

# Quarr Abbey Newsletter

Number 10

Spring

2015



*The bell tower of the abbey on the left; cloister on the right.*

## **Guardians of Man**

The stresses and anxieties of our difficult times can be felt even in this sheltered area of the Island and the Abbey. We are all of us hurt by the violence done here to Jews, there to Muslims, in other places to Christians, everywhere to men and women who simply belong to this or that group, be it racial, ethnic, national, or religious.

Man seems to have forgotten how to be good to man. We all know that the way we care (or not) for our neighbour, reflects the way we care (or not) for ourselves. Each man is guardian of man. But he or she does not fulfil this task alone. The ultimate guardian is God, the Creator who put His image in the fragile mixture of flesh and spirit that we are.

The spiritual journey of Lent offers us an opportunity to meet again with our Creator, with ourselves and with others. Lent is a time when we strip off the garments of our riches and false securities. We give time, money and attention to the poor. We suppress unnecessary luxuries and pleasures. We agree to see ourselves in the truth of our poverty, sins, weaknesses, but also in the

beauty of our hearts made for love. Lent is a time for being friendly with ourselves. We strive to choose what is truly good and resist the temptations of false goods which can only deceive and ultimately destroy us. We listen to the Word of God who tells us what is really good for us. God knows what is good for man. It is good for man to receive from above the truth about man and the world. It is good for man to listen to the voice of his Creator, who is the one who knows what is best for him. The voice of God echoes in the voice of our conscience, and both show us how to be good to man.

As we progress towards Easter, we strive to become better guardians of Man. On this way, the abbey can be an inspiration in many ways. For instance, by its rhythm. When we slow down from our hectic lives for a while, we find time for ourselves, for others and for God. When life unfolds more quietly, it is easier to listen and to be attentive. Violence ceases to be the necessary answer to anxiety and aggression. We learn to find peaceful ways of dealing with difficulties. And we fulfil with joy our task as guardians of Man. **Fr Prior**

# Quarr Abbey Chronicle

## Recent events in the life of the abbey

**December 21.** *The Voices of the Isle of Wight*, directed by Linda Filby-Borret and assisted by Fr Prior and a number of the monks, celebrated Quarr's annual Carol Service this afternoon with a large congregation. We put out more seats than last year and yet we could still have put out more. There was good singing, a good mix of music, both modern and traditional, and readings which brought the gospel of Christmas down to earth; as did the Crib, sprawling across the nave steps, where the infant Jesus opened his arms to embrace the life of the world circling around his manger.

**December 23** At 1.00p.m. after the short office of Sext in the Abbey Church, the community made its way to the teashop for the **annual Christmas party** given to thank our staff and volunteers for their hard work over the past year. Without the generous help of an increasing number of very generous people we would be unable to maintain monastic life at Quarr Abbey, and it was good to see so many of them turning up with their families for the splendid spread provided by Dean, Lucy, Emma and all the teashop staff.

This year, very young children were especially in evidence and their infectious laughter made it an especially happy celebration.

Shortly after returning to the Abbey after the party, the Chronicler was met by a delighted **Fr Nicholas announcing that he had been awarded a Master of Theology degree** by the University of Winchester.

Fr Nicholas began studying for his degree in Orthodox Studies at Lampeter University in Wales, but transferred with his Supervisor to Winchester two years ago.

His Dissertation examines the Orthodox Jesus Prayer tradition in comparison with the mystical teaching of St John of the Cross. He will be sharing some of the insights he gained in the course of his studies elsewhere in this issue.



*Orthodox icon of the Theotokos*

**December 24-25.** The **Celebration of the Lord's Nativity** began quietly with the First Vespers of Christmas at 5.00 on Christmas Eve. But the Midnight Mass was attended by a greater number of people than usual. Our friend and oblate Philip Fowke, accompanied the chant with his usual accomplished ease at the organ, and our faithful servers, as usual, gave that added solemnity to the celebration.

