

Quarr Abbey

NEWSLETTER

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‘We Beheld His Glory’

During Advent this year, Quarr and two other monasteries will appear on TV. This will be a programme about the twofold preparation for Christmas: the spiritual and the material. Spiritual life promoted through monastic products? or quality products made more attractive because of lovely monastic settings –and a few monks and nuns willing to open the doors of their homes and their lives? Think what you will: business and the spiritual life are meant to enter a close partnership.

St Benedict, you will be pleased to know, had foreseen such an alliance. When he prescribed that monastic products should be sold ‘a little cheaper than they are sold by people of the world’, he was not advocating any primitive form of dumping sub-standard goods. Much more seriously he had in view God’s glory: ‘That in all things God may be glorified’.

For Benedict, you can find glory in business –not only in the liturgy, or the beauty of the creation and the arts. A commercial activity can, or rather must, have the explicit

intention of giving glory to God. If the monks sell at a lesser price, they allow poorer people to afford products they need. At least, it was so in Benedict’s society. In ours, a just price for good quality would seem to give glory to God. It should be such that the less rich can afford it and those more affluent may consider a donation if they want to help the monastery.

Whatever the details of the economics, we may be struck by the vicinity of God’s glory. We acknowledge this glory through prayer obviously – and this constitutes a big part of the monks’ daily life. But God’s glory is everywhere. He can and must be glorified ‘in all things’. Shall we say: wherever a human act is just and good, fair and with a nuance of merciful love, God is glorified? It does not need to be the very best, but it must be right. If it is so, God’s glory is at hand.

It was at hand in the workshop of an unknown carpenter in Nazareth. It was at hand in the poor crib of Bethlehem and the angels in heaven rightly sang: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace toward men

of goodwill.” (Lk 2:14). And John, speaking of the mystery of Christmas, declares: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jn 1:14). This was true from the very first moment of his appearing.

God’s glory is not measured in numbers of ‘followers’ or ‘views’, but by the quality of love in human actions and transactions –even commercial ones. We are never wrong when we try to put more “grace” and more “truth” in what we do. Or to put it in the words of Blaise Pascal: “Do little things as though they were great, because of the majesty of Jesus Christ who does them in us, and who lives our life. Likewise, do the greatest things as though they were little and easy, because of His omnipotence.” The glory of the little actions of our daily lives is the direct consequence of the Incarnation – of the night of Christmas, when we began to learn to behold His Glory in all things.

+ Abbot Xavier

Quarr Abbey Chronicle

Two years ago the community enjoyed a full day out visiting Chichester, where we were entertained by the Anglican bishop and some of his clergy. We saw the cathedral of course, but also the medieval hospital of St. Mary's which is tucked away, behind a high wall in St. Martin's square. The hospital is a large and splendid 13th century foundation set in a beautiful garden, replanted on medieval lines, and it is still in use. As a medieval hospital it is not so much a place of healing for the sick, but living accomodation for the elderly and infirm who need some help in supporting themselves.

On that occasion we visited the beautiful 13th century chapel, yet only briefly. But in September of this year we received an invitation to return and sing monastic vespers there. We duly arrived and were first entertained to a splendid tea in the gardens – the weather was graciously kind for the day – and we had the opportunity to meet many of the residents who live,

not only in the the hospital itself, but in some of the many buildings comprising the quite extensive estate within the walled enclosure. They came from a great variety of backgrounds, obviously love the place, and have great affection for Fr. Bruce Ruddock their chaplain.

Because Fr. Bruce had another engagement at the cathedral later that afternoon, the hour of vespers was anticipated, and we proceeded to choir at 4pm rather than 5pm. We were soon seated in the stalls, and what stalls they were. The seats boast of one of the finest sets of medieval carved misericords in the country. My favourite was a merman grasping his tail in his hand, but green men peering through oak leaves and grotesque monsters were there in profusion.

