

PILGRIMS
NEWSLETTER
Aylesford



Goose and Goslings on the pond



Order of Carmelites
SUMMER 2009

www.thefriars.org.uk

Dear Friend of Aylesford,

A kind person recently gave me a book token, so I found time to pop into nearby Maidstone. While I was browsing the shelves in a bookshop, my attention was drawn to a substantial volume on British history. I had long realised that my appreciation of the early history of these islands was weak, so I decided to take the book home - paying first, of course! As I was exchanging the token for my new book, *British History for Dummies*, the woman at the till said with a wry smile, "You didn't come across as a dummy last night when you were on the telly!" She had seen a local BBC news item about the 60th anniversary this year of the return of the friars to our ancient home on 31st October 1949. Fr. David Fox and I had both been interviewed and we were pleasantly surprised at how well the piece had been edited. In fact, what was finally transmitted made us appear like professional historians, which of course neither of us is!

CONNECTIONS

Many groups coming here find not only a strong sense of welcome, but also a way of being connected with others. This is something worth celebrating and broadcasting, especially when occasionally we can feel disheartened by divisive elements in our society. Thankfully, we have good relationships with the local media. Our friends at BBC Radio Kent often give good coverage to various events happening here.



If you can pick it up where you are, one programme where our Prior Provincial, Fr. Wilfrid and other Carmelites often contribute is Lynn Wallis-Eade's *Sunday Programme* (Sundays 6-8.00 am on 96.7 FM and on the Internet). I wonder if one reason that we don't always hear or see good news on the television, radio or in our newspapers is because we do not always think to let local media news desks know. If something good and newsworthy is happening where you are, why not give them advance notice so that they can create some space? One person I would love to hear in a radio interview at some point is our own Fr. Cyril. He has great stories to tell and an uncanny knack of being able to sum up situations with a unique sense of humour.

Recently the Kent Messenger newspaper reported a fantastic day on 20th May here that attracted a record 2,000 young schoolchildren, representing 37 schools from all over Kent and South London, who had gathered for the Cabrini Children's Society Good Shepherd Liturgy. Bishop Patrick Lynch participated in a lively celebration that was entitled, 'Where people find their way'.

Nine primary schools led the service of prayer and thanksgiving as they shared their diverse skills and talents, fabulously depicting in song, dance, verse and drama how we can find our way in life through good example and prayer. Each school proudly displayed their banners and colourful balloons in the shrine area on a fine day, which made it spectacular. We have three Brother Pauls in our community and each of them was seen with radiant faces as they prayed with the children. It was both a spiritual and uplifting day where we witnessed the generosity of children as school by school they processed to give their Lenten offerings for the work of the Cabrini Children's Society. The liturgy concluded with the gospel reading reminding us that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The Carmelite Community was delighted to have played a small part in welcoming the young people to Our Lady's Shrine and has been inspired by the work that Cabrini carries out within the Archdiocese of Southwark and elsewhere. The Society provides a wide range of services to children, young people, families, adults with learning disabilities, schools, parishes and community neighbourhoods. Naturally, a lot of hard work went into preparing the day and so we wish to thank especially our own Anne Pass (Shrine Secretary) and Caroline Bennett (Cabrini Project Manager in Dartford). We look forward to working again in partnership with Cabrini. Caroline was very struck by the potential for creativity here at the priory, so perhaps one project for the future will be a family celebration of the Nativity next year using every area of The Friars. Watch this space!

When young people visit, there is a strong sense of vitality that is generated around the place that encourages us in the sense that young people and faith can and do actually go together. We enjoyed the Altar Servers Pilgrimage on 4th May and we are looking forward to the Southwark Diocesan Youth Festival on 4th July, which again promises to be a day of rejoicing. We have also begun a serious reflection on how best the needs of groups of young people can be met when they come to Aylesford. It is clear to us that when there is good preparation well in advance by organisers of groups, a good outcome is more than possible.

