

St Cecilia's
Abbey,
Ryde

Chronicle



Advent/Christmas 2022

No. 51

St Cecilia's Abbey, RYDE,
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Registered Charity 1088086

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Sung Mass & the full Divine Office every day.

Usual times of principal celebrations:

MASS : 10.00 a.m. Sundays & Solemnities

9.30 a.m. Weekdays

VESPERS: 5.00 p.m.

COMPLINE: 8.00 p.m.

CHRISTMAS 2022

Vigils: Christmas Eve 10.00 p.m. (please check)

Midnight Mass: Just after midnight.

Day Mass: 10.00 a.m.

HOLY WEEK 2023

6th April, Maundy Thursday: Missa Vespertina: 5.00 p.m.

7th April, Good Friday: Actio Liturgica: 3.00 p.m.

8th April, Holy Saturday: Paschal Vigil: 10.45 p.m. (please check)

9th April, Easter Sunday Mass 10.00 a.m.

2023 Ascension Day: Thursday 18th May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 8th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 16th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Cover: Image of Our Lady of Good Counsel in the Abbey Church.

From Mother Abbess

In a homily on the genealogy of Our Lord in St Matthew's Gospel, Fr Herbert McCabe comments on St Joseph, 'Matthew says that he was "a just man" – a fact worth noting when you think of the family he came from.'¹ Some depictions of the Holy Family at Christmastime seem to reflect idyllic images of the ideal family rather than what is implied by the Gospels. Notwithstanding the divinity of Christ and supreme sanctity of Mary and Joseph, the meaning of the Incarnation is that God became man and therefore partaker in all the troubles of the human race, apart from sin. The outrageous characters we find in the Old Testament stories were Jesus' relations; the griefs of war, famine, migration, and the anxieties of making a living, keeping warm and having enough to eat were all known to him. He was co-heir with us in all our fears and miseries. Through our baptism we have become co-heirs with him and adopted children of God, and nothing can now separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We wish this confidence to all our friends this Christmas.



Our motto this year was *Pars mea Dominus*, 'The Lord is my portion.' This phrase – Mother Ninian's profession motto – had particular application for the new abbess and community at St Cecilia's, as we looked back on the precious thirty-five years during which Mother Ninian served as our abbess. Her wise government and inspiring teaching, her example of monastic observance and most of all her loving care of each one of us have been an immense gift from the Lord to us. We came to the monastery for him alone, but he has manifested much of his care for us through the loving labours of our beloved Mother. In her retirement she remains a source of wisdom, a cherished presence and a powerful intercessor. May she long flourish among us.

Christmas blessings and peace.

St Eustochium

1. Herbert McCabe OP, *God Matters* (Geoffrey Chapman 1987).

Sr Catherine Horrigan, 31st July 1936 to 2nd August 2022

Chapter Talk by Mother Abbess

On 8th April 1943 a little girl was among the group making First Holy Communion at Notre Dame Convent school, Liverpool. One of the hymns sung by the children was ‘Jesus thou art coming’, which ends with the lines, *Take my heart and fill it / Full of love for thee; / All I have I give thee, / Give thyself to me.*

The straightforward logic of the hymn found a home in the heart of this straightforward little girl. This was, of course, our dear Sr Catherine, and decades later she told me she was still silently reciting the hymn as she waited to receive Holy Communion here.

In 1943 this child already knew some degree of suffering. In some notes she kindly wrote to help her obituary writer she began ‘loving, happy, united, devout, practising Catholic family,’ and this was manifestly true. Her parents, John Horrigan and Kathleen Hudson, had met in Lourdes. John was one of ten children. His mother had died leaving a widower with five children; soon there was a stepmother who, in later years, used to say to her husband, ‘You gave me five talents; here are five talents more,’ and there was no hint of any division among the two sets of siblings. Three entered here: Mère Claire and Mère Lucie (John’s full sisters) and Mère Ursula; another entered Ste Cécile as Mère Marie Madeleine; yet another was a Poor Clare at Darlington. John Horrigan’s stepmother also had a sister at Ste Cécile, Mère Teresa Traynor, and there was a priest uncle at Douai. Meanwhile Sr Catherine’s mother had a sister in the Society of the Sacred Heart; many years later another of Mrs Horrigan’s sisters would join La Sainte Union and make final profession at the age of 79. They were a family of piety and determination in equal measure.

Kathleen was the middle one of three girls – Mary, Kath and Teresa – born only a year apart. Into this happy family exploded the griefs and anxieties of the Second World War. Mr Horrigan was away for six long years. It is to the credit of Mrs Horrigan that she kept the family together and happy, but one wonders if some of the strain of those days seeped into the unconsciousness of those little girls. The First Holy Communion Day in 1943 would have been in the middle of this stress. It was at this time that Kathleen first thought of becoming a nun. She later wrote, ‘It seemed, for me, the obvious response to God giving himself to me – to give myself to him.’ With typical realism and self-deprecation she added, ‘There could have been other motives – being special – I was very ordinary.’ The little girl did not know about all the kinds of religious orders, but even at that stage she knew that she did not want to teach like the teaching Sisters at her school but to be ‘like Sr Anthony and pray’. Sr Anthony helped out in the children’s cloak room, finding lost articles and undoing knots in shoelaces, and when not doing such things would be saying her rosary. As we know, Sr Catherine ended up teaching and untying knots.

