



Pilgrims' Newsletter

Spring 2023



Dear Pilgrim,

During the summer I gave a tour and at the end of the afternoon a lady gave me two pictures of The Friars taken in 1932 from the air. They were taken two years after the fire that destroyed much of The Friars. The buildings were lovingly restored by Copley and Alice Hewitt, who lived here at the time. Their son Woolsey Hewitt sold the estate to the Carmelites in 1949. I thought I would tell their story.



Ariel view of The Friars after the fire in 1930

Mr and Mrs Hewitt took on the lease of The Friars from the Earl of Aylesford in 1914, who lived in

Pakington Hall, Coventry. The Hewitt's paid £150 per annum for the lease. Mrs Hewitt's mother, Mrs Woolsey who came from Ashville, North Carolina, America, also lived at The Friars. Her family traced an ancestor of the name Bradford who came over on the Mayflower. She was related to President Franklin Roosevelt.

Mr Copley Hewitt was the County Commissioner of the Scouts while Mrs Alice Hewitt was the Medway Divisional Commissioner of the Girl Guides. They were personal friends of Lord Baden-Powell who came to The Friars for gatherings of both the Scouts and Guides. I like to think that they would be pleased that the Aylesford Scouts still meet here.

The Hewitt family desired to buy The Friars outright but there were several obstacles to overcome, such as fixtures that the Aylesford family wished to remove and the valuation of the estate. The old Earl died in 1924 and as the new Earl was a minor, trustees administered the estate. One letter sent by Lady Aylesford is worthy of Maggie Smith of Downton Abbey: *"It is a bigger trouble than you can imagine selling The Friars, but there is one great consolation, you do not belong to 'the new rich' and are in every way worthy of the dear old place and everything you have done has been in such perfect taste and in keeping with the old place that it lessens the pain of parting with it."*

The saddest letter was written the day after the fire of 30th June 1930 by Mr Copley Hewitt to the Aylesford family: *"It is with the deepest regret that I write to let you know that The Friars was destroyed by fire yesterday morning. You can imagine what a grief it is to us who loved the place so and spent so much upon it in our desire to keep it so beautiful and as it was. The origin of the outbreak is unknown."*



**Gathering of the Scouts and Girl Guides
in the early 1930s**

Mrs Hewitt had her two nieces staying with her at that time, one of whom, Diana, was a debutante that year. Some of her ball dresses were singed during the fire. Even though the Hewitts had lost their home due to the fire, a few days later Diana was taken to London to have her dresses repaired.

The Hewitt family finally bought The Friars in 1932. They set about restoring what fire had destroyed. The fire had revealed some of the medieval characteristics of the place that had been covered up by previous owners. The Hewitts restored the place in keeping with the original building, rather than replacing what had been destroyed. You can still see the fine gothic windows over the cloisters.



**Mr Copley Hewitt & Mrs Alice Hewitt at the
entrance to their home at The Friars**

During the war soldiers were billeted at The Friars on their way to the D-Day landings. Mrs Hewitt created a chapel that is now the Cloister Chapel for the use of the soldiers. The Bishop of Rochester formally consecrated it. There is a memorial to Mrs Hewitt in the chapel. For some of our pilgrims it is their favourite chapel.

Mrs Hewitt was always very welcoming to the visiting Carmelites who came from the nearby parishes of Faversham and Sittingbourne. Fr Malachy wrote of a visit to The Friars with the then Prior General, Elias Magennis. Though there was a large Girl Guides gathering and even with the Archbishop of Canterbury present, *"Mrs Hewitt gave a great welcome to the Prior General. Despite all the other distinguished visitors on that occasion she clung on to him eagerly and they got on very well together. This was not surprising. He was a personality. I remember Mrs Hewitt as a spiritual woman, gentle and wistful and aware of the timelessness of prayer."*

Lent – water, light and new life

We usually read an account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert on the first Sunday of Lent and of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the second Sunday. However, after that the Gospels change from the third Sunday of Lent depending on the liturgical year. This year we will read the three great teaching Gospels from John that have been traditionally used for those preparing for baptism or to be received into full communion at Easter. This year, on the third Sunday we have the woman at the well (Jn.4:5-42); the fourth Sunday we read of the man born blind (Jn.9:1-41); finally, the raising of Lazarus (Jn.11:1-45).



**The Samaritan woman at the well,
African Batik**

The story of the woman at the well has echoes of water and new life and alludes to the waters of baptism. The man born blind is a reminder that through baptism we are people of light. The

Christian path leads us away from the darkness of sin into the light of Christ.

