidding.org.uk>.

Friday 13 April 7.30 pm
Sunday 13 May 7.30 pm
Wednesday 13 June 7.30 pm
Friday 13 July 7.30 pm
Saturday and Sunday 14 and 15 July John Clare Festival at Helpston
Wednesday 15 August 7.30 pm Poetry group AGM

Companions of Little Gidding

Saturday 28 April
Friday 8 June Quiet Day, led by the Revd Mark Mills-Powell

Other Meetings and Events

Saturday 19 May **Annual Little Gidding Pilgrimage**
The Bishop of Ely, Stephen Conway, will lead the Pilgrimage, presiding at Holy Communion and preaching at Evensong. Please note the date in your diaries. See page 5.

Sunday 3 June 6.00 pm **Visit to Clare College, Cambridge**
to commemorate the ordination of Nicholas Ferrar in 1626. See opposite.

Saturday 7 July
Sunday 8 July

Seventh Annual T S Eliot Festival
See further details on page 8.

Saturday 1 December
10.30 am
Details of the service, including the speaker, will be available shortly.
2.00 pm

Nicholas Ferrar Day
Holy Communion, followed by lunch
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 the Warden, Mrs Wendy Skirrow, at Ferrar House.
telephone: 01832 293 383; email: info@ferrarhouse.co.uk
www.ferrarhouse.co.uk

For an updated calendar and diary see <http://ferrarhouse.wordpress.com>

CLARE COLLEGE – Trinity Sunday 3 June

The liturgical anniversary of Nicholas Ferrar's ordination as Deacon at Westminster Abbey on Trinity Sunday 1626 has been marked by the Friends for a couple of years now.

This year Friends are invited to a service at Clare College, Cambridge on the evening of Trinity Sunday, 3 June at 6pm. The preacher will be the Revd Vernon White, Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey and himself an old member of Clare. After the service there is a limited number of places for dinner in the college hall. Further details of the service and dinner will follow soon.

Nicholas Ferrar was himself an undergraduate and then a fellow at Clare, and we are pleased to renew a link with the College. We hope that this Cambridge occasion will provide an opportunity for Friends to gather in the university city and also for students



Clare College Chapel (picture by Jim Linwood)

and others to learn about Nicholas Ferrar and Little Gidding and maybe even encourage them to visit the place for themselves.

ELIOT FESTIVAL 2012 – Saturday and Sunday 7 and 8 July



Supper on the lawn at the 2011 Festival

Planning for this year's Eliot Festival began in September with the programme now organized and our attention turning to the practical and catering arrangements.

This festival is gaining international prestige as a major celebration of the life and work of T S Eliot – but it's also a friendly and fun occasion, with an opportunity for scholars and enthusiasts to meet and share their interest.

The Festival takes place over two days, on the weekend of 7 and 8 July, and a leaflet with details of the programme and a booking form is available (and can be downloaded from the Festival website at littlegidding.org.uk/eliotfestival).

Following last year's acclaimed reading of 'The Waste Land' this year's Festival opens with a selection of shorter Eliot poems read by Peter Cochran and Jenny Sargent, after which Richard Harries and Hugh Black-Hawkins will debate the question 'Poetry and religion: did faith make Eliot a better poet?'. Richard Harries, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, was Bishop of Oxford from 1987 to 2006; he is Gresham Professor of Divinity and a well-known writer and broadcaster. Hugh Black-Hawkins is Chair of the Eliot Society.

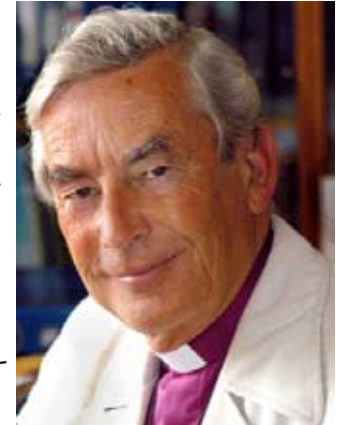
This year's Eliot Society Lecture is given by Sandeep Parmar, poet and visiting fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. Her talk is titled 'Unreal Cities and Timeless

landscapes' and focuses on Eliot's correspondence with the modernist poet Hope Mirrlees.