As soon as Fr. Abbot intoned the Deus in adiutorium we knew the acoustics were excellent – resonant, but not too resonant. Vespers proceeded very peacefully, our little congregation assisting devoutly, and some joining us to conclude by singing the Salve Regina as we faced the stained glass window featuring Our Lady. It was the best kind of ecumenism.

Farmers do not always have an easy time of it; the agricultural sector is small and fewer and fewer people have connections with the land or any real understanding of where

their food comes from. For over twenty years now, Fr. Gregory has endeavoured to support the Island farming community by providing an annual harvest thanksgiving service for farmers and growers and their families across the Isle of Wight. Last year the service was held outside because of Covid restrictions, but this year we could return to the shelter of the abbey church. Social distancing was observed but the the unity of the singing could now be maintained and the sound not lost on the open air. We listened to St Francis's Canticle of the Sun and a reading from the Gospel. Fr. Gregory's homily followed and gave us much to ponder. Finally the read testimonies of farm workers helped by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution informed and encouraged us in the work to support our Island farmers.

We have occasional concerts of sacred music given in the Abbey Church, but in these Covid times they have been few and far between, inserted in the uncertain intervals among the lock-downs. The Renaissance Choir came to sing for us on Saturday 10th October when we were daring to hope that the more aggressive restrictions might be a thing of the past. I did not know the name of the choir, but I was won over by the sound as soon as they opened their mouths. There was a pleasing balance among the four sections, a joyful, confident, full sound with good harmony, and the director maintained a firm control on proceedings. It was easy to see why they had been welcomed at St. Peter's Rome, and Notre Dame, Paris, and their mix of Palestrina, Victoria, Tallis and Bruckner among other composers demonstrated their range. All the singers came from the south eastern part of Hampshire. They were not singing far from home, but after Covid they brought an exotic air with them.

October 18th was a day of great joy for the whole community. It was, of course, the feastday of St. Luke, as every year, but this year it was also the day of Br. Matthew's clothing. Matthew joined the community in



St. Mary's Hospital



Holy Week this year and as six months had elapsed and he was still keen to pursue a monastic vocation we asked our friend Julia Trahair if she would make him a habit. As a skilled sempstress this was completed within a week, and St. Luke's day was chosen for its conferral.

It is a moving ceremony celebrated in the Chapter House away from the public gaze. The postulant first prostrates, and arising in the name of the Lord asks for the mercy of God and fellowship with the community. The tunic, the belt and the scapular are given while the community sings psalm 23 together with the antiphon "Qui sequitur me" (He who follows me) It is always much more moving than the postulant imagines it is going to be. Please pray for Br. Matthew and for further vocations to Quarr.

Television cameras are not a frequent visitor to monasteries, and that is as it should be. For monks, whose very way of life is founded on separation from the world, it must seem very strange to feature in the world of mass media, perhaps the most worldly world of the modern age. But just as St. Antony was prepared to leave his desert for the city on occasion for some real need, so monks today may occasionally venture into the public glare.

Fr. Abbot was willing that Quarr participate in an ambitious Advent television series produced by Purple

Productions for the B.B.C. The three programmes plan to visit three monasteries, Quarr Abbey and Chilworth Abbey in England, and Kylemore Abbey in Ireland. The central theme is preparation for Christmas and the material gathered at Quarr was both copious and diverse. Over two weeks of filming the camera crew interviewed many of the monks and members of lay staff, filmed the Mass and the Office, visited the tearoom, farmshop and bookshop, recorded work in the garden and on properties about the estate, and developed stories around the making of Quarr Abbey Ale and preparing for the annual Carol Service.

The film crew were very respectful and sensitive to the needs of the community, and we have every hope that the resulting programmes will reflect the priorities of monastic life. But they will certainly be about much more than that. The producer shared her interest in exploring the interface between monastic life and the local community. Over the last twenty years Quarr based enterprises have brought the Monastic community and certain local groups much closer together than before, and increasing numbers of tourists have added to the mix. We feel sure that the proper quiet of the monastery has been preserved, but we must needs always be watchful, discern carefully, put the one thing necessary before all else.

