

BUILDING PROGRESS

No 23

Summer 2005

At last, our building work has begun. As reported in the last issue the school building development began towards the end of January. Since then Bewley Homes have made rapid progress. Once the financial side was completed, we were able to put our monastery building plans out to tender. The contract was awarded to Feltham Construction of Newbury. This firm had previously built the parish centres in both Pangbourne and Theale for us. They moved on site towards the end of May.

The first work was to demolish the building which had been built as the bursary, and served that purpose for some thirty years before being converted into the monastery infirmary. The infirmary has been moved to the ground floor of the south monastery building. Also demolished was the temporary link passage between the 1966 monastery and the



The site where the infirmary had stood.

1925 buildings which now serve as Conference Centre and Guesthouse. This means that for the present we have to go outside to get from monastery to the church and to the refectory.

Within the next few months we shall have to vacate our present monastic and guest refectories and kitchen. Temporary buildings to house these facilities will be set up in the car park adjacent to the abbey church which



The last wall of the temporary cloister link about to be demolished.

we shall have to use until our new building is completed, scheduled for the end of July next year.

At the same time the *Bewley Homes* development of the former school is also making rapid progress, some of the houses have now reached the first floor, and the underground carpark is having its roof constructed for which purpose a second crane much larger than the first has been erected.△

Douai Abbey Newsletter



Profession of Br Placid

On Saturday July 16, Br Placid Hughes made profession for three years, during Conventual Mass which was at midday.

Br Placid was born in Long Beach, California in 1979. After leaving school he intended at first to be an architect but soon abandoned the idea and studied history instead. Following a period at a polytechnic university in California he came to Bristol University where he took a BA in history followed by an MA in mediæval studies, concentrating on Abbot John Feckenham, last abbot of Westminster Abbey. It was during this period that he became a Catholic at Clifton Cathedral, having been raised as a Baptist. He first came to Douai on a Catholic Chaplaincy retreat. He became a postulant in September 2003 and was clothed as a novice in January 2004. At present Br Placid is studying theology at Blackfriars,



Br Placid reads out his profession chart in the middle of the monastic choir.

Oxford. He did his pre-profession retreat at Minster Abbey in Thanet.△

Maison St-Benoit

The French foundation in Douai is on track to start in November. At the end of May the two founding monks spent a week in the town. They visited the Archbishop of Cambrai and the contract was signed whereby we have the use of the *Maison St-Benoit* for five years. The townsfolk were again most welcoming and are looking forward to the establishment of the monastery.

The *Maison St-Benoit* is intended to be a house of



Frs Peter and Finbar outside our former monastery in Douai.

prayer where the people will be welcome to share in the daily cycle of monastic office and Mass. Part of the office will be celebrated in the collegiate church of St-Pierre.

The monks will provide a place of retreat and hospitality and will offer spiritual and theological reflection and guidance to those who request it. In addition they will help with various chaplaincies in the town.

In preparation both monks have been doing crash courses in French, Fr Peter at L'Institut Catholique in Toulouse, where he stayed with the Dominicans, and Fr Finbar in Paris, where he lodged with the Redemptorists. They have also visited other small monastic communities. The abbot of Solesmes, president of the French Benedictine Congregation has sent a kind and warm letter of welcome to the English monks returning to France.

In order to help defray the expenses of equipping the chapel in the house and for other furnishing an appeal for funds has been made under the title *Le Projet Douai* to raise £30,000. Over half this sum has been raised now, please help us reach the total. △

Abbatial Blessing of Abbot Edmund at St Paul's

In *The Douai Magazine* no. 167 we reported that Fr Edmund Power of our community had been appointed Prior-administrator of the Abbey of St Paul's-without-the-walls and published an article on the history of that monastery. Subsequently on 9 April this year Fr Edmund was elected Abbot of St Paul's by its community.



Cardinal Sodano, representing the Pope, as bishop of Rome, places the mitre on Abbot Edmund's head.

One of the first acts of the new Pope, Benedict XVI, was to confirm Abbot Edmund's election, a traditional requirement that reflects St Paul's status as a papal basilica. Br Hugh wrote the following account.