The evening concert will feature the renowned Bingham String Quartet playing Beethoven's String Quartet number 15 in A Minor, opus 132: a piece that Eliot himself noted was a major inspiration for his *Four Quartets*.

The day will also include regular favourites such as 'My Favourite Eliot' in which Festival-goers are invited to read a short piece of poetry or prose; and musical interludes for refreshment, and for conversation with speakers and fellow Festival-goers.

On Sunday we will again be joined by Professor Ron Schuchard and members of the International



Richard Harries



Sandeep Parmar

Eliot Summer School. Paul Muldoon, Daljit Nagra and Bernard O'Donoghue will read 'Little Gidding', and Professor Muldoon (Professor of Humanities at Princeton, and formerly Professor of Poetry at Oxford) will give the Summer School lecture, titled 'The Love Song of T Stearns Eliot'. The day will conclude with choral evensong.

We invite all members of the Friends to support the Festival both by buying tickets and attending, and also by encouraging others to come. Leaflets and posters are available (online or on paper) – please make use of these: perhaps your church or local library or other group would be happy to display a poster,

or for you to give out leaflets or to put some leaflets out for people to take. If you do not live close enough to visit Little Gidding regularly, why not consider a visit around the weekend of the Festival and see Little Gidding at its public best?

Please mark the dates in your calendar – **7 and 8 July** – and share these details with your friends. We look forward to seeing you at this, one of the highlights of the summer season at Little Gidding.



Paul Muldoon

IONA COMMUNITIES WEEK

Last October I represented Little Gidding at a gathering of communities on Iona. It was a great privilege to be included as this was the first time that the annual meeting of Iona Community members was joined by members of other communities and also because it implied that we are seen as a dispersed community.

Another dispersed community present was the Servants of Christ the King who do a lot of listening before deciding together to take action. They described themselves as a Third Order without a First or Second one, which could well apply to the Companions.

There were also representatives from: the Ashram Community in Sheffield; The Well at Willen, part of the work of the Society of the Sacred Mission based at Milton Keynes; the Othona Community with centres at Bradwell in Essex and Burton Bradstock in Dorset where my elder daughter Susanna met her husband Jim; Corrymeela, a longstanding place

of reconciliation in Northern Ireland; and the Mennonite Community, part of the worldwide Anabaptists.

In my talk I gave a potted history of the households that have lived at Little Gidding and also the Pilsdon Communities based on Little Gidding as they could not be present. I also spoke about the links between Little Gidding and the Lifestyle Movement of which I am chair. A lot of interest was shown both in the Little Gidding tradition and its present manifestations

Openness, welcome, hospitality and generosity were all key words in the presentations and all the communities were also deeply concerned with simple living.

I came back with renewed conviction that what Little Gidding stands for still has a lot to offer in our present world.

Tony Hodgson

Sheep at Little Gidding
(picture by Paul Skirrow)



A WEEKEND AT LITTLE GIDDING

Two deer on the lawn at dawn. Green woodpeckers check the grass for ants for breakfast. We watch and enjoy fresh fruit, cereals, and homemade jam from Little Gidding plums.

Walk a wide circle of local footpaths. We tiptoe through the Baptists' graveyard to peep through the ancient chapel windows. Great Gidding's church visitors' book offers tantalising snippets written by international visitors tracing Giddings ancestors.

Skylarks soaring above winter wheat shoots. Two sea creature fossils lie in a field: a collision of times, sea, sky and a vast field like the ocean, disappearing over the horizon. 'The intersection of the timeless moment is England and nowhere.'

Soup shared with a joyful mixture of friends old and new, talkative after their Friday Eucharist in the church.

Bask under Indian summer sun in the garden, with tea and cake. My reading concentration is happily distracted by a flock of goldfinches darting between bird feeders.