The great day came of Mr Horrigan’s return from the War. Mrs Horrigan



decided not to go to the station in case she broke down, so sent the three girls to meet the train. Sr Catherine used to describe how at the last minute they realised that they were on the wrong platform and had to dash to the right one, so it was three out-of-breath little girls who ran up to their father, who had to ask, 'Are you the little Horrigan's?' No doubt worn down by the privations of the War, Mr Horrigan died in 1950, when the three girls were 12, 13 and 14.

In her teenage years Kathleen thought of being a missionary. She wrote: 'No doubt attracted by pictures and stories of missionaries, especially pictures of children, and very probably with my father's time in India and Burma. Also liked science subjects and thought of combining disease research with missionary work.' The end of the War meant that it was possible once again to visit the aunties at PCJ, and even more when the family moved to Sussex after Mr Horrigan's death. Sr Catherine wrote, 'After a visit here when staying with a school friend she said to me one day, "Do you realise you can hardly talk of anything except Ryde?" I realised then the deep

impression it had made. I was drawn by the solemn celebration of Mass and Office and the family spirit (not just the aunties).'

With faith and generosity Mrs Horrigan welcomed her daughter's vocation. After a year working in the accounts department of the water rates office Kathleen entered on 4th August 1955 at the age of nineteen, proud to be a birthday present for Notre Mère Bernadette. Mère Gertrude Colson was the novice mistress and Mère Maura Foley zelatrice. The only other member of the novitiate at the time was Jeanne Guerrin who did not stay (later she was a devoted oblate), but the young Sr Catherine was soon joined by Sr Bede and then Sr Marie Bernard. One of the earliest entries in the novitiate chronicle is an account of a picnic on the roof, with sketches done by Sr Bede of Mother Mistress and Mother Zelatrice, but not of Sr Catherine 'because she moved about too much.'

Sr Catherine was clothed on 10th February 1956 and made First Profession on 11th February 1957 – the last to do so before the two-year novitiate became the norm. The Chronicler of the Monastery wrote 'She accomplished the details of the ceremony with the gentle tranquillity that she puts into all things.' She made Solemn Profession on 5th August 1960, Père Abbé Tissot presiding. The young nun worked

in the vegetable garden and altar bread department; and for eighteen months on the poultry farm; she was also second MC.

In February 1975 Sr Catherine was named as novice mistress. When handing over the charge, Mère Gertrude told Mère Catherine that she was not to see herself as imparting her own monastic teaching but acting as the instrument of her abbess. This principle was no problem to Mère Catherine who was devoted to the abbesses she served. She was not an intellectual and had had limited experience of adult life in the world, yet she was able to foster the monastic vocations of people quite different from herself. Her novices looked on her as very strict. If she thought you were using electric light unnecessarily, she would put her hand round the door and switch the light off.

She had no time for exaggeration or melodrama in things spiritual; her method for dealing with self-pity was to get the sufferer to focus on the most important thing of all – Our Lord. The standard of behaviour which she set was very high but she was also immensely kind and encouraging. Having been carefully brought up herself, she could seem rather staid, but there was also a gracious courtesy through which her genuine warmth



shone forth. She made clear what she wanted (Sr Mary David used to relate how after a few days in the novitiate she was asked ‘Would you like to do some sewing during recreation, Michele?’ and the innocent American, taking it as a friendly offer, said, ‘Oh, no thank you, Mother Mistress.’ ‘Well, you’re going to.’) but if someone struggled and stumbled, she helped her up.

At the renovation of charges in February 1996 she was relieved of the novitiate and instead made portress and sub-prioress, charges held until 2015. She had the community’s vote as counsellor for many years, right up to the stage when the abbess, prioress and a fellow counsellor were all her ex-novices or postulant, a situation that presented no problem whatsoever to her. Her veneration for her three abbesses was unswerving, based as it was on her deep faith.

Through all these years she remained deeply attached to her two sisters and the extended family, and they – including the next generation – loved and revered her. If anyone in her own extended family or in the family of one of the community rather fell by the wayside of life, her response was always one of compassion, and her perseverance in intercessory prayer for them was life-long.

And so we come to the last few years, when physical infirmity and confusion of mind went hand-in-hand. It was as if she had lost an outer layer of self-possession and

was vulnerable to any anxiety that might occur to her. In that First Communion hymn another line goes, *Take myself, dear Jesus, all I have and am*. Our Lord took her at her word. Perhaps there was a purification that had to be done in her, perhaps it was on behalf of all those for whom she had so ardently prayed. In the last few months there was a shift, with less anxiety and more occasions of peace and even joy – in particular the times she made it to Mass and Vespers, festive recreations and parlours, where her delight was lovely to behold. The birdtable and squirrels outside her window also brought lighter moments. The days of her dying were, at last, days of peace.

Her suggestions made years ago for the Office of Vigils for her funeral day carried this note: *This is meant to be helpful but as long as all pray for me – please do do this – I won't mind how much or how little, or even none at all of this is used.*

We pray for her, and are confident she is praying for us.

Homily for the funeral of Sr Catherine Horrigan, 8th August 2022 **Fr Abbot Xavier Perrin of Quarr**

Five years ago, on 5th August 2017, Sr Catherine celebrated her diamond jubilee. Many of us will remember this joyful occasion. Family and friends had gathered with the community to give thanks for sixty years of faithful and fruitful monastic life. The former novice-mistress could rejoice in the midst of the group of Sisters she had formed to monastic life – among whom we count no fewer than two abbesses. The kind and dignified sub-prioress enjoyed the respect and affection of all. We were on the eve of the feast of the Transfiguration and the climate was one of light, joy and hope.