I have a Catholic friend who lives in Glasgow, and a few weeks ago I received a parcel from him. This was unusual; a letter, yes, but what could the parcel be? It was a book, a book of poetry. And the poet was a Jesuit priest, Peter Banyard, recently deceased who had been my friend's spiritual director for many years.

Fr. Peter's poetry is marked by a strong sense of place and a love of the little things of the natural world, which become symbols of the deepest divine and human realities met in our lives. He used to visit Quarr and wrote a poem for my friend called "Quarr, 22nd July, 2002" – the medieval Abbey of Quarr was dissolved on July 22nd 1536.

*Cistercian ruins cast long shadows
Aslant the undulating field
Beneath whose sheep-cropped grass
Lie the bones of long-buried monks.*

*Was the sunset slow beyond the Solent
That day of Dissolution?
Were the rooks, in ragged ranks,
Streaming loudly homewards?*

*Still the sound of "Salve Regina"
Hangs hauntingly in the evening air.*

"The Poetry of Peter Banyard S.J." is edited by Ronnie Renton and was published by Kennedy and Boyd, Edinburgh in 2021.

The community and our guests were privileged to listen to pianist Yoon-Seok Shin who gave an impromptu recital at Quarr on Sunday, November 7th. He dazzled us with pieces by Schubert, Haydn, Bach and Mompou.

Br. Duncan Smith





Two Abbeys Project

900 Years of Monastic History

The Two Abbeys

The monastic site of the Abbey of Our Lady of Quarr on the Isle of Wight comprises of two Abbeys. The ancient Abbey of Quarr was founded in 1132. Cistercian monks dwelled here and worshipped God, celebrating a daily monastic liturgy, for over 400 years. Owing to the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII in 1536, there followed a gap of almost another 400 years before the reestablishment of monastic presence in 1907. The modern Abbey of Our Lady of Quarr is situated on a hill adjacent to the ancient abbey and continues to thrive as a Benedictine community of monks of the Congregation of Solesmes. Thus for almost 900 years this site has had a monastic identity, either through the presence of a living community of monks or through the monastic buildings which lay in ruins for four centuries.

The aim of our Two Abbeys Project is to highlight the great continuity of the monastic life here and to ensure that this tradition continues for generations yet to come. For there is indeed a definite continuity between

both abbeys in that the life currently being lived by the monks of Quarr, just like the life of the medieval monks, is founded upon the Rule of St Benedict, a monastic rule which dates back to the 6th century. An essential part of this project is therefore to preserve the buildings, both of the modern abbey and the ancient ruins.

The Ancient Abbey of Quarr

The first abbey of Quarr was founded in 1132 by Baldwin de Redvers, who later became Lord of the Island and Earl of Devon. He brought monks from Savigny Abbey in Normandy, France, to begin the monastic community. The Abbey took its name from the nearby quarry to the east of it. Despite the good reputation of its monks, the Abbey was closed and dismantled under the orders of King Henry VIII in 1536. It was purchased and demolished by Mr John Mills of Southampton. Some of its stone was used for building Yarmouth Castle on the south west of the island. The ruins of this monastery are visible today from the bridle path that passes through our site. The ruins are listed

as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and are currently on the Historic England Buildings at Risk Register. Our priority is to conserve the most historically important parts of these ruins and allow public access to a section of it while still preserving its spiritual identity in some definite form.

Modern Quarr Abbey

In 1901 the monks of Solesmes, France, under Abbot Paul Delatte, came to Appuldurcombe House on the south of the island. They chose voluntary exile from their homeland following the implementation of unjust laws against religious life in France. In 1907 the monks purchased Quarr Abbey House near the ruins of the ancient Quarr Abbey. One of the monks, Dom Paul Bellot, was an extremely gifted architect. He was therefore commissioned to design and build a new monastery – modern day Quarr Abbey.

