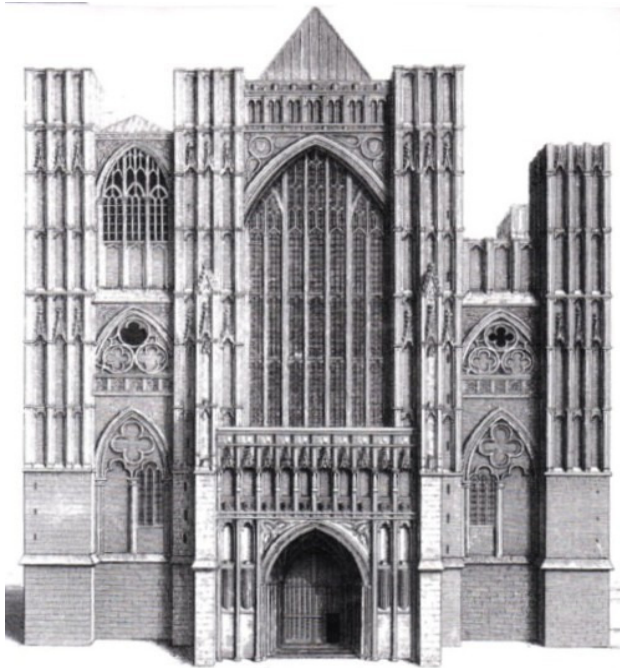


Westminster Abbey

On November 22 Frs Abbot, Alban, Richard and Br Placid took part in the celebration at Westminster Abbey to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the event by which continuity was established between the pre-Reformation English Benedictine Congregation and the present-day Congregation. The article below gives a detailed explanation.◊



Westminster Abbey as it would have been known by the monks; (the twin towers were only added in the seventeenth century by Christopher Wren). Engraving from Dugdale's 'Monasticon Anglicanum'.

Dies Memorabilis by Placid Hughes OSB

November 21 is known among the English Benedictines as the *Dies Memorabilis* because on that day in two different years two significant events occurred in the early history of the Congregation. In 1556, monks took possession once again of Westminster Abbey, which had, since its surrender in 1540 to Henry VIII's officials, been used as a cathedral church. Most of these men had formerly been monks during the reign of Henry VIII, and, with the coronation of Queen Mary in 1553, they saw new possibilities for living the monastic life in England. They were led by John Feckenham, who had been a monk of Evesham Abbey until

1539. As a former chaplain to Bishop Bonner of London and Dean of St Paul's, and now chaplain to Queen Mary and Abbot of Westminster, Feckenham was well-connected and ready to use his position to effect the restoration of Catholicism in England.

That many others shared his vision is evident by the influx of novices at Westminster Abbey, of whom the most notable was Dom Robert Seberte, later known as Sigebert Buckley. Little is known about him except that he was ordained by the Bishop of London and spent most of Queen Elizabeth's reign in prison. After his release at the beginning of James I's reign, he was con-

Douai Abbey Newsletter

tacted by two young monks, Dom Vincent Sadler and Dom Edward Maihew, recently professed abroad.

In 1607, another young monk professed in Italy, Dom Augustine Baker, who had previously been a lawyer, arranged for the aggregation of Sadler and Maihew to Buckley. Therefore, through Marian Westminster and Dom Sigebert Buckley, English monks in early modern Europe were linked to their pre-Dissolution predecessors.

On November 22, 2007, a half-day conference, organised by the History Commission of the English Benedictine Congregation, was held at Westminster Abbey celebrating the 400th anniversary of Buckley's act of aggregation, one of the two events commemorated under the name *Dies Memorabilis*. More than fifty people attended, including many abbots, monks, and clergy and staff of Westminster Abbey. Before the conference a tour of the abbey was led by Canon Theologian, Nicholas Sagovsky, who, among other things, drew our attention to a small chapel dedicated to St Benedict just off the south transept. Apart from a small plaque high on the wall, the chapel is dominated by memorials of poets. The conference began with a warm welcome from Dean John Hall in the historic Jerusalem Chamber, which is the principal room of the medieval house of the abbots of Westminster, formerly known as Cheyne-gates. Built up against the south aisle of the abbey church, it is now the Dean's residence.

