

A VIEW FROM LITTLE GIDDING

Tom Gillum shares a personal view on Christian gentleness.

Since my earliest memories, I have been reminded of my father's school motto: 'Manners maketh man' – at the heart of being a 'gentleman'. In a nation which has taken pride in this, it is a bit illogical I think, that in an attempt to help us identify more easily with him, some preachers have wanted to emphasise that he is not: gentle Jesus meek and mild. I understand why.

'Gentleness is a quality hard to find in a society which admires toughness and roughness. We are encouraged to get things done fast, even when people get hurt in the process. Success, accomplishment and productivity count. Gentle is the one who is attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of the other and enjoys being together more than accomplishing something. A gentle person treads carefully, looks tenderly and touches with reverence. A gentle person knows that true growth requires nurture, not force.'

(Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, 6 February)

Would it not be very good if English Christians could again be known for their gentleness? It is part of the risky way of relating in the way of Jesus. St Paul knew gentleness to be a primary characteristic of the Master (2 Corinthians 10.1). Easily hurt, humans cannot be vulnerable with one whose hands are not gentle. It may well be preferable to bottle up pain and guilt unless words of forgiveness are heard spoken with gentleness. And we will retreat back into a safe, materialist and passing world rather than risk our vision of the New Creation remaining unseen by one who does not know to 'tread softly because you tread upon Christ's dreams'.



FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER



May 2009

SPRING AND SUMMER AT LITTLE GIDDING



The cherry tree is in full springtime flower at Little Gidding, but it is two summer events that we look forward to in this month's Newsletter.

The annual TS Eliot Festival takes place on the last weekend of June (27

and 28 June), and a fortnight later on Saturday 11 July Little Gidding is the destination for the annual Pilgrimage.

Full details are inside on pages 4 and 8, along with news from the last few months.

LITTLE GIDDING: THE BLOSSOM OF SNOW

It may be Spring on our front page, but just a few weeks earlier, back in February, Little Gidding was covered in snow for a couple of weeks. Like much of England, snow fell and the low temperatures (by our English standards anyway) kept it there for some time. For Annah, Ferrar House volunteer from Uganda, the snow was a great novelty; Hannah and Catherine enjoyed messing around in the white stuff too.

At the same time, a BBC crew arrived to film a feature for the TV programme *Arena* expected to be screened on BBC2 at the end of May.



Left: Annah, Catherine and Hannah

Right from top: snowing; BBC film crew; Annah enjoys the snow
Opposite: 'towards sundown' – the view southwest from Little Gidding



TV AND RADIO

On 22 February, BBC Radio 4's *Sunday Worship* was broadcast from Bemerton in Salisbury. The service commemorated the life of George Herbert, friend of Nicholas Ferrar, and at the end of his life rector of Bemerton. Beginning and ending with haunting violin music (a meditation on the poem 'The Flower'), the service featured Herbert's poetry set to music as hymns – some well known, and other tunes only recently composed. Canon Judy Rees led the service, assisted by Ronald Blythe, Vikram Seth and others, with singing by the Farrant Singers. Ferrar's role in the publication of Herbert's poetry was also mentioned.

The settings of Herbert's poems have been published as *Another Music* which is available from the Bemerton website www.georgeherbert.org.uk.

A few days later, Radio 4's *In Our Time* was a discussion of T S Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land', with three leading Eliot scholars. This episode can still be listened to through the programme archives at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20090226.shtml.

Coming soon is the BBC's poetry season on both radio and television. This includes an *Arena* programme on Eliot to be broadcast on BBC2. We do not yet know exactly when this will be broadcast, so keep an eye on the schedules.

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.

LITTLE GIDDING CALENDAR 2009

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

Wednesday 13 May Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Saturday 13 June Geoffrey Hill

A Quiet Morning will usually follow each Poetry Evening, often on the same, or similar, theme. These are held from 10am until lunchtime on either the 14th of the month, or the second Sunday, followed by a 'bring and share' lunch.

Thursday 14 May Quiet Morning
Sunday 14 June Quiet Morning

Quiet Days led by Ken and Guinette Davies

Wednesday 1 July 'Life's Journey'
Saturday 19 September 'Recognising Pride and Learning Humility'
Wednesday 2 December 'Behold the King'

Regular services at Little Gidding

Sunday 31 May 6pm Pentecost Evensong at Little Gidding

Other Meetings and Events

Sunday 14 June 12.30pm meeting of the Companions of Ferrar House
Saturday 27 June **TS Eliot Festival**
Sunday 28 June visit of TS Eliot Summer School
Saturday 11 July Annual Little Gidding Pilgrimage
Saturday 7 November Eliot's 'Little Gidding' Day
Saturday 5 December 11am AGM of the Friends of Little Gidding

For further details about any event, to book a place or to book your own event, please contact the Revd Catherine Lack at Ferrar House.

telephone: 01832 293 383
email: info@ferrarhouse.co.uk
www.ferrarhouse.co.uk

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



Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
 Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing
The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
 Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation.
Where is the summer, the unimaginable
 Zero summer?