The Abbey Church and ancillary buildings are classified as Grade 1 on the register of Listed Buildings in the UK. Much has been done in recent years on the fabric of the church and the east side of the cloister buildings. However, with the buildings now being over a century old, there is an urgent need to continue these works of repairs. Our immediate plan over the next two years is to repair the church windows, replace the leadwork on the valleys of the church roof and do a full repair on the roof of the Old House of Quarr on the north side of the monastery. Thereafter we hope to continue with repairs to the fabric and windows on the north, east and south sides of the cloister buildings and guesthouse.

A Call to Action

We were greatly assisted by the award of an HLF grant for £2.2 million in 2014, for which we had to provide 10% match funding. This provided a tremendous impetus to our project. We were able to begin the consolidation work on the ruins and conduct an archaeological study of

the site, carry out urgent repairs to the sanctuary roof of the church of the modern day abbey, develop a new Monastery Shop, Visitors Centre and courtyard area and greatly improve the landscape which now includes a much needed new car park, a new delivery road access, new pathways and a woodland walk with bird hide.

In 2016 we carried out extensive repairs to the east wing of our monastery buildings. This entailed replacing many of the roof tiles and re-building some of the dormer windows. The total cost for this project was just under 300k for which we were greatly assisted by the Fondation des Monasteres in France, but we also had to draw down from our investments.

The Friends of Quarr recently completed a new path project which has greatly improved the access, particularly for the disabled, to both the church and Visitors Centre area. We are extremely grateful to all who have contributed to these projects in various ways. But much work needs still to be done to preserve both the monastic life at Quarr and its heritage, whose 900th year anniversary will be in 2032.

This year, as part of a Government Cultural Recovery Fund administered by Historic England, we were awarded a grant of £229,817 to assist us in a project for continued works on our church. The total works of this project

include repairs to the north and south side chapels and 16 of our windows on the south side of the church. We will have to provide 20% match funding of the grant, plus pay for the additional works of this project outside the scope of the grant-aided works, coming to a total expense for us of £103,313. The Friends of Quarr hope to raise £5,400 to cover the match-funding cost for 10 of the windows.

We have also been awarded 60,000 euros for roof repairs to the Old House at the back of the monastery, again from the Fondation des Monasteres in France. These works will be carried out in-house by our Work Shop team. The total cost for these works is estimated at £130k and we will have to provide the remainder of these costs ourselves.

A grant award of £27k in 2018 from Historic England has enabled us to continue the phased work of consolidating the ruins. We are hopeful of further grants for repair work to both abbeys but we also have to provide match funding to obtain these grants. We have a target of £5 million to raise over the next 10 years in order to help bring these works to a successful conclusion. But in addition to these projects we also need to find ways to increase our income through our businesses which will need funds for development. For example, we plan to expand our Farmshop which will entail a new building close to the teashop. We are also

currently renovating one of our rental properties to run as a holiday cottage next year. The cost of this restoration work, being carried out in-house, is approximately £100k.

The running costs of Quarr Abbey and its site are over £1 million per year. The pandemic due to Covid-19 has had a severe impact on our income and continues to do so. We have been successful in obtaining government support grants for our businesses during this time.

Our goal is to be able to celebrate our 900th year anniversary in 2032 by securing our two abbeys, both buildings and grounds, for future generations of monks and visitors. The Divine Worship, peace and serenity of Quarr is currently enjoyed by over 90,000 pilgrims and visitors each year.

Ways to Donate.