Miss Barbara Harvey, the principal authority on the medieval

abbey of Westminster, gave an excellent paper on the first dissolution of Westminster Abbey, when twenty-four monks signed a deed of surrender. She put Westminster in the context of the dissolution of the monasteries as a whole, drawing particular attention to the fact that, whereas few monks had left the abbey during previous centuries, after the royal visitation of 1535-6, many monks departed. She suggested that the reforms implemented in the wake of the royal visitation, which brought about a tightening of monastic discipline, were responsible for the departure of these monks.

Dr Peter Cramer of Winchester College gave what he described as 'more of an essay' on the wider context of Buckley's act of aggregation. His principal point of reference was a monumental book entitled *Apostolatus Benedictinorum in Anglia*, published at Douai in 1626. He drew attention to Dom Augustine Baker's role in the production of this book. Ranging far and wide, from the Inns of Court to Erasmian humanism, Cramer illuminated early modern ideas concerning the continuity and discontinuity, and the legal term 'aggregation'.

While tea and sandwiches were being served, the Keeper of the Muniments, Dr Richard Mortimer, displayed a few of the medieval muniments, including, most notably, WAM 9327, which is an early list of the monks of Marian Westminster. Conference participants were then hurried into choir for choral evensong. The monks and nuns, however, processed in with the choir and canons, ably led by the vergers. Following

evensong, conference participants were led up through the doors on either side of the high altar to the shrine of St Edward the Confessor, the only medieval English shrine that survives mostly intact, thanks to the care and industry of Abbot Feckenham. In this intimate space, and later in the chapel of St Benedict there was a short service consisting of a few prayers and readings, notably the official document signed by Buckley attesting to his act of aggregation, and the singing of the responsory *Posuisti* and the profession antiphon *Suscipe*, led by the Abbot President, the abbots of Downside, Ampleforth and Douai, the titular Abbot of Westminster, and the Dean of Westminster. It was a simple and fitting commemoration of the *Dies Memorabilis*.

Lastly, the conference ended with a reception in the undercroft, which is the oldest surviving part of the abbey buildings. It is presently used as the Abbey Museum and contains an enamelled medieval retable, which, until its recent discovery and restoration, had been used as a cupboard. The Dean was again thanked for the abbey's hospitality and Dom Anselm Cramer of Ampleforth was thanked for organising the conference. From Douai Abbey, Abbot Geoffrey Scott, Dom Alban Hood, Dom Richard Jones, and Dom Placid Hughes attended the conference. ◊

A booklet *Sigebert Buckley, Monk of Westminster The Benedictine Link* has been published by Ampleforth Abbey price £2, (by post £3), available from Douai Abbey Bookshop or from Ampleforth Abbey. ◊

School Building Development wins award

The development of the former school buildings won ‘Silver’ in the ‘Best Renovation’ category at the prestigious ‘What House Awards 2007’. At the presentation on November 16 the judges commented how “minimal intervention, the use of existing volumes, the quality of finish and the landscaping all help Avalon stand out”. They also praised the transformation of the old school buildings for combining “the historic fabric with a contemporary approach... always one of the most difficult challenges in such a conversion”.

‘Avalon’ is the name the developers have given the project, which is now complete.◊



Monks visiting the apartment in the former school refectory.



The former Study Hall is an apartment.



The former Court of Arches is a general reception area.

Studley Parish Open Day

The Douai parish of St Mary at Studley in Warwickshire held its first ever open day on Sunday September 24. The parish priest, Fr Alexander Austin OSB, explained, “It was really to raise our profile in the area, and to show that the church is for everyone, open and welcoming. We’re red hot on evangelization! We sent personal invitations to every house in the village and had a great response, with lots of visitors including several lapsed and those who want to become Catholics. They were all impressed and positive in their comments, so we’ll probably make it an annual event.”

Local newspapers, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, *Redditch Advertiser* and *Redditch Standard* all devoted generous space to announcing the open day. The church was opened from 11.30am until 5pm. There were organised tours of the church and peo-

ple were left free to walk around as they wished. There were displays about the history of the church, and its connected organisations and groups such as the church school and the Catholic Women’s League. There were displays of the church plate and vestments as well as an explanation of the Mass and devotions such as the Rosary. Other displays covered the life of St Benedict, the Benedictines and Douai Abbey.