As last year, we celebrated Lauds together with the Dawn Mass and although less well attended it has proved a popular innovation with the community. It is an import from Fr Prior's monastery of Kergonan in Brittany. Perhaps surprisingly, the Chronicler found he was in better voice for the third Mass of Christmas at 10.00. After the tiring but joyful liturgies we all relaxed at table in the Refectory and enjoyed a good Christmas dinner.

**January 27.** The community welcomed Fr Joseph Hilaire from Haiti into its midst. He is a De Montfort Father who has come to spend a year with us in the monastery to learn something about the monastic way of life, and to discern the possibilities of establishing some form of

monastic life in his diocese. We keep him and his intentions in our prayers and hope he does not suffer from the cold at this time of year.



*Quarr carpenters at work*

**January/February.** Our carpenters' workshop has, as usual, been more than busy. Under the direction of Fr Petroc, our two carpenters, Sam and Kelly are building fire-breaks at strategic places in the cell block. Partition walls with doors are being constructed according to a plan which divides the house up into appropriate fire zones. Another job of work has been the construction of benches- there can never be enough- for the public areas of the monastery grounds. A large Macrocarpa was brought down by recent storms, and that has been set aside for further seats. And recently a very spacious chair was made from English oak as a gift to the Abbey of Douai for their generosity in sending us Fr Finbar as Prior Administrator in time of need.

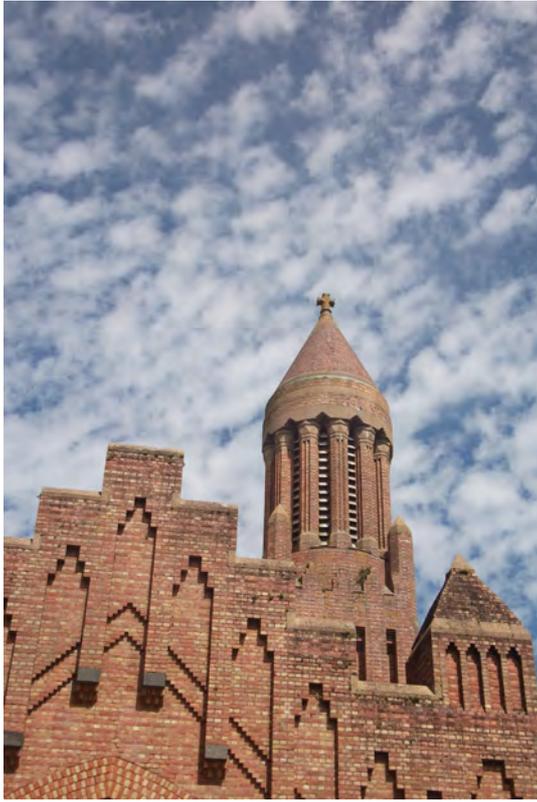
**February 2.** In this present year, dedicated to the consecrated Life by the Holy Father, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, has, in a special way, been appointed to commemorate the place of the consecrated life in the Church. For this reason, the Abbess and Community of St Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde invited all the consecrated persons on the Island to join them for Vespers. **All the monks went down to St**

**Cecilia's where we were joined by the Sisters of Christ, by the Verbum Dei Sisters, by the Sisters of St Mary Immaculate and by two Diocesan Hermits.** A short service was celebrated first in the great Parlour This was followed by tea and animated conversation. From the parlour, we made our way to the Abbey Church where solemn Vespers of the Presentation was sung. Fr Prior presided and was assisted by Alban and Paul, two young French guests staying at Quarr. The Nuns in the choir and the monks in the sanctuary sang the psalmody against one another just as we did last year on the feast of St Scholastica. The seed of a tradition planted last year seems to be germinating.

**March 13-15.** Vocations are, seemingly, not as many as they once were. And therefore, like many monasteries we are planning to hold a series of **monastic experience weekends for young men.** The first of these is planned for Friday. March 13 to Sunday. March 15. It is open to single men between the ages of 18 and 35 and all they have to do is to apply to the novicemaster at [novicemaster@quarr.org](mailto:novicemaster@quarr.org). They will then be booked into the guesthouse for the weekend. There will be an opportunity to attend the full monastic office in the Abbey Church, opportunity to meet the monks, and teaching will be given on fundamental monastic topics. There will also be a little manual work. The whole weekend will be geared to helping the participants answer the question, might God be calling me to serve him in the monastic way of life?