(Words copyright the estate of TS Eliot 1942)

LITTLE GIDDING PILGRIMAGE

This year's Pilgrimage to Little Gidding is on **Saturday 11 July**.

We are delighted that Bishop John Flack has agreed to lead the Pilgrimage. Bishop John, who is at present assistant Bishop in the diocese of Peterborough, was formerly the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative at the Vatican, and before that Bishop of Huntingdon in the diocese of Ely.

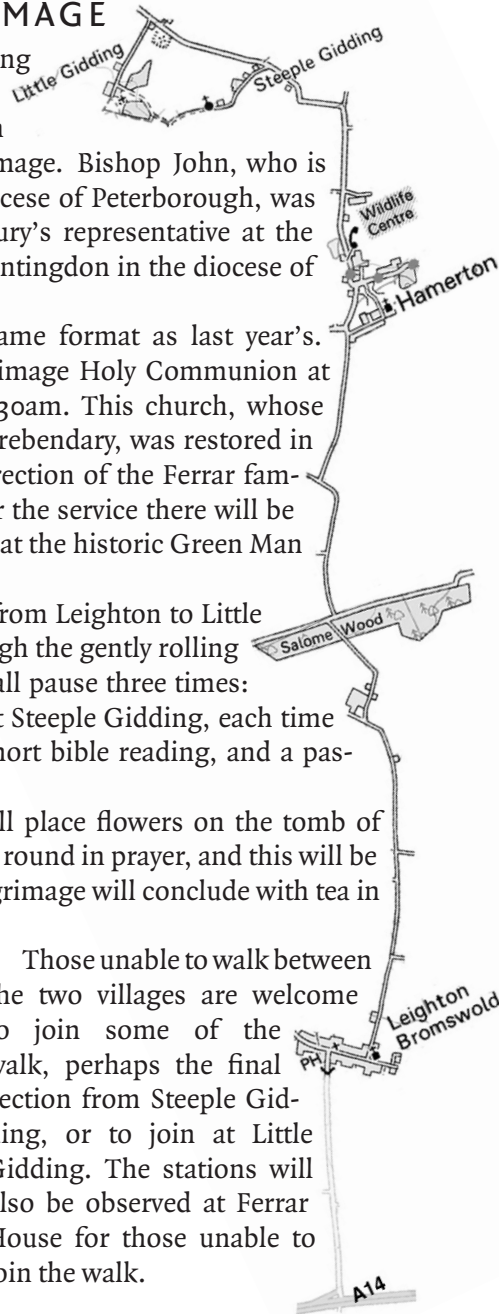
The Pilgrimage will follow the same format as last year's. Bishop John will preside at the Pilgrimage Holy Communion at Leighton Bromswold, starting at 10.30am. This church, whose title was held by George Herbert as prebendary, was restored in the seventeenth century under the direction of the Ferrar family with funds raised by Herbert. After the service there will be a Pilgrimage lunch of bread and soup at the historic Green Man inn in the village.

We shall then walk the five miles from Leighton to Little Gidding, taking a leisurely pace through the gently rolling Huntingdonshire countryside. We shall pause three times: at Salome Wood, at Hamerton, and at Steeple Gidding, each time gathering for prayer and hearing a short bible reading, and a passage from the life of Nicholas Ferrar.

At Little Gidding, Bishop John will place flowers on the tomb of Nicholas Ferrar as the pilgrims gather round in prayer, and this will be followed by choral Evensong. The Pilgrimage will conclude with tea in Ferrar House.



Those unable to walk between the two villages are welcome to join some of the walk, perhaps the final section from Steeple Gidding, or to join at Little Gidding. The stations will also be observed at Ferrar House for those unable to join the walk.



the first Eliot Festival in 2006, is well-known as a leading English poet. She is a freelance academic and broadcaster and the great-great granddaughter of Charles Darwin whose bicentenary falls this year. This promises to be an exciting concert – not to be missed.

Summer School

The second day of the Festival is shared with the new International TS Eliot Summer School, which is being held in London all week. The School features a fabulous array of renowned poets and Eliot scholars, and many of them will be joining in the visit to Little Gidding, including Nobel Prize winning poet, Seamus Heaney, who will share in reading 'Little Gidding'.

Sunday's programme concludes with afternoon tea followed by a service of choral Evensong, sung by Oundle School choir.

