



# FRIENDS OF LITTLE GIDDING NEWSLETTER

February 2021



Photograph by Richard Mortlock



Photograph by Michael Keck

Positive news to begin 2021: St John's Church bell has been restored and rehung. Unlike the old bell which was swung in order to sound, with the new installation the bell remains static; pulling the rope moves the actual clapper to sound the bell. This change was at the recommendation of the DAC Bell Advisor.

We remember with thanks the late Ian Bentley who has made this and ongoing work at St John's possible.

*Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices; something understood.  
(From **Prayer** by George Herbert)*

## Thoughts from Richard and Angie's last visit to Ferrar House: 7 March 2020

### *Both a still place and a place of busyness*

We arrived to find lots of activity. A team of guys were trimming the hedges. People were arriving for a 'Friends of Little Gidding' meeting, catching up over a coffee. Guests that had been staying overnight were getting ready to leave, and the volunteer gardening group was in full swing.

Despite all the busyness, there was still space for us to sit and wait, to walk and wonder. There is always chance to find a quiet corner, especially in the church. How many people had sat there before me, over how many years, including King Charles 1? How many prayers have been prayed and answered? They say that more prayers are prayed in a hospital waiting room than in any church. Whilst that may be true, I think it is important for people to be able to seek out a quiet place for themselves. Somewhere private that feels like it's yours alone, where you can find time to reflect and catch your breath. Maybe it could be an hour in the early morning, before the rest of the world wakes up, a quiet seat on a country path, a walk on a secluded beach, a pew in an empty church. Whatever works for you.

If you don't stop moving, maybe running away from what you feel is chasing you, when you do eventually come to a stop, either from exhaustion, or you run out of road, whatever was chasing you will catch you up, hit you and probably knock you over. Take time to stop and look at it now, before it does. Let others do what they need to do, but don't let that stop you doing what you need to do. Take some time out that's just for you. And maybe Little Gidding is just the perfect place to start.....



Article by Angie Mortlock and photographs by Richard Mortlock

## **NICHOLAS FERRAR'S RELEVANCE TO 'BLACK LIVES MATTER'**

*This article was part of a presentation by Raymond Garfoot to the Little Gidding Poetry Group in November 2020. His theme was Black Lives Matter; including contemporary poetry as well as this exploration of the Virginia Company's involvement with slavery. I am grateful for Raymond's balanced research into this timely issue.*

First, the negative side:

Nicholas Ferrar's involvement with Virginia is probably due to the fact that his father was a leading London merchant in skins and furs, and he wanted to trade with the native Americans who were expert fur trappers. Nowadays the fur trade is seen as cruel and exploitive, but we have to judge the Ferrar ventures by 17th century standards. We cannot rewrite history according to the assumptions of the 21st century.

We can justifiably criticise the Virginia Company as a colonial venture. Since King James I was short of money, the company was set up as a joint stock company financed by shareholders who were called 'adventurers' along with the settlers. Nicholas Ferrar invested £50 of his own money in it, but lost it all when the King dissolved the company in 1624 and made Virginia a Crown Colony. Nicholas tried to use his position as assistant treasurer of the company, along with the treasurer Edwin Sandys to try to diversify agriculture and lessen its dependence on tobacco plantations, but was not given enough time and the colony was never really a commercial success, even after they had organised a lottery.

We now realise that colonialism aimed to destroy the culture of native peoples as well as their economies. The first aim of the company in 1609 was stated as converting the Native Americans to Anglican Christianity. Power politics came into this, because it was hoped by the King and court that this would help to prevent Catholic France and Spain from controlling the eastern seaboard of North America. But it denied the vibrant culture and spirituality of the local Native Americans who were organised into a confederation of tribes called the Powhatan, part of the Algonquin linguistic group. Chief Wahunsenaca who had the title of Powhatan said, "Your coming is not for trade, but to invade my people and possess my country."

Now to the positive side:

Chief Wahunsenaca's daughter happened to be the famous Pocahontas who married John Rolfe from Heacham in Norfolk and was feted in England before her untimely death aboard ship at Gravesend in 1617, which Native Americans attributed to poisoning rather than disease. English people wanted to see the Powhatans as savages, and the story got around that the early settler John Smith from Willoughby near Gainsborough in Lincolnshire was about to be murdered by the chief until Pocahontas threw herself in front of him to protect him. The truth was quite different according to Native American oral tradition, for the chief had wanted to initiate John Smith and the settlers as part of his Powhatan confederation, and Pocahontas was seen by him as a symbol and gift of peace. Actually she was too young to be present on that occasion!