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**FRIENDS OF QUARR.** The Friends of Quarr are always looking for new members. If you are interested in helping the community whether financially or through expertise or voluntary work, please contact **Dr Rebecca Ashton**, the Chair of the friends at [chair.friends@quarr.org](mailto:chair.friends@quarr.org) or phone 01983 882440 ext.209. More about the Friends and much more besides can be found on our new website. It has been designed for us by Luke Davies with the help of Heritage Lottery Grant money. We hope it will meet with general approval and that it will attract new Friends.



**QAN here publishes a new poem by Sam Davidson** who took the Quarr internship programme last year and is now studying for a degree in English Literature. The picture left is of the abbey bell tower that summons the brethren to prayer.

## LITTLE HOURS

At Night it's not the darkness but the silence that prevails,  
like a rippling stoop of water trickling over at the brim,  
as they sunder on through summertime, travellers with their tales,

like a ragged band of jackdaws at the clattering of bells,  
softly brushing at my reveries like hair upon my skin,  
while at night it's not the darkness but the silence that prevails,

as between each tick the cloister clock rattles in my walls,  
and as it peals upon each silence calls the dozing pilgrims in,  
so they sunder on through summertime, travellers with their tales,

on holy days bent down with dusty backs upon dry kneeling stools  
and let their various tomorrows slide from lips too hot to hymn,  
then at night it's not the darkness but the silence that prevails,

when like an angel dusk descends to dumb the day, unveils  
a tapestry of tumbling bats, and inks their daydreams dim,  
still they sunder on through summertime, travellers with their tales,

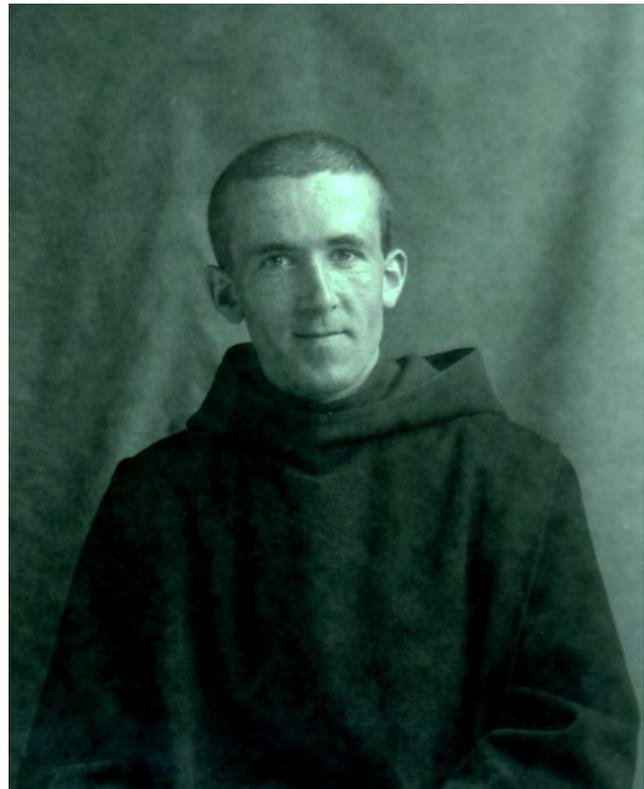
on to lucid dreams of seabird songs, the psalmody of whales,  
and the plainchant that the oceans sing, to tumble on in time,  
until at night it's not the darkness but the silence that prevails,  
as we sunder on through summertime, travellers with our tales.

**Fr Gregory recalls one of his confrères in this memoir of Dom Jean Desrocquettes.**

When I arrived at Quarr in September 1964 Dom Jean had just been made Subprior. He was highly amused by this as he said later, perhaps in an unguarded moment, to Fr Robert Gough: 'When I was young I was a devil'. He had then been in the monastery for 55 years. He amused me by claiming that his Latin wasn't much good. Though he had been given extra lessons, he said that 'it has been getting worse ever since.'