We should not be surprised that this mystery of light was to be followed, or even *had* to be followed, by a season of darkness. The Transfiguration is given as a sign on the way to Christ's glory, which way cannot avoid Calvary. The disciples follow the Master and it is through His Passion and His Cross that they are led to the full glory of God's love. For Sr Catherine, by and large, light seemed to have disappeared; her mind and even at times her soul seemed to be plunged in a painful darkness, while her body experienced the weaknesses of great age. She had to be cared for in her physical needs, but also reassured, soothed, brought back to peace. These were painful years for all who loved her and suffered to see her distress and who surrounded her with love, patience and expertise; even more so for herself, obviously, who had to stay in this place of solitude and sorrow – which she did with her natural patience and kindness.

Here, we are given an option. We can consider these painful years just as the result of failures of her metabolism – which they certainly were. Or, we can choose to open the eyes of faith to recognise God at work in our lives. His work is always the same: He gives life. He gives life in the beginning, when He creates; He gives life all the time, when He keeps the universe going; He is giving life even when the forces of death are at work, when He redeems us on the Cross; He gives life in the silent

morning of Easter when life humbly triumphs for ever; He will give life at the end, in the resurrection of the dead.

The way we partake in this work of life is our faith. Faith is an assent, given to God out of trust; to who God is and to what God does. We pronounce with our whole being a 'Yes' of trust. This 'Yes' can be strong, joyful and luminous as on the day, say, of our monastic profession or wedding. It can at other times become far less triumphant; it can even be a voluntary assent of the soul while experiencing total weakness. Then, you do not rely on yourself at all, but only on God's strength which is imparted to you by His grace now and then.

Where science discerns sickness and death – and science is right within its remit – faith opens up another dimension and acknowledges: 'This is life through and through.' For Jesus' Cross is life – which the Resurrection manifests – and our sufferings, too, united with His, become life. They partake in a mystery of creation and redemption where life is given and life is restored to its fullness.

Through faith, we dwell already on this mountain where God promised to 'swallow up death for ever' and to 'wipe away tears from all faces' so that all may 'rejoice in His salvation' (Is. 25). There He has prepared a banquet of life in which He gives Himself as the 'living bread which came down from heaven, that man may eat of it and not die' (John 6). This last quotation reminds us of the years Sr Catherine worked in the altar bread department, and, mainly, of her love for the Eucharist. She believed with all her heart that 'who[ever] eats this bread will live for ever'. She adored Christ present in the Host. She received Him with faith daily, slowly becoming similar to Him: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is' (1 John 3). It is our hope that Sr Catherine has been made like Jesus through her long life of humble monastic service and through her final years of mysterious sufferings. We pray that her soul may be fully united to the One she loved and in whom she kept her faith to the end.

Now, let me add that none of us would be surprised to find a 'Horrigan corner' in heaven. We would hope to meet there with Mère Claire, Mère Lucie and Mère Ursula, as well as Mère Marie-Madeleine, but also many related religious sisters, a group of good mothers and fathers, and many others more or less happy, more or less successful, for all of whom these humble sisters prayed and suffered. The communion of the saints begins in one's family – both natural and religious. 'None of us,' says St Paul, 'lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord' (Rom. 14) – and, if I may add, for one another. There is a familial, and indeed ecclesial dimension to life and death when they are lived by faith. All the children of the Father are related. They have one life: Christ's. They have one death: Christ's. They have one resurrection: Christ's. 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.' May our Sister rest in the peace of the Father!

Extracts from Bishop Philip Egan's Homily for the Abbatial Blessing...

We can sum up this brief homily in just one phrase: Do whatever He tells you. This is the good counsel the Blessed Mother gives us in today's Gospel: Do whatever He tells you.... To do whatever Jesus tells us, we should first turn to Her, the Mother of Good Counsel, She who tells us to listen to her Son and to pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We should ask Mary to bring us to Christ and to obtain for us the gift of counsel, that we may know the Word and will of God and have the grace to put it into practice. Mother Eustochium, it is providential to have this blessing today on the Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel, the Secondary Patron of this abbey. The role of an abbess is to be the servant of the Lord's servants, and as any bishop, abbot or abbess, or anyone exercising authority in the Lord's name will tell you, counsel is a gift of the Holy Spirit constantly needed. Do not be surprised to find yourself having a lot of meetings! For as you pray for counsel, you must duly listen to trusted counsellors



Novice Mistress Sr Elizabeth and Sr M. Benedict

and in turn give wise counselling to others. The Prayer of Blessing says *Spiritus tui, Domine, ipsam implere*: 'Give her the gifts of your Spirit. Set her on fire with love for your glory and for the service of your Church. And may she in turn inflame with zeal the hearts of her sisters.' That is our earnest prayer for you today, and our prayer for this community.

... and for Sr Mary Benedict

Ryan's Solemn Profession, Feast of the Triumph of the Cross

Today is a wonderful feastday for a solemn profession, when we hear the words of Jesus in the Gospel: God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that through Him the world might be saved. ... What was humanity's darkest hour, the crucifixion of God, became its most brilliant triumph when Jesus rose victorious from the grave, defeating sin and evil, sickness, suffering, sadness and death. God raised him high, St Paul said in the First Reading, and gave him the name above all names. In our fallen world, every day we meet the Cross in one form or another, in ourselves, in others, in the situations of life and in the broken world we live in. A monastery is no exception. There can be many trials, tribulations and difficult moments. Or as we say, crosses to bear. Today, Sr Mary Benedict sets us an inspiring and unforgettable example. In what she is doing, we see what we, each in our own way, are called to do. For her solemn profession reminds us, that the Tree of Death is in fact the Tree of Life.