Above, a fearless pair of crows circle and dive bomb the red kite, making him spiral higher and higher above Ferrar House.

Read evening prayer with Paul Skirrow – Elijah's taunts to the prophets of Baal make me laugh, 'perchance your god is asleep'. Did Nicholas Ferrar have a sense of humour? I wonder.



Red Kite near Little Gidding
(picture by Paul Skirrow)

I find myself humming phrases from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* throughout the evening.

Tawny owls call in the night.

Early morning mist hangs over the large field. From my bed I watch golden, heavenly sheep appear in the sun's low rays, as if lit by 'tongues of flame', whilst Nigel joins Paul for morning prayer.

A weekend is never long enough. We will come this way again – for the Nicholas Ferrar Day, to continue our exploration and pilgrimage, and to 'arrive where we started And know the place for the first time.'

Sally Seaman October 2011

LITTLE GIDDING CHURCH

At a meeting of Great Gidding PCC last year, it was decided to ask the Little Gidding Church Subgroup to assess what work needed to be carried out to consolidate the future of St John's Church into the foreseeable future.

In conjunction with the church architect, six main areas were identified:

- Fabric repair (mainly at the east end of the church)
- Restoration of three of the nave windows
- Restoration of the church bell
- Re-gilding of the weather vane
- Restoration and re-gilding of the inscription over the west door
- Conservation of woodwork

Reports and estimates were subsequently sought. These are now to hand and indicate that the restoration in total will be in the order of £30,000. As the church is a Grade I Listed Building, all such matters relating to the church (however small) must be approved by both the Ely DAC (the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches) and English Heritage. At the moment a full schedule of the proposed work is being prepared, and this will be sent to both these bodies, accompanied by the contractors' reports and estimates.

Meanwhile, thought is now being given as to the best way forward to raise the appropriate finance.

If anyone has any questions, or would like to offer any advice or assistance, please contact the chairman of the Subgroup – John De Val (01832 293417).

Michael Keck

Pictures, above and right, by Paul Skirrow.



The Friends will of course give their full support to this project by the PCC, and we hope that many members will be able to help. We will let you know when that stage is reached.

COMPANIONS OF LITTLE GIDDING

The Friends' commitment is to support the witness of the Church of St John, Little Gidding and of the work done at Ferrar House; to keep the flame alive in seeking to preserve the ethos of Christian witness established by Nicholas Ferrar and the Ferrar family in this idyllic, peaceful place. Sometimes it is a silent, individual witness, and sometimes it may be in one of a number of activities organised for and on behalf of the Friends.

But what if one wants to dig deeper, to acquire knowledge and 'stretch oneself in the Faith of Jesus Christ?' The answer may be to join the Companions of Little Gidding, a group of Friends who wish to prod a bit more, to think more deeply how their lives can be more faithfully developed and transformed in the Service of God. The Companions meet from time to time to pray, to think, to listen, to consider.

Last Autumn, the Companions had the benefit of hearing Canon Alan Hargrave from Ely Cathedral who led them in thought and prayer, considering among much else what the Benedictine

Rule might teach us in the present day. Unsurprisingly, a great deal it would seem. Much emphasis was placed on achieving *Balance* in life: listening to God, through Scripture, Quiet Days and Retreats. In *Obedience*, by listening deeply 'with the ear of our heart'. In *Stability*, by being tied to a particular place rather than to people – surely some resonance with Little Gidding in that. In the *Conversatio Morum*, we should strive to be changed into the Likeness of Christ, and be prepared to go on being changed. There must always be an emphasis in looking outward into the world and keeping the Big Vision.

The Companions concentrate on one or more of a number of issues in their Witness, including Prayer, Study, Lifestyle, Work and Fellowship.

There will be a Quiet Day on Friday 8 June starting at 10.30am, incorporating the regular Service of Holy Communion at 12 noon.

Might you be interested in joining the Companions on that day, or of finding out more? If so, please contact Tony Hodgson on 01832 275343.