Further information

For more information about the Eliot Festival weekend please see the Festival website at <http://littlegidding.org.uk/eliotfestival>.

The Summer School is independently organized and is not affiliated with the Friends or the Eliot Society. Further details can be found at its website at <http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events/TSE>.

We hope that many of you will be able to come to the Festival on one or

both days, and that you will encourage your friends to come as well.

Tickets

Tickets are available for Saturday and Sunday, and there is a generous discount if you purchase a weekend ticket which includes afternoon tea and supper on Saturday and lunch and afternoon tea on Sunday.

Tickets for Sunday are limited as we have to accommodate the members of the Summer School. However, a small number of tickets is available to Friends and others for Sunday's programme. Priority will be given to those who also book tickets for Saturday. Please see the enclosed booking form for further details. We encourage you to book early, as this will not only reduce the risk of disappointment, but also help the organizing committee to sleep a little more easily!



Steeple Gidding Church: the 2007 Festival

T S ELIOT FESTIVAL

This year's annual Eliot Festival at Little Gidding will be held over the weekend of 27 and 28 June.

The Festival has grown in just a few years to become a much-loved fixture in our calendar. It's not just an important literary festival, it's also a major celebration of the life and work of one of the twentieth century's greatest poets, and held at the place which is the subject of his last poem, widely acknowledged as his greatest achievement.

In addition it's a mixture of fun and scholarship, meeting old friends and making new ones, hearing talks from those working in the field of Eliot, some established and some just beginning to make their mark, and new music and poetry, together, of course, with the hospitality that delights all visitors.

This year the Festival extends into the Sunday with a visit by members and teachers from the new International Summer School being held in London the following week.

Saturday's programme

The organizing committee – a joint committee of the Friends and of the T S Eliot Society – have been working hard since the close of last year's Festival to make this year's even better.

The main day of the Festival is the Saturday, and we hope that many of

you will be able to come. The afternoon will feature talks by Professor Hugh Haughton, Professor of English at York University and an acknowledged expert on Eliot. Amongst other things he is editing the second volume of *The Letters of T S Eliot* (to be published later this year). His talk is entitled 'T S Eliot and the Use of Letters'.

The keynote speaker is Dr Anne Stillman, fellow, tutor and lecturer at Clare College, Cambridge. Dr Stillman wrote her doctoral thesis on Eliot, and is continuing her research.

Between these two talks we shall again invite Festival participants to read favourite short extracts from Eliot's prose or poetry. This has been a highly enjoyable and an interesting feature of the last couple of Festivals.

After supper, we shall move to Steeple Gidding Church for the evening concert.

The 'Riprap Collective' is a group of musicians and writers from Cambridge, exploring the 'exchange of ideas between poets and musicians'. The group will perform and improvise alongside Ruth Padel. Ruth Padel, speaking at the 2006 Festival



FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends

Another summer lies ahead of us and I hope that many of you will be able to join us at Little Gidding and Westminster Abbey.

Can I give those of you who have not yet renewed your membership a gentle reminder? It would greatly help us if you were able to do so, and in particular if you can set up a standing order to make annual (or more regular) payments. As the Friends is a registered charity we can also benefit if you are able and willing to make a Gift Aid declaration. This enables us to reclaim from the taxman 22 pence for every pound donated. The only qualification is that you must be a UK taxpayer. Tax on income, savings or capital all count.

We depend as always on your generosity to maintain and enhance the beauty and holiness of this place that is so special.

With best wishes,

Simon Kershaw

ELIOT'S 'LITTLE GIDDING' DAY

Graham Fawcett, now the President of the T S Eliot Society, has held two highly-successful and over-subscribed days at Little Gidding to study Eliot's poem. A third day is being arranged and is planned for Saturday 7 November. If you missed this study day the first time and would like to join, then contact Ferrar House for further details.

little gidding

Saturday 11 July

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

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

**4pm: Prayers at the
tomb of Nicholas Ferrar**

Evensong

Friends of Little Gidding
www.littlegidding.org.uk

pilgrimage

BISHOP IAN CUNDY

It is with sadness that we report the sudden death of Ian Cundy, the Bishop of Peterborough, on 7 May. Bishop Ian, who led the Little Gidding Pilgrimage in 2006, had been ill for some time, and was due to retire on the grounds of ill health in the summer. Our thoughts and prayers are with Bishop Ian's wife, Jo, and their family.

NEWS FROM FERRAR HOUSE



What has happened here since the last issue of the Newsletter?

At one level, not a lot! The grass has grown a little, the cherry tree near the church is getting used to its new shape (some 40% was cut off in order to clear the view from the House to the church), and is finally coming into bloom (I suspect the surgery delayed its flowering at least a little); we're a little bit older.