Dom Jean had left Quarr with the Solesmes community, but returned after a short time to be choir master. Dom Pedro said that the choir came to life like a great organ under the hand of a master. When the foundation was made at Santiago de Chile he and Dom Pedro were the only monks of Quarr who were sent out but, in 1948, Dom Jean returned to Europe via Brazil, a providential disposition since it was there that he met Dom Paul Gordan of Beuron, who was able to take word to Germany of the need for support for the Chilean monastery.

After a short time teaching in Rome Dom Jean returned to Quarr and resumed the office of choir master. He had a great gift of encouragement and used to repeat to me what Dom Delatte had been in the habit of saying to novices, "si le petit cochon ne vous mange pas" [If the little pig doesn't eat you]". Obviously, since I was a novice and he a jubilarian I did not know him well, but Abbot Aelred wrote in his obit: 'For him the chant was the heart of the life of prayer-it would be a thing of beauty in the measure in which it expressed and nourished prayer. It would express and nourish prayer in proportion to the loving care given to its execution. The same deep spirituality was both expressed and concealed by his utter simplicity, and it was expressed especially in his love of the brethren.' Dom Jean certainly communicated his love of the chant in his weekly choir practices and in his chant classes for the novitiate. I remember my very first class with him, when I was required to read some verses of Psalm 118 to him. He always insisted on perfection of diction as the foundation of good chant.



*Dom Jean Desrocquettes*

In January 1965 Dom Jean left for what was to be his last month in the USA giving courses to the Cistercian monks and nuns. About six months after his return, to the great sorrow of the community, he suffered a severe stroke. The community assembled in the corridor outside his cell for the administration of Extreme Unction, and very slowly he made a partial recovery so that he was able to walk even into the wood unaided. Although his speech was affected he was able to communicate. He kept his sense of humour and his ability to mimic, which had always been a source of mirth at recreation. When I was taking him his supper I asked him if he wanted cocoa. He echoed my words with a pronounced English accent: 'Est ce que vous voulez du cocoa, mon père?' Another of my tasks was to go to his cell and wake him up for Sunday Mass, as he often fell asleep and the bells didn't wake him.

For seven years Dom Jean accepted his severe disabilities with unfailing cheerfulness and fortitude, but in February 1973 his condition deteriorated rapidly, and he died in St Mary's Hospital at the age of 83. He is buried in our cemetery at Quarr.

## Fr Prior's Homily for Ash Wednesday 2015

It is not an ecclesiastical rule, but it is certainly a tradition in many places that the ashes for Ash Wednesday are made from the palms of the previous year, collected on Palm Sunday and respectfully burnt.

Palms are a symbol of victory. On Palm Sunday, we hold them as signs of Christ's victory in His Passion and Resurrection. We keep them in our houses, on our crucifixes or near our icons. They remind us of Christ's triumph and of His glory. But even if they are made of plants which keep green a long time, they eventually fade and lose their colours. They are signs of a fragile and transient glory. We would be wrong, though, to consider that the use of linking palms and ashes, glory and death, is only a reminder that human glory is fragile and does not last. Our pride certainly needs to be reminded of such a truth, but the message goes much further. Indeed, it is not intended to teach us that glory is always eventually followed by death and corruption, but it suggests the exact contrary, namely that death is the path to glory – I mean: death with Jesus and in Jesus is the path to sharing in Jesus' glory. That is why we receive the ashes this morning with joy. The ashes remind us that we are dust and shall return to the dust. There is no way to escape death. But death is 'The End' no more. Salvation in Christ is a salvation through death, because Christ made of death the door into life eternal. That is why the ashes speak to us of the good news of the Resurrection, as we find it expressed, for instance, in Saint Paul: "you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God; you have been raised with Christ; when Christ who is our life will appear, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:1...3).