Finally, we proclaim the great Gospel of the raising of Lazarus with the promise of new life. Through the Resurrection of Jesus, we all have the gift of new life. Jesus proclaims himself to Martha: *"I am the resurrection and the life."* (Jn.11;25)

The figure of the Samaritan woman has inspired both the two great Carmelites, St Teresa of Jesus (Avila) and St Thérèse of the Child Jesus (Lisieux), but they reflected upon different aspects of the story. Teresa longed for the water of the well and wished that she could take the role of the Samaritan woman, while for Thérèse she could see the mercy that Jesus showed to the woman and that this would be reciprocated with her love for Jesus. During Lent may we reflect upon these Gospels. What does the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, Lazarus and his sisters, say to us today? I feel that through my baptism I have the opportunity of becoming more Christ like, seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus. What do these figures say to you this Lent?

The highlight of the Holy Week ceremonies is the Easter Vigil where those of us who have been baptised and, like me do not remember the actual event, renew their baptism commitment. I feel if we have had a good reflective Lent, it leads us to more authentic renewal of our baptism commitment. Lent is more than giving up something for Lent, as it important as that may be. Going into the desert reflecting upon the Word of God, we will find God is not far away.

News

We were fortunate with the weather for the Christmas Fayre, though the Saturday was better than the Sunday. Those who came found it to be a happy family day. Thank you to the support of our many friends. It was good seeing our local Mayor, Cllr. Sue Bell, Mayor of Tonbridge of Malling. Father Christmas brought much joy to our younger visitors. The other high light for the children was Bjorn the animatronic polar bear.

The following Sunday saw the Light Up a Life ceremony arranged every year by the Heart of Kent Hospice, Aylesford. The service was arranged by our good friend the chaplain, Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild. It was good to welcome



Santa with his many elves at the Christmas Fayre



Bjorn the Polar Bear with Fr Michael at the Christmas Fayre



Light up a Life by the Heart of Kent Hospice on the Main Shrine in December



Fr Ged, Fr Francis, Prior General Míceál O'Neill and Fr Michael at the General Visitation

for his first visit the new Bishop of Rochester, Rt. Rev. Jonathan Gibbs. I am always amazed that so many people attend an outside event in early December. The Shrine looks radiant with all the illuminations, especially since the statue of Our Lady has been regilded.

Later there was the Carols by Candlelight led by the Medway Brass Band. This is always a jolly service with traditional Christmas carols followed by some joyful Christmas songs.

Just before Christmas we welcomed our Prior General Míceál O'Neill and our Councillor General, Richard Byrne, for a General Visitation. About the same time, we experienced snow which looked quite picturesque for a few days. Though we had a lot of rain over the Christmas holiday we still received a good number of visitors for Mass and to visit our crib. This year we were gifted a new stable which looks rather striking. It was made by a carpenter, Larry O'Toole who has done many other jobs around the Shrine.

This year we will have our Provincial Chapter. It is an important time in the life and mission of the Carmelites at Aylesford. There may be few changes here, but it is an occasion for us to reflect upon our mission at Aylesford and how we can best serve the church today.

May the gentle presence of the peace and joy of Christ be with you and everyone you love during the coming year.

Francis Kemsley. O. Carm.

Prior.



The new stable made by Larry O'Toole in St Anne's Chapel this Christmas

Retreats at The Friars

GRIEF AND LOSS RETREAT

Friday 24th—Sunday 26th March

Elizabeth Partridge, Liz Taylor & Francis Kemsley O.Carm

For anyone who has experienced a bereavement, whether recently or some time ago. We grieve, remember, hope and give thanks for our loved ones in the light of the Resurrection Jesus.

Cost: £230.00 single; £210.00 shared

EASTER TRIDUUM RETREAT

Thursday 6th —Sunday 9th April

Angela Black & Richard Green O.Carm

The retreat will be a prayerful reflection on the passion and resurrection of Jesus through the scriptures and the Liturgy.

Cost: £330.00 single; £300.00 shared.

For more information or to book please call 01622 717272

Easter Lily Dedications

As we do every year, the chapels at Aylesford will be adorned with lilies throughout the Easter season. Many of our friends like to dedicate one of the lilies for themselves, a friend, a relative or a loved one who has died. The names of all the lily dedications are recorded and displayed in a book in the Carmelite Saints Chapel during the Easter season.



If you would like to do this, please fill in the name of the person for whom each lily is dedicated on the Intentions Leaflet. The suggested donation for each lily is £5. The lilies will be refreshed regularly and extra monies raised from the dedications will go towards various chapel costs at The Friars such as flower displays at other services.



The Friars Christmas Draw Winners 2022

Congratulations to

1st Prize £500 - E. Arnold—London
2nd Prize £250 - M. Sexton—Maidstone
3rd Prize £150—A Monneyer—West Malling
Hamper Winner—M Cascioli—Maidstone

Thank you for all of your kind support



Summer Draw:

The Summer Draw is taking place at our Summer Fayre on Sunday 25th June.

We have enclosed draw tickets with this Spring Newsletter. Please support The Friars if you are able, and good luck!



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