When Nicholas Ferrar's father of the same name died in 1620, he left £300 towards the building of a college for Native Americans in Virginia that they "may be persuaded that it is not the intent of our nation to make their children slaves, but to bring them to a better manner of living in this world and to the way of eternal happiness in the life to come". But the Ferrars had enemies within the company. In 1616 Deputy Governor Samuel Argall decreed "no trade nor familiarity with the perfidious savages, lest they discover our weakness." There were recurrent wars against the Native Americans, culminating in the Jamestown massacre of 1622 when the colonists came off worst, but Chief Wahunsenaca (who had died in 1618) declared, "Why should you take by force that from us which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food? What can you get by war?" It was the British who were the savages, controlled by the authoritarian King and his court.

In 1621 while Nicholas Ferrar was working for the company the first Africans arrived in Virginia to be sold as slaves. They were civilised people from a well organised country with towns, villages and an agricultural economy in a Spanish colony south of the Congo River, and many of them were Roman Catholics. They had been taken to Luanda (the capital of modern Angola) as prisoners of war by the Portuguese and their African allies and were being shipped across the Atlantic on the Portuguese ship the Sao Joao Bautista to be slaves in New Spain (modern Mexico). John the Baptist would turn in his grave at being associated with this slave ship! As they were entering the Caribbean Sea, they were intercepted by a British pirate ship jointly owned by Samuel Argall and Robert Rich the Earl of Warwick, and about 60 of the Africans were diverted to Virginia where they were dumped on the colony to be sold off and dispersed. But in 1624 when the Virginia Company was disbanded there were still only 21 Africans living in the colony, mostly as domestic servants with the 906 European white settlers.

At the time when Nicholas Ferrar was working for the company, the tobacco plantations were worked by white settlers who were indentured labourers for 7 years until they qualified to be given their own land. Indentured service is nowadays regarded as a form of slavery according to the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, and many were indeed treated as slaves. Since their work was highly specialised, the planters needed a more stable labour force where they did not have to recruit people from new settlers every 7 years, but it was not until 1661, a generation after Nicholas Ferrar's death in 1637, that slavery became legal in Virginia. There is clear documentary evidence that Nicholas Ferrar was opposed to slavery in principle. His archives contain a 16- page pamphlet indicting King James's supporter Sir Thomas Smith, entitled 'Sir Thomas Smith's Misgovernment of the Virginia Company'. In it, Nicholas alleges that Dr John Woodall had bought some Polish settlers as slaves, selling them to the then governor Lord de la Warr. He also claimed that Smith was trying to reduce other colonists to slavery by extending their period of indenture indefinitely beyond the 7th year. In this, Nicholas Ferrar was 150 years ahead of his time, as the antislavery movement did not really get under way until the 1770s.



Virginia Ferrar's Map of Virginia 1651, reproduced from reprint in the end-sheets of Clare College 1326-1926 by M.D. Forbes

The Church of England was then gripped by an austere Calvinism dating from the reign of the Protestant King Edward VI which is reflected in the 39 Articles of Religion which defines Anglicanism even today. Calvinists believed in the absolute sovereignty of God, so for them it was impossible for people to defy God by exercising their own free will. Therefore, the Calvinists departed from the Bible in saying that when people rejected God it was only because God had willed it and had condemned them to damnation right from their birth. In fact, the Calvinists believed that the whole social order was determined by God, and this would for many people include slavery.

By asking to be ordained deacon in 1626 by Bishop (later Archbishop) William Laud, Nicholas Ferrar was aligning himself with the anti-Calvinists in the Church of England who were in the ascendancy during the reign of Charles I. They were called Arminians after the Dutch reformer Jacobus Arminius. They believed in the love of God for all people, so that we are all free to decide whether or not we want to be a Christian, and all are welcome. So it was impossible for an anti-Calvinist Arminian to justify slavery.

Nicholas was also a Renaissance Humanist, which in those times involved being Christian rather than atheist. The Renaissance marked a new holistic interest in people as human beings, which is why he studied medicine at Cambridge and then at Leipzig, Prague and Padua. He was in touch with all aspects of Renaissance thought, and even translated into English 'The Hundred and Ten Considerations' of the Spanish humanist Juan de Valdes (or Valdesso) which had been banned by the Inquisition and is now available online.

When the dying poet George Herbert sent the manuscripts of his poems in 1633 to Nicholas Ferrar who then decided to publish them, they were co-operating not only as friends from Cambridge days but as Arminian anti-Calvinists, mystics and humanists.

In The Church Porch LXIV, Herbert writes,  
'Man is God's image; but a poore man is  
Christ's stamp to boot; both images regard.  
God reckons for him, counts the favour His...

Another friend of Nicholas Ferrar, the Anglican cleric and later Catholic convert Richard Crashaw (c 1613- 1649), wrote in his book **The Temple of Sacred Poems** (A reference to George Herbert's book which was called **The Temple**),

Know you fair, on what you look;  
Divinest love lies in this book,  
Expecting fire from your eyes,  
To kindle this his sacrifice.