We are extremely grateful for any donations received. You may make a donation in any of the following ways:

- By the donate button on our website <https://donate.quarrabbey.org/>
- Through the contactless points on our outside donations board and in the church
- The cash boxes in the church and on the outside donations board

For further information, especially concerning regular donations and legacies, please contact one of the following:

Fr Brian Kelly, Procurator, at procurator@quarr.org

Tracy Osborn, Director of Fundraising and Operations, at tracy.osborn@quarr.org

Fr. Brian Gerard Kelly



Quarr Abbey is a Catholic community of Benedictine monks of the Solesmes Congregation. If you wish to contact us please write to guestmaster@quarr.org or Quarr Abbey, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 4ES. Our website address is www.quarrabbey.org



Photo: The National Gallery

Zurbarán and the Poetry of Silence

Gabriele Finaldi, Director of The National Gallery

During the 292 days that the National Gallery was closed in 2020-21 – over three national lockdown periods – a pall of silence came over its lofty halls. No chattering children, no friends exchanging impressions before the Van Goghs, no earnest educators broadcasting their interpretations of the paintings, no recorded audioguide commentary spilling out from users' headphones into the galleries. No tourists, no visitors, no people, no sound. Just the pictures and silence. The situation was unprecedented. Even during the Second World War – when the pictures had all been evacuated to a secret location for safekeeping – the Gallery remained open for lunchtime concerts organized by the pianist, Myra Hess. People flocked as the sound of music filled the rooms, roofs, domes and staircases of the Gallery. This was very different. I spent a lot of time in the building during the Covid lockdowns

and for me this long period of quiet afforded the opportunity to look slowly at the paintings, to meditate on them, yes, even to listen to them.

A classic early definition of painting is given by Plutarch: 'Painting is silent poetry; and poetry is painting that speaks'. He was quoting Simonides of Ceos, a Greek musician and lyric poet of the 6th century before Christ, who wrote verses rich in human empathy. Paintings may make no sound but they have a voice that is able to communicate emotion and meaning across time and space. That is one reason why painting is so important.

The Irish poet Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) wrote passionately about how the works of art in a museum and the quiet galleries where they are displayed refresh the spirit of the overburdened city dweller: 'Warmed and cajoled by the silence the cowed cypher revives'. He had rejoiced when

the pictures returned to the National Gallery in 1945 and sensed that they could help bring about moral regeneration:

'So fling wide the windows, this window and that, let the air

Blowing from times unconfined to
Then, from places further and fuller
than There,

Purge our particular time-bound
unloving lives, rekindle a Pentecost in
Trafalgar Square.'

During a visit to Spain before the War, MacNeice had been deeply affected by a large painting by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664) he saw in Seville showing Carthusians monks in a refectory witnessing a miracle. Their white habits ('a godsend' to the artist who was supremely gifted at representing white draperies), the rigorous design, the stillness of the scene and the accuracy of the still-life

elements, led him to comment on the 'lyrical intense placidity' and 'haunting matter-of-factness' that Zurbarán had deployed in the work.

During the lockdown silence I found myself constantly drawn to a painting by Zurbarán in the Spanish room at the National Gallery: *A Cup of Water and a Rose*, a small still life, just 20 by 30 cm. Placed on a table at hand height is a white ceramic cup with two handles, filled almost to the brim with water. It sits on a silver plate upon whose broad rim rests a pink rose, the stem trailing off at an angle. The simplicity of the motif set starkly against a dark background invites silent contemplation. It comes naturally to want to invest the picture with religious meaning: the virginal purity of the water, and the association of the flower with the *rosa mistica* appellation of the Virgin Mary, suggest it should be read allegorically. And Zurbarán, 'peintre espagnol de la vie monastique' (to quote the words of Paul Guinard the distinguished French scholar of his work), may indeed have intended it as a devotional homage to the Madonna.