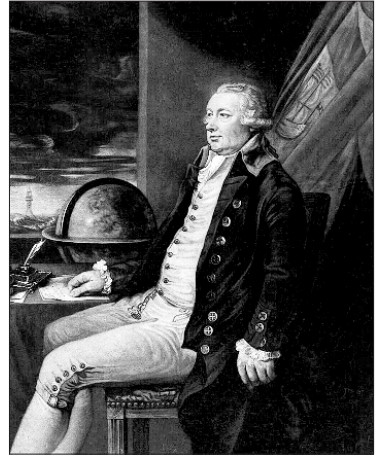
The History of Appley House: Part 7: Mrs Walker's Heir

On 15th September 1805 nearly every household on the Isle of Wight would have been full of excitement over the events of the previous day: the arrival in Portsmouth of the national hero Lord Nelson, on his way to fight the French. Having travelled overnight he had reached the George Hotel at six in the morning. Later in the day he slipped out a back door to avoid the crowds but they overtook him on Southsea Common, cheering and calling down blessings upon him. He boarded a boat on Southsea Beach (not far from where the hoverport is now) and was rowed to HMS *Victory* which was anchored at St Helen's.¹ HMS *Victory* sailed the next day, so that Nelson's last sight of England was the Isle of Wight. One of the few households preoccupied with other things was Appley House, as it was on 15th that Mrs Walker died.

Mrs Walker's will, drawn up in 1782, consists of ten sheets of vellum, and provides in careful detail for the major part of her estate to be entailed on her cousin John Hutt 'for his natural life, with the power to cut timber for repairs but not for sale.' It is to pass then to his eldest son and his heirs, or in the absence of these to his subsequent sons; if there are no sons, it is to be divided equally among the daughters. If John Hutt has no heirs, it goes to John's brother Richards (sic) on the same terms; if he has no heirs; it goes another cousin, Edward Roberts. Although she had no children of her own, Mrs Walker was clearly intent on founding a line which would keep intact the estate of farms and woods inherited from her parents. John Hutt, however, died childless in 1794, and so the heir was his younger brother, Richards Hutt.

While John Hutt had been an officer in the Royal Navy, Richards had been working his way up in the maritime service of the East India Company. By 1775, aged 25, he was 4th Officer on the *Grenville*, on a two-year voyage to Bombay. Over the next decade he would make four further voyages of similar length, on the *Lord North* to Madras; again on the *Lord North* to Bencoolen (modern-day Sumatra) and China; on the *Foulis* to 'Coast' (the Coast of Coramandel, East India) and China; and again on the *Foulis* to 'Coast & Bay' (the Bay of Bengal), with a few months in England in between each one. After the last-mentioned voyage, he had time to woo Gilly Flower. They were married at Christchurch, Southwark in London on 26th February 1790, but two months later he was off again on a voyage to China, this time as 1st Officer on the *Hillsborough*, and would not return until summer 1791.

1 A plaque on the base of the tower of St Helen's Old Church commemorates the event.



Gilly Flower's father John had been a timber merchant in Covent Garden.² He died in 1780 leaving Gilly aged twelve and three younger children, Anne, Sarah and Colly. It is not known whether Gilly's mother was still alive, but Gilly seems to have stayed in the area while her husband was at sea, for her first child, Elizabeth, was baptised at St Paul Covent Garden on 2nd February 1791. Mrs Hutt would have been relieved that her husband had not gone on the next voyage of the *Foullis*, as it set out for China and was never heard of again. The baby's name could be construed as a compliment to the wealthy cousin Betty Ann Walker at Appley House. Richards Hutt then seems to have spent a couple of years in England, during which his next child, Anne, was born, but there followed another voyage as 1st Officer in the *Hillsborough*, this time to Coast & Bay, departing from Portsmouth in May 1793 (did he call on the cousins at Appley?) and returning in August 1794. To greet him this time was a third daughter, Mary, born while he was away. He will also have had to learn the news of the death of his brother John just two months before, which made him the heir to Mrs Walker.

The owner of the *Hillsborough* (and of the ill-fated *Foullis*) was Sir Robert Preston, a Scot who had worked his way up from 5th Mate to Captain, and become very wealthy. His friend Sir Walter Scott said that he was 'as big as two men and eats like three' but he was also known for his philanthropy to the poor of his native Fife. Although a Member of Parliament for twenty years, he is not recorded as ever speaking on the floor of the House of Commons. He seems to have been impressed by Hutt, making him Captain of the *Hillsborough* for two voyages to Coast & Bay, lasting from May 1795 to August 1796 and from March 1797 to July 1798. The Hutt's first son was born while Captain Hutt was away, and baptised John. No more voyages are recorded, and the family seems to have settled in Bishops Stortford as several of the later children were baptised there. His rank made the Captain eligible for the Society of East India Commanders, a sort of club and mutual society which met at various London taverns. One of the more unusual benefits was the presentation of a piece of plate of a value of 50 guineas to any member who had ten children born to him in wedlock. The Hutt's were eligible for their piece of plate by 1804, and their eleventh child, Matilda, was born a couple of weeks before the death of Mrs Walker. If Captain Hutt came to Appley to settle Mrs Walker's affairs, he may have witnessed HMS *Victory*, bearing the body of Nelson, arriving at Portsmouth on 4th December. The nation's mixture of mourning for Nelson and joy and relief over the victory at Trafalgar had its mirror in Hutt's mourning for his cousin, joy over the new child and relief at the acquisition of Appley House and its rent-rolls, to support his growing family.