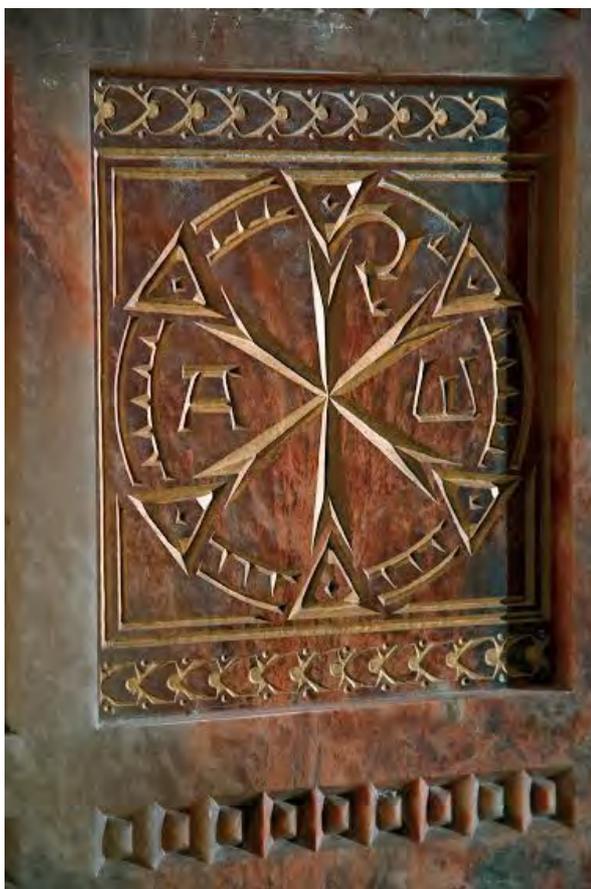
Rightly considered, these ashes entail a promise of glory because they remind us of our baptism. The ashes speak of life. In them, fire which burns leads to water which purifies and gives access to new life. Again Saint Paul: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism

into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

The ashes of our new birth from the waters of baptism and the fire of the Holy Spirit introduce us into the mystery of Lent. Indeed, Lent is about baptism. For catechumens, Lent is a time of preparation for baptism during Easter Vigil. For us who have been baptised, it is a powerful invitation to consider earnestly the mystery of which we were made partakers in baptism.

Through prayer, abstinence and generosity towards others, we shall nourish in us – and in the Church – that baptismal life, which is not other than the life of the Risen Christ which is in us His members.

Filled with this hope, let us receive the ashes with joy and with an intense spiritual desire that by sharing in the sufferings of Christ's passion and death we may become partakers also of the glory of His resurrection.



*The ancient PX (Chi Rho) monogram of Christ*

## 7 Journey Into Silence

### Fr Nicholas meditates on the relationship between silence and prayer in Orthodox tradition.

For many people, silence is a strange and alien environment which seems, to a society dominated by ceaseless noise and instant communication, a hostile and frightening world. This fear even enters our religious life. Many more parishes now have regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and groups fostering meditation and contemplative prayer, yet it is still nevertheless true that for many Western Christians prayer consist almost entirely of spoken words. While we certainly must use words of praise, intercession and intimate conversation when we pray to our Heavenly Father, our prayer is incomplete unless we also practice the prayer of silence.

The first word of the Benedictine Rule is 'Listen' and we cannot listen to anyone unless we are silent. This means not just trying to find outward silence but also, which is much more difficult, try to silence the constant whirrings of our thoughts. Over the last few years I have been studying the theology of the Orthodox Church.

The most important lesson has been the study of 'Apaphatic Theology'. It is very difficult to summarise such a profound school in a few sentences. It helps if we think of the meaning of two very important words used in the theology of monastic prayer. The first is **apatheia**. It means freedom from passion. It was used by the great theologian of early monasticism Evagrius Ponticus, born 345. His important work (*The Praktikos*) is really concerned with how this state of freedom from passions can be achieved. It was Evagrius who formulated the list of passions to be overcome which has come into the West, through Pope Gregory the Great, as the famous Seven Deadly Sins.