At another level, an awful lot has happened here.

The Team we have here at Ferrar House is exceptional: the way the meals are produced, on time, hot, no fuss, no bother, with minimal staff, never ceases to amaze me – not least because usually I have very little part in that. When we're busy we seem to be able to work in the kitchen, rarely bumping into each other or interrupting the others' flow. It's a real tribute to Annah and Hannah who make it all possible. We had a couple of very busy weekends. Two groups in: a church group upstairs, an 'outdoor education' group downstairs? No problem. Food for twenty-eight, with several special dietary needs? No problem. Extra beds for people I've forgotten about? No problem. A mountain of ironing? No problem. Soon done. Then when extra volunteers arrive – Hey presto! we have a wonderful new laundry room and linen cupboard, complete with labels as to which sheets are where, clean, tidy, miraculous!

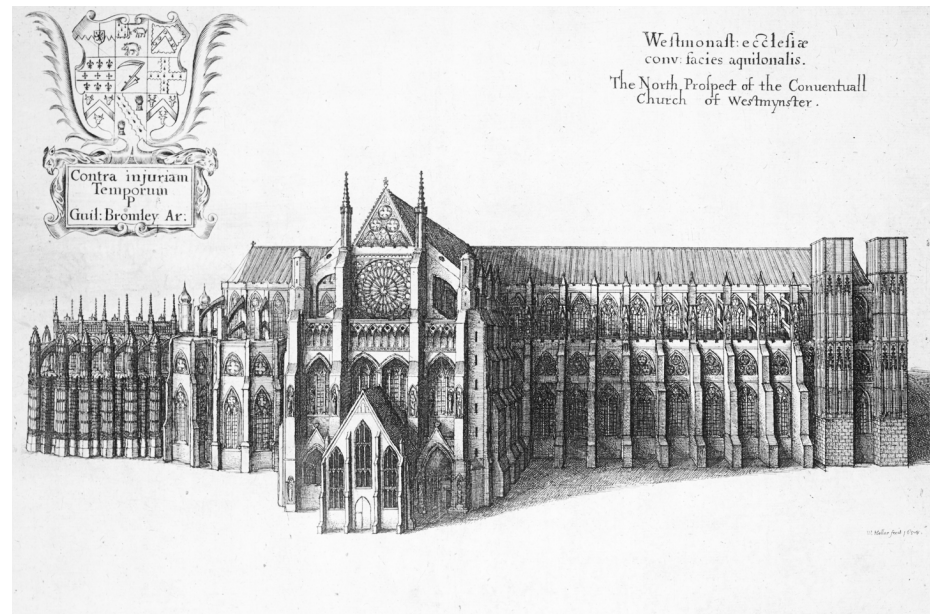
Of course there are moments, like when cries of 'Help! Help!' were heard echoing through the building. First the Ferrar House staff tried to run and help; then participants from the church group who were in went to assist ... but it was only the First Aid course doing role play; and I'm glad to say there were no real casualties.

One day we re-defined heaven: Heaven is a spring morning at Little Gidding. It was perfect. Sun, quiet, birds singing, the whole world seemingly at peace ... and while we were saying Morning Prayer outside I looked up and interrupted the reading (John 12) to say 'Look! What is that?' It was an enormous white bird, glistening in the sun. I wasn't quite sure what it was – White Stork? Can't be. Egret? It's got its neck out. The answer is that it was almost certainly a Spoon-bill, on its way to the Wash. Magnificent!

Little Gidding is indeed a thin place – there is not much between earth and heaven here.

Catherine

WESTMINSTER ABBEY



It was on Trinity Sunday, 4 June 1626, that Nicholas Ferrar was ordained Deacon in Westminster Abbey by the Bishop of St Davids, William Laud, later Archbishop of Canterbury.

To mark this occasion, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey have invited the Friends to attend Evensong on Trinity Sunday this year, **Sunday 7 June** at 3pm.

We hope that this London occasion will provide an opportunity for members from the south to join with us, as well as for many to visit what has been described as the parish church of the Commonwealth.

We will be joined at this service by members of the London Company of

Deacons, whose patron is Nicholas Ferrar, and with whom we hope to develop a long friendship.

If you are interested in joining this special occasion, or if you would like further information, please can you contact us as soon as possible, either by writing or phoning Ferrar House, or by email to chair@littlegidding.org.uk. We need to let the authorities at the Abbey know how many of us to expect.

The seventeenth-century engraving of the north side of Westminster Abbey by Wenceslaus Hollar shows the Abbey as it appeared in Ferrar's time; the two west towers were only completed in 1745 to a design by Nicholas Hawksmoor