CUMENICAL LINKS

Angelfest was a Youth Festival of the Anglican diocese of Rochester that took place here on 6th June. Fr. Joseph from the community was thrilled to welcome Dr. Brian Castle, Bishop of Tonbridge, to The Friars with the piazza filled with young people who had come together to celebrate their Christian faith. During the day marquees had been arranged for a wide variety of activities designed to help them explore and express their commitment. In the evening our ever-helpful sound engineer, Gordon, was on hand to mix and monitor the sound levels as a variety of bands played Christian music. Brother Michael kept a watchful eye to make sure that Gordon was moving the correct slides on the mixing desk! Even as he prayed the Rosary, Fr. Alphie's toes were tapping in his room that overlooks the shrine to the rhythm of energetic praise music!

We are delighted that we have good ecumenical links with the dioceses of Rochester, Tonbridge and Canterbury. More locally, on Pentecost Sunday (31st May) we had our annual ecumenical prayer service, this year at the church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Aylesford village. If you are visiting The Friars some time, do take a short stroll to this historic place of worship. It has stood on its hill overlooking a ford of the River Medway for nearly a Millennium. It is at this ford that Hengist and Horsa are said to have been victorious at the Battle of Aylesford, so paving the way for the Anglo-Saxon era. Maybe reading my new history book is beginning to pay dividends! In the north chancel of the church stands a grand memorial to John Banks, one-time owner of Aylesford Priory. He was a contemporary and friend of Samuel Pepys.

During our joint Pentecost Service, Christian communities from the surrounding areas filled the church and each shared some good news about what God was doing in their own churches. It was a touching testimony to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. Once again, it was striking to realise that we could all do with a bit of good news to hear and share - and there's plenty out there if we can get together and focus on the positive. Sister Beth and members of The Friars choir joined together with the choirs from the other churches to lead us in melodious song; and the organ, by Forster & Andrews of Hull, dating from 1865 was a delight to hear.

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

From its beginnings in the 13th Century Aylesford Priory has had strong international bonds with Carmelite friars around the world. A familiar

face over the past year in our community has been Fr. Jose from Kerala, India. He has made many friends in the area and has been a very willing and able minister of God's gentleness to the people who come and to our own Carmelite fraternity. He returned to India on 12th June to take up new responsibilities. We will miss him very much. Do keep him in your prayer.



On 6th-9th June we were delighted to welcome two of our brothers from our General Curia in Rome. Fr. Christian Körner is the Vice-General of the Carmelite Order throughout the world and Fr. John Keating is the Carmelite Councillor General for Europe. Fr. David Waite had seen our visitors from Rome in May as he had spent four weeks there working hard in our international library. They came to Aylesford to meet with every member of the community; they offered encouragement and listened to the hopes and concerns, the experiences and opinions of the friars here so that they could have a good appreciation of how we try to witness to our Carmelite vocation in contemporary society. We were also able to receive from them news of developments in which Carmelites are involved around the world.

Some years ago an exciting development was the formation of a Carmelite NGO (Non Governmental Organisation) attached to the United Nations. A meeting of the European representatives of the NGO took place at Aylesford on 2nd-3rd May. The group explored the area of human trafficking and will be seeking ways to encourage people to become more aware of this reality in our world today. The international executive of the Carmelite NGO will also be meeting here at the end of August.

F AITH IN SOCIETY

Last August The Friars was invited to join a Local Strategic Partnership, a non-statutory body that brings together the different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors working at a local level. Together with Bishop Brian Castle of Tonbridge, we have been asked to bring something of the so-called faith sector to the body. Visitors from different Christian denominations and also different world faiths come to Aylesford. I wonder if it might be possible to work towards gathering representatives of the major faiths for a conference on important social issues.

The main religions in our society all have a profound respect for the dignity of the human person, so perhaps an exploration of the evil of human trafficking in Britain might become a live topic that may lead us into uncharted territory. As pilgrims sometimes groping for a way forward in mutual respect and trust, a common social issue may well unite us in action. You might be thinking that human trafficking surely does not happen in modern-day Britain, and certainly not where I live. I believe that if we dig deeply enough we might have an unpleasant surprise. As people of faith we cannot remain blind to the suffering of others; neither can we be silent and inactive. The core of The Friars is the experience of God. The Carmelites at Aylesford believe deeply that prayer and spirituality will always find concrete expression in practical concern for others. I wonder if God grieves when “religious” people are not moved with the compassion manifested by Jesus during his earthly ministry. What do you think?