The painting was made in Seville in the 1630s during the most brilliant and successful years of the artist's career. Mostly at this time Zurbarán was painting the martyred friars and ascetic monks of the then flourishing religious orders but every now and then – on a few rare occasions – he turned to making still lifes and created images of a searing, lyrical beauty. The objects

are life size and their visual impact is enhanced by their closeness to the picture plane. The ceramic cup here is of Sevillian manufacture whereas the plate was imported from Peru, a silver-rich viceroyalty of the vast Spanish empire. The light falls from upper left giving rise to an impressive array of reflections and highlights on the objects. Particularly impressive is the combination of shadow, highlight and surface glimmer at the top of the cup of water. The petals adjacent to the plate mingle with their own reflections on the lustrous metal surface.

This meticulous observation is typical of Zurbarán's still lifes but the painting retains elements of ambiguity which are also characteristic of his work. The right handle of the cup is not positioned diametrically opposite the other and the cup itself casts no shadow, as one might expect, on the inside of the plate. The former Director of the Prado Museum in Madrid, Alfonso Pérez Sánchez, titled one of his essays on the artist – whom he admired greatly – 'Humility and clumsiness (*torpeza* in Spanish) in the work of Zurbarán'.

Silent painting can invite silent reflection. Even profound meditative, religious reflection. The composer Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943) whose extraordinarily beautiful version of *O Magnum Mysterium* has become a modern choral masterpiece, says that he was inspired to write his Christmas meditation by another

still life by Zurbarán, a painting in the Norton Simon Museum in California. It shows a plate of lemons, a basket of oranges and a cup of water, the same motif that appears in the National Gallery picture. Nothing more. There is nothing overtly religious about it, although it too, has been interpreted as an homage to the Virgin Mary. Silent though it is, the painting made Lauridsen weep and he asked himself, 'How can I do musically what Zurbarán has done, achieving such a profound effect with the simplest material?'. In spite of its silence – and no doubt partly because of it – it set in motion in the composer a desire to reverence the Christ Child in the manger and also to honour the Virgin's sorrow at seeing her son murdered. Painting may be silent but it can speak; it can sing.

*O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,
iacentem in praesepe!
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera
meruerunt portare
Dominum Iesum Christum.
Alleluia!*

O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the newborn
Lord,
lying in a manger!
Blessed is the virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
the Lord, Jesus Christ.
Alleluia!



Photo: The National Gallery

Friends of Quarr

The Friends of Quarr continue to support the Abbey in these difficult times and are currently raising funds to contribute to the match funding for a grant, the Abbey is in receipt of, to repair part of the church roof and the restoration of 10 stained glass windows, which need urgent attention.

The Friends have already raised over £3000 from donations since the completion of the Accessible Paths Project in October 2020. We hope to achieve the required sum of £5,400 by early next year. Work has already begun on the windows.

We have been unable to hold fundraising events during the pandemic and had to rely on donations and would like to thank our donors for their generosity.

I am happy to report that the calendars for 2022 sponsored by the Friends in aid of the Abbey's Internship Programme have almost sold out with only a few left in the Monastery and Farm shop at the time of writing. This will enable the Friends to donate over £1000 to the Intern Programme open to young men of 18-25. Please email: interns@quarr.org for more information about the programme.

On behalf of the Friends, I would like to wish you all A Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year and would like to thank you for your support.

To join the Friends please go to the 'support tab' on the Quarr Abbey website where you will find information and the membership form which can be downloaded. You can also contact Dr Rebecca Ashton email: chair.friends@quarr.org or telephone 01983-562180 ext. 209 and leave a message.