FERRAR HOUSE NEWS

The decision was made to close Ferrar House from the middle of December to the end of January, and this produced real savings on running costs particularly as it coincided with a relatively mild spell of weather.

However, it was possible to take phone calls, respond to emails and take bookings remotely resulting in substantial advantages to the House without any perceived loss of business. A team of volunteers checked the House regularly, and there appears to have been no detriment either to the fabric of the building or to the business of the House as a result of the six weeks closure.

There is cautious optimism over the bookings, which look hopeful for the coming months. February saw a number of retreatants, Quiet Days, and Group bookings. Availability for Saturdays over the next few months is limited.

There have been a number of updates to the blog and an encouraging number of 'hits'.

We look ahead to longer days and clement weather, and the garden group is now back in action after the winter break. Maintenance has taken place, the hedges have been trimmed, and the glories of an English Summer at Little Gidding are just around the corner.

Wendy Skirrow



photo by Paul Skirrow

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one can become blasé about modern pilgrimage and its attempt to get into step with another age, I find myself also learning all the way.

I have, as a matter of fact, come this way a number of times without moving on from literature into faith. But today it is different. It must be the tumultuous weather, the realisation that our route is the one that Nicholas rode on his horse when, at his old schoolfriend's careful instruction, he cancelled the ruin of Leighton Bromswold.

This was where our pilgrimage began. To somehow lift the meanness of Bemerton it had been decided to give Herbert the prebendal church of Leighton Bromswold.

It was wrecked, needless to say. Everything they gave him was in disorder, the priesthood most of all. He probably never saw Leighton Bromswold, but today we certainly saw him. I preached from the right-hand pulpit, looking down on the wide aisle. He had told Nicholas to think of Isaiah 35 when he got the builders to make it.

'And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness ... it shall be for the way-faring men ... but the redeemed shall walk there.'

Herbert's pale benches bank this purposeful aisle, and his greenish glass casts a springtime light. We move from his handsome nave to his

purposeful sanctuary for the eucharist. Shorts, big boots, dog-leads, packs. Now and then I find myself wondering 'what the dead had no speech for when living', as the lovely familiar words that Herbert 'set' in his verse are said yet again.

At Little Gidding, five miles away, another feast awaits, plus for myself a destination loaded with language. Such imagery. Such inescapable sentences and songs and memories and friendships. Herbert would have been delighted. 'Delight' was high in his vocabulary. Although young, he could not walk far, owing to the 'mole working away in his breast', that is, TB.

Ronald Blythe

little gidding

Saturday 19 May

**10.30 am: Holy Communion
at Leighton Bromswold**

**1 pm: Pilgrimage Walk
to Little Gidding**

4.15 pm: Evensong

**Pilgrimage leader:
Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely**

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

pilgrimage

A JOURNEY, IN MAYTIME, TO LITTLE GIDDING

Ronald Blythe, preacher at the Eucharist at 2011's Pilgrimage, subsequently wrote this piece in his 'Word from Wormingford' column in the Church Times, 27 May 2011.

'If you came this way,' wrote the poet famously, '... you would find the hedges White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.' And he was right. It is the feast of Matthias, the otherwise anonymous man chosen to mend the broken circle, and we are on pilgrimage to Little Gidding.

The verges wave with cow parsley, the clouds are mountainous, and red kites are acrobatic. It really is the most marvellous tramp. At Steeple Gidding, I watch the procession breast a grassy hill, a happy 'over the top', and

I hear the litany being blown about as it descends to the redundant church. Young and old, familiar nameless faces, often beautiful, enter its cold space. Then the last lap to where Eliot found that 'prayer is more than an order of words'.

The Bishop of Peterborough lays flowers on Nicholas Ferrar's tombstone. The Ferrar brothers and George Herbert were Westminster schoolboys who could hardly have expected to end up here in Huntingdonshire.

Part of their education was to be crocodiled along the Thames path by Lancelot Andrewes, learning all the way. And, rather to my surprise, for

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photo by Paul Skirrow