ARCHBISHOPS

Brother Laurence is always seen with a spring in his step when there is a bishop at the priory! As you know, a great friend of the Carmelites here is Archbishop Kevin McDonald. It was a great joy to see him here on Saturday, 30th May for a Mass celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage. Archbishop Kevin welcomed 1,000 people, including 256 married couples from the diocese of Southwark. They were all



celebrating special anniversaries of their weddings this year and came with their families and friends to express their gratitude to God. We look forward to seeing him again on 27th June when the diocese celebrates the end of the Year of St. Paul and again on 10th October when he will preside at Mass during the visit of the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

On Trinity Sunday, 7th June the recently inaugurated Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, presided at a special Mass at the shrine for the 90th Anniversary of the foundation of the Knights of St. Columba. During his homily, Archbishop Vincent emphasised the invitation that we have all received to grow in a mature spirituality that is firmly rooted in

the Scriptures. Brothers Paschal and Victor looked very pleased to get a photograph with Archbishop Vincent! The Carmelite Community adds our congratulations to the Knights on their anniversary and we wish also to renew our thanks to them for all the generous support they have given and continue to give freely to The Friars through their time, energy and skills.



*W*ATERGATE UPDATE

Major work began at the beginning of the year to restore the 16th Century Watergate. The work will hopefully be complete by the end of June. We did launch an appeal in September last year and a number have contributed generously to this work. However, this essential project has cut deeply into The Friars' financial reserves, which are now almost depleted. We don't mind letting you know that, like everyone else in the country at the moment, we are experiencing very acutely the present economic downturn. A lot of energy is going in to trying to find a way forward so that The Friars can continue to be a spiritual centre of welcome and renewal. We may well need to take some difficult decisions in order to ensure the longer-term security of the priory so please do keep us very much in your thoughts and prayer as we discern the way forward.

We are always deeply moved by the generosity of the thousands who support our work. Three great supporters of Our Lady's Shrine from the earliest days were Katy Jaffa, Alice Powell and Stuart Mahony. Since our last newsletter these generous friends have left this world. Please remember them in prayer before God with the confidence that God is never outdone in generosity. The Carmelite Community, together with our staff, supporters and friends, feel privileged to be part of this beautiful place in the heart of Kent. As friars and friends, we see ourselves very much at the service of those who come to this wonderful oasis of peace seeking quiet, gentleness and meaning in their lives. We pray for you regularly and as we prepare for the great Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel you will be especially in our prayers. Please pray for us too, especially Fr. Conleth who, at this time of writing, is in hospital. If you are free, come and join us for the Pilgrimage Mass in honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on Sunday, 19th July.

*S*T. THÉRÈSE RELICS

The largest event this year will be the visit of the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux to Aylesford on 9th-11th October. Practical preparations are in hand for this major event when we will have the opportunity to celebrate her life and spirituality and seek her intercession. If you received this newsletter by post you should also have received a separate leaflet about the visit, telling you something about her life, the weekend and how you can be involved. Copies are also available at The Friars. We want to encourage you to be involved in the spiritual preparation before the visit of the relics. You may wish to consider buying a set of the simple booklets about her that we have available. You may also wish to pre-order a fresh rose that will be blessed during the weekend and placed for you, your family members (living and dead) or friends near her relics. We will also add the names of those who have ordered roses on a special list near the relics. Unfortunately, we cannot send the roses to you afterwards as we are expecting thousands to take advantage of this special gesture of reverence and prayer.

*A*ND FINALLY . . .

Well, we have run out of space so there is no room for a mildly amusing story. However, we will do our best to see what we can pull out from the humour store next time!

Until next time, may God keep you and Our Lady smile upon you.



Brendan Grady, O.Carm.

Prior

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