(To be continued.)

Picture: Portrait of Sir Robert Preston by William Dickinson (source: Wikipedia).

² His workshop and timber-yard appear on contemporary maps of the area. I am most indebted to Mr Richard Oliver, a descendant of Anne Flower, for this information.

What is Christmas like at the Abbey? Part 7: Christmas Shopping

After we have sung None we go to the community room, St Gabriel's, which is at its most charming in festive lights and decorations. Suddenly Christmas is now complete as we meet and speak, our greetings on Christmas Eve seeming like an age ago. We only ever intend to make Christmas as good as the preceding one, and yet each year it is all so different, and everyone seems to have new joys or mishaps to share.

Then begins what has come to be known as 'Christmas Shopping'. The long tables in St Gabriel's are covered with gifts donated by generous benefactors, or made by the community, and everything is laid out with great care. One sister delivers a speech of explanation, as traditional in this house as that of the Prioress on Christmas Eve, making sure we don't accidentally take more than 'ONE!' of this or that selection in the cheerful hubbub.

Numbers are drawn to decide who goes first, only adding to the anticipation. Soon all are circulating, and commenting with humour on each other's choices; we can observe the delight of a nun who has picked out a notebook that is just the thing for a study she hopes to do, or a biro that glides gloriously across the page, or a kind of glue she is very fond of for making feast-day cards for her sisters. Some may take very little, feeling they already have what they need, but share in the fun of 'shopping' with their sisters.

Things wind down in time for the beginning of what we have known all our lives as the Queen's Christmas message, but which now of course will be the King's. Those who wish gather around the radio - the only time of year we use one - while others drift off to various corners of the house: some to write letters to family and friends after the Advent silence, some to take the siesta permitted to make up for the very short night, some to peruse the new books which are on display in the library. A cosy hush descends upon the house, as if not to disturb the Christ-Child's slumber.

Somehow everyone surfaces again for Vespers. At Lauds, the antiphons spoke explicitly of the Child's birth. At Vespers, the antiphons are simply drawn from the Psalms which they accompany - but today, that gives those Psalms a perfect transparency to the One of whom they speak. *Exortum est in tenebris lumen rectis corde* - 'A Light has arisen in the darkness for the upright in heart' (Ps 111) - a Light, which, we know, is a Person. And so the Magnificat antiphon at last proclaims that 'today' we see the fulfilment of Scripture's promises: *Hodie Christus natus est*, 'Today Christ is born... Today let the just rejoice, saying, Glory to God in the highest, alleluia!'

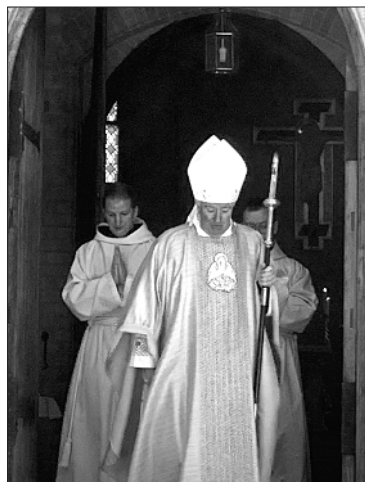
Sr MBR (to be continued)

Picture opposite: Bishop Philip Egan coming out of our church after the Abbatial Blessing.

On 21st November 2021, Feast of Christ the King, Martha O’Riordan from Cork entered as a postulant. The next afternoon, feast of St Cecilia, the monks of Quarr came for a talking tea in the parlour, followed by Vespers alternated between monks in the sanctuary and nuns in the choir. Such meetings had been prevented by Covid precautions for well over eighteen months, so it was a particular joy to see them at close quarters again. Making up for lost time, we enjoyed another fraternal afternoon of tea and Vespers on 2nd February, feast of the Presentation of the Lord and day of consecrated life.

We were once again very happy to welcome Fr Dominic Allain as our celebrant for Christmas, as well as Easter and several other occasions, sometimes in the company of his colleague Fr Daniel Weatherley. Their valuable work of ‘Grief to Grace’ retreats for abuse survivors has been able to restart after the end of the lockdowns, and we are glad to pray for it.

The novitiate’s traditional Epiphany play this year was a delightful performance of *The Smallest of All*, by M. Mary Francis PCC, about St Bernadette of Lourdes. All the characters joined in singing the Lourdes Hymn at the end, when God had shown His grace to all in need of Our Lady’s care and guidance.



This message came at the right time, for Mother Abbess Ninian Eaglesham had announced on 3rd January that her resignation, on grounds of age and health, had been accepted by the Abbot President of our Congregation. As described in the Easter Chronicle, it was with deep gratitude for Mother Ninian’s long years of outstanding abbatial service that we prepared for the abbatial election on 17th January. Sr Eustochium Lee, Prioress, was duly elected as the fourth abbess of our monastery. Her abbatial motto is *Supernæ pietati deservire*, ‘To serve the divine goodness’ (St Bede). Mother Ninian takes her place as a treasured abbess emerita, a special and beloved presence of prayer and support.