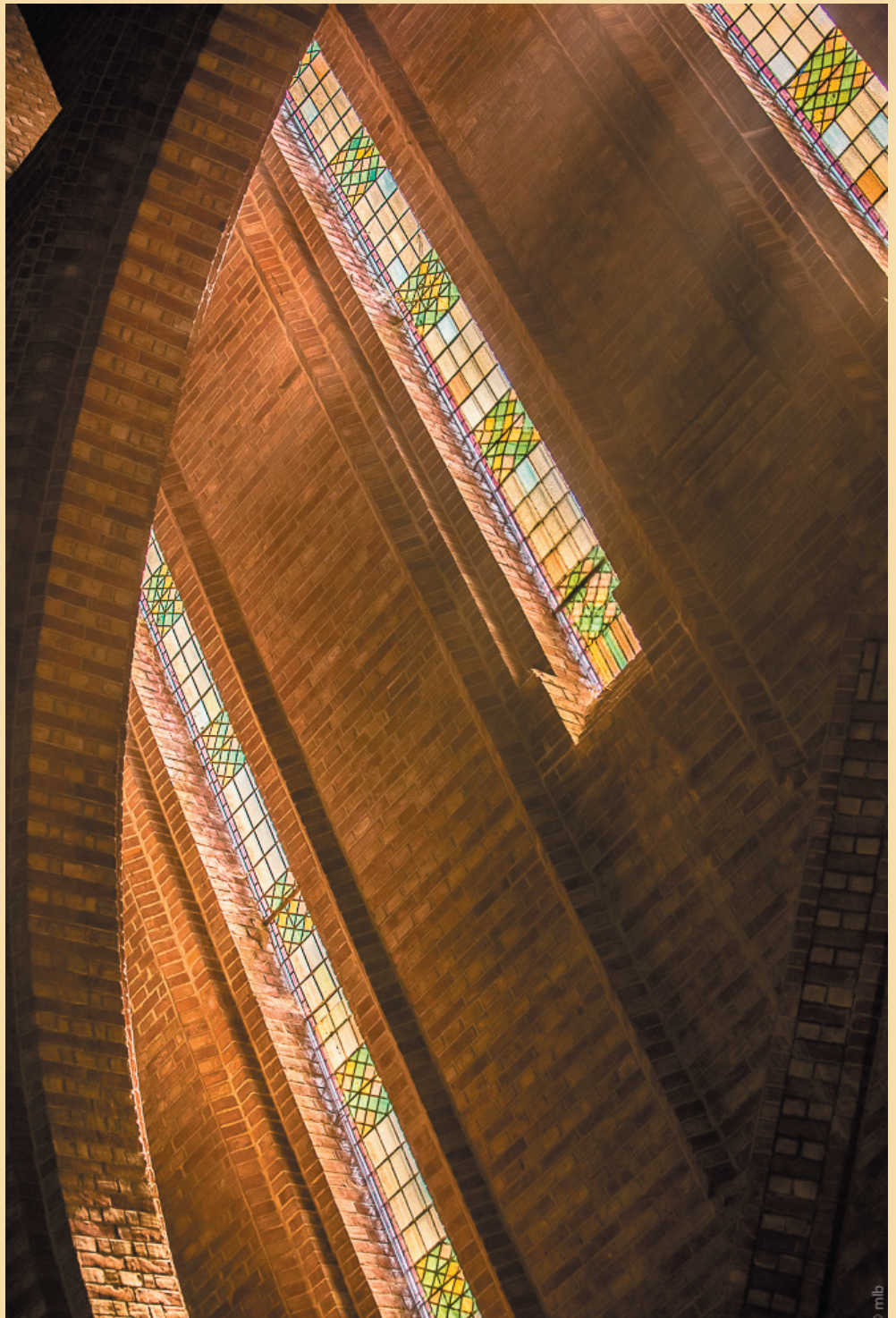


Photo: Marie-Line Burquiere

If you would like to join the Friends of Quarr please email the Chairman,
Dr Rebecca Ashton:
chair.friends@quarr.org or you can download a membership form from the Friends' webpage on the Quarr Abbey website 'support' tab.

Like many charities, Quarr Abbey is suffering a lot from the present Covid crisis. The Community is very grateful for any donation towards the maintenance of the monastery and estate so that Quarr may remain open to many. Donations can be made online through the website. You might also consider putting us in your will. The Procurator can be contacted for any questions: procurator@quarr.org and 01983 882420 ext. 204.