There were activities for children. The gardens and new parish centre were open and cream teas were available for sale. A video was shown promoting the forthcoming *Alpha* course which was to run from September 29 for ten weeks

A chapel was set aside for private prayer, and Fr Alexander was available to talk with anyone who wished.◊

Community Notes

Br Christopher

led a Saturday Workshop on Benedictine Spirituality at the Jesuit church in Farm Street, London in October.

Fr Dermot

attended the Catholic Theological Conference at Louvain, Belgium in September and the Conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions in Edinburgh. He also gave talks for the clergy of the Diocese of Leicester at Swanwick, and led a Business Ethics Seminar at Canford, Dorset, for sixth form students.

Fr Hugh

spent the summer in Italy learning Italian and has gone to Sant' Anselmo College, Rome, to study Patristics at the Augustinianum. Sadly he had to travel to Australia to visit his father who became critically ill and has recently died. Please pray for the family.

Fr Gervase

gave a retreat at Matera in the province of Basilicata, Italy for the organisation, *Retreats Beyond Dover*, in September. During the retreat the participants were able to visit many of the cave churches, some going back to the early influx of Byzantine Christians to the area during the iconoclast persecution.

St Edmund's Eve

The celebration of our patronal festival began as usual with Pontifical First Vespers to which monks and nuns from the Anglican communities of Elmore, Burford & Wantage were invited. Our monastic guests stayed for supper and Compline. At the Mass on the feast Fr Peter L'Estrange S.J., Master of Campion Hall, Oxford and some of our confraters were present.

Maison St-Benoît

Since the summer, there have been many visitors to the Maison St-Benoît, mostly from England, including quite a few members of the Abbey community.

In early September, a group from the

Catholic Records Society, led by Abbot Geoffrey, and Br Placid stayed in the town and inspected archives in Northern France. In the local parish, the autumn months have been dominated by the Archbishop of Cambrai's pastoral visitation of the deanery. It has been a very successful reaching out, by the local Church, to people of all faiths and none, and has embraced the whole town. It has lasted about six weeks in all, and a year was spent in preparation.

On September 8, the monks accompanied the deanery clergy, on their annual day out, this year to St Omer. Other trips away from Douai have included an overnight stay by the coast in a holiday home near Boulogne, in the company of Père André, the parish priest, courtesy of two friends, Michel and Jacqueline Toison; and a trip to Solesmes (not the home of the famous monastery) where, in a school, the religious of the diocese were holding a kind of fair, the purpose being to let the people know what they do. It was instructive for the monks as well as being a good opportunity to meet lots of people. In addition, Fr Peter attended a two-day meeting in Paris for chaplains to the Equipes Notre Dame, a society for the benefit of married couples.

On November 20, the patronal feast of St Edmund, the monks invited people to come to Vespers, and afterwards enjoy light refreshments. The Chapel was packed with about fifty people, and more overflowed into the corridor.

Among other things worth mentioning is that the numbers coming to the young people's lunch and discussion on Thursdays during the school midday break is slowly increasing. Many people are supporting the monks, contributing food for this lunch, including the local patisserie, which gives discounted bread and tarts, and the local charcuterie, which

donates, completely free, a large plate of cold meats and pâté.

Fr Peter has been running two groups studying the Rule of St Benedict, and will be giving two talks in Advent on the Infancy Narratives.

We hope to start the renovation of the Chapel soon, the last part of the house to be refurbished, to which end a local architect is giving his services free. As can be seen, the "Maison" continues to receive a great deal of help from the parish and townsfolk of Douai.

University of Reading

This semester a group of monks under the leadership of Fr Abbot taught a course of Monastic History from 1200 to the present, and Fr Gervase gave a course on the Gospel of St Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. A university day-school at Douai was given by Fr Boniface on an introduction to Homer and Virgil.

Retreats and Conferences

The BI Hugh Faringdon Conference Centre and the guesthouse are being increasingly used by groups, for day and residential events. Recently we have had the Bishop and clergy of the Portsmouth Diocese for their retreat, given by Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, a Salvation Army leadership team, a group of young adults from the Diocese of Brentwood, the School of Evangelisation from St Patrick's church, Soho, the Lay Community of St Benedict, the annual Gathering of Consecrated Women, the Bridge Pastoral Foundation, Headteachers from Oxfordshire and Berkshire, the Latin Mass Society, Monos, Tagathata, a Buddhist-inspired silent retreat, and the Boehringer Ingelheim company among others.◇

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