Stockport Viaduct, featured on Mother Abbess’s blazon as a symbol of the monastic life – millions of humble little bricks together forming a sure pathway – has captured the imagination of all who hear of it. Mother noted that the Viaduct was completed ‘on time and within budget’. One sister suggested we pray that the same may be true of our journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. God’s budget, thankfully, is infinite, even if our time is not. Our new Mother Abbess had a rapid initiation into

presiding over the termini of monastic life. Only four days after her election, on 21st January, feast of St Agnes, she gave the postulant's veil to Olivia Gardner. On 25th March, feast of the Annunciation, Fran Tomlin from London also began her postulancy. At the other end of a monastic journey, Sr Marie Brigid Dickinson was called home to the Lord on 17th February, after some years of being confined to bed. Sr Marie Brigid was the last member of our community to have entered under our first abbess, Mère Ambrosia Cousin, and so her passing was also a milestone in our collective memory.

Just before Lent began, our old friend Dom Benedict Hardy of Pluscarden Abbey preached our annual retreat, his conferences being as appreciated as ever – especially given the stormy weather's vigorous but ultimate unsuccessful efforts to prevent his arrival.

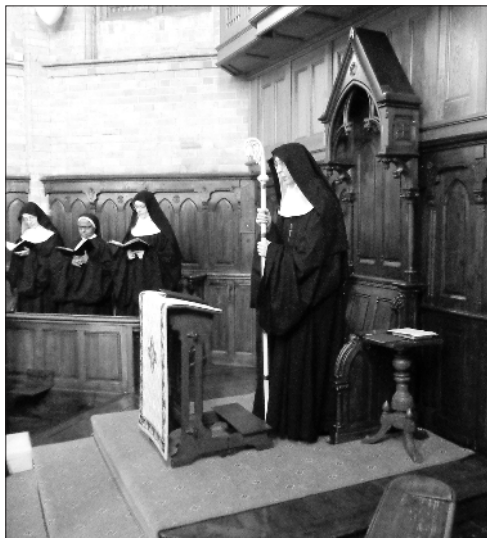
Mother Eustochium was Prioress and cellarer before her election as abbess. After the election, Sr Gertrude Quayle was appointed Prioress, and was also given the charge of cellarer at the subsequent renovation of charges in March. Other changes include Sr Madeleine McCann's appointment as Subprioress; Sr Elizabeth Burgess to the charge of the art studio; Sr Mary Thomas Brown to the kitchen; and Sr M. Michaela de Paula to the vegetable garden.

Mother Abbess was able to make a retreat at Douai Abbey before her abbatial blessing, and returned bringing Mother Ninian home from the latter's weeks of well earned rest at Kiln Green convent. The whole community was thus reunited in time for Holy Week, and ready for the new stage about to begin in our history.

The abbatial blessing of Mother Abbess Eustochium Lee took place on 26th April, feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel, which fell on the Tuesday after the Easter Octave. The liturgy for this Feast draws heavily on the Book of Wisdom, applying its eulogies of God's wisdom to describe Our Lady in her maternal role of teaching, guidance and encouragement. The antiphons of the morning offices set the appropriate tone of joy and light in reliance on divine Providence. At the Mass of Blessing, Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth presided. Our monastic Congregation of Solesmes was represented on the sanctuary by Monseigneur Robert Le Gall OSB, Archbishop Emeritus of Toulouse; Abbot President Philippe Dupont of Solesmes; Abbot Jean Pateau of Fontgombault; our own Abbot Xavier Perrin with almost all our brethren of Quarr; and the Priors Administrator of Wisques and Kergonan. Abbot Cuthbert Brogan of Farnborough, Abbot Emeritus Finbar Kealy of Douai, and clerical friends from near and far, added to the celebration. Inside the enclosure, meanwhile, we welcomed Abbess Claire de Sazilly of Ste-Cécile, Solesmes; Abbess Laurence Dupré La Tour of St-Michel, Kergonan; Abbess Anne-Lætitia Derreumaux of Notre Dame de Wisques; Abbess Nirmala Narikunnel of Shanti Nilayam, India; M. Prioress Benedict McLaughlin of Immaculate Heart, Westfield, USA; M. Winsome Durrant of the

Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary; M. Anne Clarke of the Anglican Benedictines of West Malling; and representatives of Ste-Marie des Deux Montagnes and Stanbrook Abbeys. Apostolic sisters from the Island were also present in the nuns' choir for the Mass of Abbatial Blessing.

Preparations for the great day required intense activity – from guest cells to refectory decorations, menus to liturgical booklets, musical practices to what seemed not unlike musical chairs in the elaboration of seating and serving plans. Nonetheless, joy as well as busyness intensified with the arrival of guests, and the day of the Blessing was one of graces. If there was a breathless succession of things to be done before and after, the Mass of Blessing itself, the centre of the day, was an unencumbered space of liturgical time, carried by the chants and prayers of the rite, meeting eternity in the Eucharist. The prayer of blessing, which followed after the Litany of the Saints, is a rich text which starts with the model of Christ the Good Shepherd who came to lay down His life for His sheep. Full of allusions to the Rule of St Benedict, it places the love of Christ and the brethren at the heart of what an abbess must inculcate. We hear St Benedict's prescriptions for the abbatial office three times a year in the refectory, yet it was profoundly moving in quite a new way to hear them prayed in this context, at this moment in the life of our community. After a festive lunch, we joined many of our guests in the parlour for some musical entertainment and greetings at the grille. The midday crowd was somewhat diminished in that the monk guests returned to Quarr for lunch. All were reunited later for the *Laudes Festivæ* sung in the parlour: a peculiar genre of quasi-liturgical sung prayers, wherein the acclamation *Christus vincit, Christus regit, Christus imperat!* is repeated between sections composed for the occasion, wishing appropriate blessings on the current pope, bishop, the new abbess, monastic friends, and so on. Vespers was alternated between monks and nuns.