We can perhaps use an image to define what we mean by apatheia. In the high mountains we often come across small lakes or tarns. Because they are very often sheltered by the peaks, the surface is perfectly still. The sunlight can

penetrate the depths. In other lakes there can be terrible storms which make the surface of the lake very rough, so light cannot reach the depths. The stormy lake is our life that is torn apart by passion-- anger, lust, pride and the rest. Because we are storm-tossed, the uncreated light of God cannot penetrate the depths of our souls. For in the teaching of Evagrius, and later monastic theologians, the achieving of apatheia is only the first stage. By prayer, fasting and ascetic practices we overcome the passions so that our souls can be calm and deeply still. Then, like ground that is properly tilled, we can be ready to receive the divine gift of light or rain.

The other key word takes us further on our quest as to why we need to journey inwards and enter the stillness of God which is deep within our souls. This second word is **hesychia**, which is the Greek word for stillness. Hesychasm is a major school of Orthodox teaching on prayer associated with Saint John Climacus, Saint Gregory Palamas and many others. There is a clear similarity between hesychia and apatheia. The school of Hesychasm shows us one practical way of trying to achieve this state of deep inner stillness needed to receive the uncreated light of God. It is this.

Sit in an upright chair. Do not cross your legs. Place your hands face down on your knees. Head slightly forward with eyes looking down to the heart. Close your eyes take several deep breaths, then start slowly reciting the words '*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner*'.

This is a very ancient prayer whose power lies in the power of the Holy Name.

When distractions come into the mind always go back to the prayers. Gradually, by using the prayer you will enter more fully into silence and will be able to listen clearly to the voice of God. The most important lesson is that we must seek to calm our passions and make of our lives a calm lake. We must turn away from endless words and seek, by entering into the deep inner silence, to be able to truly listen to the Word of the Father who will recreate us and bring us into the eternal light of the everlasting Divine Glory.

## Quarr and its Parts: the refectory

As in most monasteries, the refectory here is the largest space after the church. Traditionally the refectory was placed on the far side of the complex, as far as away from the church as possible. The odour of food should not invade sacred space. And yet, a parallel was observed between the two.

The brethren sit in the same order as in choir and before the main meal, just as in choir, they first listen in silence to a reading from the Sacred Scriptures. The main event in the Church is daily conventual Mass which is, in St John Paul II's words, Presence, Sacrifice, but also Banquet. The community is bound together by sacred and secular food.

Other books are also read. At present the community is listening to a book on the Station Churches of Rome by George Weigel. When the readings were in French, they were chanted but now they are said.



*Before a meal in the refectory*

Guests are welcomed to a special place in the abbey church for the Office and they are similarly welcomed (by the Prior himself) to a special place in the refectory.

Benedict is characteristically astute and understanding in his instructions on food. He says that 'it is with some reluctance that we fix the measure for another'. He allows considerable discretion but insists that it should be varied, healthy but unostentatious. The monks themselves should, within reason, select what and how much they eat. Extremes should be avoided. Wine (then a common drink) is allowed but only in judicious amounts. At Quarr, it is only drunk on Sundays and great feast days. Meat is not allowed in the Rule but at Quarr it is served on four days of the week but not in Lent (apart from Sundays).

Our saintly founder wanted each abbey to be, as far as possible, self-sufficient. This is not practical at Quarr but, more than most modern abbeys, it utilises a range of home-grown products including apples, potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots, leeks, squash and, of course, pork from our celebrated pigs.

Most suppers are prepared by a monastic cook but other meals, in recent years, are cooked by helpers. All monastic communities, as Benedict notes, have to continually adjust to changing circumstances.

The serving at table, on the other hand, is always done by member of the community. St Benedict lays great stress on this: 'the brothers are to serve one another'. Both servers and readers change every week and are formally inducted to the task. We could call it a pious decorum.

Monks are called to be ascetics in what Benedict calls 'the school of the Lord's service', but he goes on to say that he hopes to establish 'nothing harsh or oppressive'. He counsels that the life of a monk should be at all times 'a Lenten observance' but he wants his monks to lead a comely life in a comely place. Our beautiful refectory, a counterpart to its lovely church, is one sign of that grace-filled comeliness. [BB]