I like to think that the 17th century Little Gidding community, though steeped in Anglican devotion through the prayer book, was really based on Renaissance humanism, philosophy and mysticism. It was a lay community, an extended family of men, women and children, and although Nicholas Ferrar was ordained deacon for the purpose of leading devotions, he pointedly refused to be further ordained as a priest. There was no sense of compulsion towards particular vows, although Nicholas himself became increasingly austere by his own personal choice. As well as helping each other, they served the surrounding villages in different ways. They were involved in education through their school, the family's Little Academy and discussion groups. Nicholas Ferrar used his knowledge of medicine to organise a dispensary and help the sick in the area, and they supported four poor widows.

So I think Little Gidding stands for:

1. A Mystical approach to God and Spirituality.
2. A Humanist view of life and concern for individuals of all races, classes and beliefs.
3. A positive attitude to the natural world
4. Mutual tolerance and peace.

I think therefore that it is just as relevant in the 21st century as it was in the 17th.

## **And the work at Little Gidding continues....**

Hospitality Manager Sue Capp and her team have been working hard for many months refurbishing Ferrar House. Their dedication during this difficult time is appreciated. We all look forward to visiting again once this is possible.

The next phase of work at St John's Church will be to bring in electricity for lighting in the Oratory and discreet power points within the Church. Lighting by candle-light within the Church body will remain as it ever was.

Next, there will be a reordering of the Oratory, followed by treatment to the stonework around the Ferrar tombs. This is to make easier access for wheelchairs and to prevent any trip hazards.

### **Dates for your diary:**

All events are subject to the current Government restrictions:

Saturday 1 May **The reopening of Ferrar House**

Sunday May 9 **Little Gidding Open Gardens**

September 25 **Virtual Little Gidding Pilgrimage via Zoom**

Saturday 4 December **Nicholas Ferrar Day and Friends AGM**

Saturday 14 May 2022 **Little Gidding Pilgrimage led by Revd Malcolm Guite**

A recorded service from Little Gidding led by the Revd Canon Fiona Brampton is available from noon each Friday via links from the North Leightonstone Benefice website under YouTube videos; Friends of Little Gidding Facebook page; North Leightonstone Benefice Facebook Group or via this YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWZUrcG9C0s&t=33s>

For further information, please contact the Hospitality Manager, Mrs. Sue Capp, at Ferrar House, telephone:01832 293 383; email [info@ferrarhouse.co.uk](mailto:info@ferrarhouse.co.uk)

For an updated calendar and diary of events, see [www.littlegidding.org.uk](http://www.littlegidding.org.uk)  
Information is also shared on our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/littlegidding](https://www.facebook.com/littlegidding) - 'like' this page to receive updates. For further event details or to arrange your own event, please contact the Hospitality Manager, Mrs. Sue Capp, at Ferrar House, telephone:01832 293 383; email [info@ferrarhouse.co.uk](mailto:info@ferrarhouse.co.uk)

## TS Eliot Festival

*Dear Friends of the TS Eliot Festival at Little Gidding,*

*For reasons all too familiar in these difficult times, the 2021 TS Eliot Festival at Little Gidding has been cancelled. Two summers without gathering in Little Gidding to celebrate the poem we all love is two summers too many. But we have high hopes for next year: thanks to a generous continuing grant from the Old Possum's Practical Trust, we can look forward to a bigger, better TS Eliot Festival in 2022. See you then!*

*The Festival Committee*

## Membership

A big thank-you to everyone who has renewed their 2021 subscriptions. May we encourage you to support the work of the Friends of Little Gidding by remaining a paid-up member: Individual: £20; Household: £30; Patron: £70.

A cheque made out to 'The Friends of Little Gidding' can be sent to Sally Seaman: 12 Bayswater Avenue Bristol BS6 7NS or for Standing Orders, Gift Aid and online banking information to [membership@littlegidding.org.uk](mailto:membership@littlegidding.org.uk).

This Newsletter has been compiled by Susan Waters, who would be pleased to receive your stories about your experience of Little Gidding – what brought you there, your impressions of the place... Please email contributions and suggestions to [susanwaters144@gmail.com](mailto:susanwaters144@gmail.com) or by post to: NL Editor, FOLG, c/o Ferrar House, Little Gidding, Huntingdon PE28 5RJ.

This email has been sent from [newsletter@littlegidding.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@littlegidding.org.uk) to people on the contact list of the Friends of Little Gidding. If you would like to be removed from our list please email [chair@littlegidding.org.uk](mailto:chair@littlegidding.org.uk)

The Society of the Friends of Little Gidding is a registered charity, number 1102857



Photograph by Richard Mortlock