Mother Eustochium with her crozier; in the choir stalls, M. Nirmala and M. Claire.

After the great day, we had a little longer to enjoy the company of our monastic guests. The superiors from our Congregation were able to hold a preliminary meeting in preparation for the Chapter of Abbesses in autumn. By way of light relief, M. Claire and M. Benedict gamely joined in the novitiate's netball match. M. Nirmala stayed with us for several weeks, maintaining our strong ties with Shanti Nilayam Abbey in

Bangalore. The communion of the Benedictine family, and the special bond uniting the houses of the Solesmes Congregation, were made very beautifully concrete in all that surrounded the Abbatial Blessing. We give thanks for the occasion, and pray that it may bear much fruit for our dear Mother Abbess and our whole monastic family.

Ours was not the only Abbatial Blessing this year. The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Abbot President Philippe Dupont in March. Dom Dupont had served as Abbot of St-Pierre of Solesmes, and hence as Abbot President of the Congregation of Solesmes, for nearly thirty years. We are grateful for his long and faithful exercise of this heavy office. His paternal care has maintained the unity in diversity of the different monasteries of the Congregation, and his visits to us for canonical visitations and other occasions have made us familiar with his wisdom and his humour. May he enjoy a peaceful retirement, and be rewarded abundantly by the Lord for his many labours. On 17th May, the community of St-Pierre, with the superiors of the houses of monks of the Congregation, elected as his successor Dom Geoffroy Kemlin. The Abbatial Blessing was set for 14th July, the anniversary of the abbatial blessings of Madame Cécile Bruyère, first abbess of Ste-Cécile of Solesmes, and of Dom Germain Cozien, fourth abbot of St-Pierre. Dom Kemlin has chosen as his motto *Fratres in unum*, 'Brethren in unity,' taken from Psalm 132: 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!' The Latin could also be read as, 'Brethren towards the One', for it is the search for the One Thing Necessary which alone can ground enduring monastic unity. Dom Kemlin invited the Congregation's abbesses to his Blessing, and so Mother Abbess travelled to join the French abbesses in representing the nuns' spiritual presence. May the Lord indeed bless Dom Kemlin's ministry, and we hope he will soon find a reason to visit the Isle of Wight.

On 2nd August, Sr Catherine Horrigan made her final journey to God (see obituary, p.4). As with Sr Marie Brigid's death, Sr Catherine's departure marks the close of a chapter; she was the last of five Horrigan nuns of our Congregation. May their joyful reunion in eternity overflow into new vocations on earth.



Sr Pia

Our junior Sr M. Michaela de Paula moved from the novitiate to community on 6th August, for the remaining years before final profession. Sr M. Faustina Sinclair has begun the second year of her novitiate. On 19th October, feast of the North American Martyrs, Serene Lai received the habit and the name

Sr Pia. Her patron is St Pius ('Padre Pio') of Pietrelcina, a great heavenly friend of our new novice. At the time of writing, we are looking forward to the first professions of Sr Cæcilia Schenke on 19th November and Sr Teresa Benedicta O'Riordan on 10th February, and the clothing of Martha O'Riordan on 30th November.

Sr Mary Benedict Ryan's Solemn Profession took place on 14th September, Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross – if every profession is eagerly anticipated, this one was especially so, since the changes to canon law meant that it had to come two years later than first expected. Bishop Philip Egan presided over the beautiful Mass of Profession, with a group of concelebrants headed by Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross, Sr M. Benedict's home diocese. Guests included Mr and Mrs Ryan, Sr M. Benedict's elder brother Denis and family all the way from Australia, and her younger brother Br Columba Maria, a novice at Silverstream Priory in Co. Meath. The festive recreation in the afternoon got off to a lively start with the novitiate's adaptation of 'Wild Rover' – 'And it's no, nay, never... will she wear her old white veil, no nay never, no more'. Sr M. Benedict has chosen as her motto, *Tibi munus æternum*, 'An eternal gift to You', a phrase found in the Third Eucharistic Prayer and dating back to a prayer over the offerings found in one of the ancient Sacramentaries. Her emblem is an altar.

Mother Abbess's patron St Eustochium appears in the Martyrology on 28th September, but our celebrations of the feastday were transferred this year to 28th August. The novitiate's refectory decorations were inspired by (no surprise!) Stockport Viaduct. The arches strode in yellow paper round the refectory, each pillar a living stone helping us on the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem: silhouette drawings of saints and heroes, from Old Testament patriarchs to figures in Solesmian history, took their places along the way, and silver letters on the door proclaimed that 'all your walls are built of precious stones' (Is. 54:12). On the columns behind the abbatial table were Saints Eustochium and Ninian. Is this the first time they have formed an iconographical pairing?

The reason for the early feast was that on 28th September Mother Abbess was in North America: the Chapter of Abbesses of our Congregation was held this year at the monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Westfield, Vermont. The superiors of the women's houses discussed a range of issues in contemporary monastic life, while strengthening fraternal ties and getting to know the new Abbot President. It was also an occasion of more direct visibility for monastic life than usual: an official at the Canada-U.S. border remarked with some surprise upon seeing eight nuns in one day!

Our bishop recently told us us that Mass attendance is only 80% of pre-pandemic numbers: a subject for prayer. One hopeful sign, however, is that our Altar Bread Department is being kept busy, an indication of parish activity. The hot summer kept the gardeners extremely busy with watering cans, thanks to which we have eaten our own courgettes, lettuce, beans, and more. Berries, apples, and the

beautiful flowers which furnish the sanctuary are further results of manual labour and God's bounty.

Jacqueline McCrea made her affiliation as a novice oblate in June. An oblate weekend was held 29th-30th October – the first since before Covid. About eleven oblates gathered for talks on 'The Fear of the Lord' (Sr Claire), the Lukan parables on prayer (M. Subprioress), and the Te Deum (Mother Abbess), all followed by a recreation with the community in the parlour on the Sunday. Our oblates are an important element of our monastic family; we are very conscious of their prayers and support, and it was good to be able to meet together as a group again.

In July, we welcomed Sr Gloria Onyeguili for a fortnight's stay. Sr Gloria, a nun of Umuoji monastery in Nigeria, is currently a student in sacred music at St Cecilia's in Rome. During this summer, she visited Ryde, Stanbrook and Pluscarden. Sr Gloria charmed us with her zest and enthusiasm for the vocation of giving glory



to God at every moment. 'Outside' visitors to the abbey included a First Communion group from St David's, Cowes. Talented young members of the Lowe and Barrett families gave us parlour concerts. Two groups from local branches of the (Anglican) Mothers' Union came to learn about monastic life. A group of Anglican organists and choir masters visiting the Island's abbeys had a talk from Sr Bernadette. We have enjoyed visits from Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Bishop Erik Varden of Trondheim, and Abbot Adrian Lenglet of Vaals, as well as our own Bishop Philip.

Sr Margaret's father, Mr David Ross, gave us a fascinating illustrated talk on climate change and regenerative agriculture. Sr Anne gave us a post-prandial talk on the *Shemah Israel* and St John's Gospel. Mother Ninian delighted on her feastday with a talk about her childhood on the Solway Firth. We benefit from Mother Abbess's teaching in her regular conferences, including exploration of the history of our diocese (encouraging our prayer for it), and a conference on the 'Christ prayers' of the Book of Nunnaminster.

Sr Claire Waddelove's book *Our Father* continues to be well received: 'I cannot recommend it highly enough and I look forward to reading it again' (Deacon Owen Cummings, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*); 'extremely useful not only for private study but for preparation for teaching and preaching on the prayer that Jesus taught us' (Prof. David Deavel, *The Imaginative Conservative*).

Abbot Xavier Perrin's recent book on Benedictine spirituality was published by

Gracewing in an English translation by Sr Lætitia Payne and Dom Luke Bell, under the title *In the School of St Benedict*. In the *Catholic Herald* it was described as an ‘excellent’ book. *The Joy of God* (Bloomsbury, 2019), the selected writings of Sr Mary David Totah (d. 2017), now has editions in French – *La Joie de Dieu* (Les Éditions de Solesmes, translated by Abbot Xavier Perrin) – and Polish, *Droga do Radości* (Wydawnictwo W drodze). A German translation made by Sr Cæcilia Schenke, *Die Eroberung der Freude*, is to be published soon by Renovamen Verlag.

We were united with the whole country in mourning the death of Her Majesty the Queen, after having been united also in the joy of the Platinum Jubilee. This is only an earthly reflection of the communion in Christ to which all are called, and which we seek to foster through prayer for the needs of all people, including the many who do not know their need of God. May Elizabeth II rejoice in the fullness of eternal life, and may a new hunger for that life be awakened in all who have honoured her memory. Of our own families and friends, besides Sr Marie Brigid and Sr Catherine, those who have passed away this year include Mr Alan O’Riordan, father of Sr Teresa Benedicta and Martha; and Jonathan Bacon, brother of Sr Scholastica. May they and all the departed rest in peace.

When the bishop questions the new abbess as to her resolve before he blesses her, one enquiry is whether she will encourage her sisters to ‘increase the people of God through the hidden apostolic fruitfulness of contemplation’ (rendered literally). This comes from Vatican II’s description of the role of contemplative institutes: ‘They offer a pre-eminent sacrifice of praise to God; they illuminate God’s people with rich fruits of holiness, stimulate them by example, and give them increase by a hidden apostolic fruitfulness’ (*Perfectæ caritatis*, 7). It is a challenging programme, to say the least. If possible at all, it is only by God’s grace. May the graciousness of God revealed at Christmas come to its full effect in our community, and in all our oblates, benefactors, helpers, friends and readers.



*Novitiate
schola
for
St Martin’s day.*

*The novitiate
served
as chantresses
for the feast.*

With our prayers for peace at Christmas and in the New Year

Sr Eustachium Lee

Sr. Ninian Eaglesham

S. Gertrude Quayle.

Sr. M. Germain Fievret

Sr. Mary Antonia Badger

Sr Madeleine McCann

Sr Margaret Ross

Sr. Maria Michaela de Paula

Sr Elizabeth Burgess

Sr. Scholastica Bacon

Sr. Teresa Benedicta
O'Riordan

Olivia

Sr Caecilia Schunke

Sr. Bede M. Barker

Sr. Anne-Marie O'Keeffe.

Sr. Marie-Therese Dempsey

Sr. M. Bernard Eckhardt

Sr. Anselm ^{Scott}

Sr Mary Thomas Brown

Sr. Constance Neame

Sr Blaine Waddelore

Sr Mary Benedict Ryan.

Sr Rachel Appleby

Sr. Luce Marie Pimuta

Sr. Anne Eason

Sr. Maria Justina Sinclair

Sr. Pia Kai

Sr. Marie Angela Conway

Sr. Laetitia Payne

M^{gr}

Sr Mechthild Hansen

Sr Bernadette Byrne

Jan