On June 22, Abbot Geoffrey with Abbot Finbar, Frs Terence, Oliver, Alexander, and Br Hugh flew to Rome, to celebrate with Abbot Edmund his abbatial blessing. We arrived in time for mid-day prayer, and lunch. The Refectory is an imposing room, dominated by an enormous chandelier which was a gift of Queen Victoria to Pope Pius IX. After lunch there followed coffee with the brethren, and then an hour-long tour of the monastery and basilica conducted by Abbot Edmund, who pointed out many of the treasures, religious, architectural and archaeological, housed within the walls (and often literally in the walls) of St Paul's. Then all succumbed to the need to fol-

low the local practice of siesta, before celebrating vespers, which was followed by supper at a local restaurant for the Douai brethren and Abbot Edmund.

The next day, Abbot Geoffrey, went to the hospital of San Camillo to visit Abbot Laurence of Ramsgate who had been knocked down the day before by a stolen Vespa.

All were ready for the Abbatial Blessing itself which began at 5pm in the exquisite space of the basilica. The ordained joined the procession of concelebrants while the rest of the monastic guests were advantageously placed immediately below the sanctuary. The large gaggle of mitred abbots and prelates, including two cardinals, were seated in the sanctuary itself. Among the guests was the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative to the Holy See as well the British Ambassador. Despite its complexity the liturgy was well-executed: the monks of St Paul's were assisted by monks from Sant' Anselmo as well as seminarians from around Rome. The readings alternated between Italian and English, and the gospel was chanted in Latin by an American Benedictine deacon. A schola sang the Latin chants parts of the Mass. Conferring the blessing on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI was Angelo Car-

dinal Sodano, the Vatican's Secretary of State, who also preached. Just before the dismissal, Abbot Edmund made a short address in Italian, English and German.

Then all decamped to one of the monastery's quadrangles where, lit by flaming braziers, a reception was held and refreshments served. Among the guests were other EBC monks, as well as an international mix of Benedictines, a goodly smattering of Orthodox clerics and monks, and even a student from St Benet's Hall, Oxford. Also present was Andrew Lavarello, an former pupil of Douai School, who kindly treated the Douai monks to supper at a nearby restaurant after the reception had ended.

The next morning, after yet more photo calls, we bade our farewells to Abbot Edmund, to return to England. We all felt privileged to have represented the Douai community at Abbot Edmund's Blessing, and to wish him well. *Ad multos annos!* ☺



Abbot Edmund on the abbot's seat in St Paul's



Abbot Edmund with the Douai monks before their return to England: left to right Br Hugh, Fr Alexander, Abbot Edmund, Fr Oliver, Abbot Finbar and Abbot Geoffrey.

Community Notes

Visitation

The quadriennial visitation took place in the middle of May, conducted by Abbot President, Richard Yeo, and Fr Bonaventure Knollys of Ampleforth Abbey. A visitation is an opportunity for outsiders to take a deep look at a community and to make suggestions as to how its life could be improved. It is a spiritual growth point rather than an inspection.

Jubilees

On May 21 Fr Romuald celebrated the golden jubilee, and on June 4 Fr Augustine came to celebrate the diamond jubilee of their priestly ordinations. On both occasions the jubilarians presided at Mass at noon which was followed by buffet luncheon for their friends and relatives with the monastic community.

Appointments

On March 1 Fr Oliver became bursar in succession to Fr Peter, and Fr Bernard took over as guestmaster from Fr Oliver. On April 1 Fr Benjamin became assistant priest in the parish of Ormskirk, replacing Fr Finbar who will be going to our French foundation later in the year. Br Christopher has replaced Fr Benjamin on the hospitality team and has responsibility for wayfarers; he has also become assistant infirmarian. Br Simon has taken over Fr Benjamin's position as procurator and is in charge of the cars.

Fr Dermot

In March Fr Dermot attended a conference in Rome to commemorate the 40th

anniversary of the issuing of *Gaudium et Spes*, the document dealing with the church and the modern world, by the 2nd Vatican Council. In April he gave two papers at the 11th National Conference of the Bloxham Project in Oxford and also flew to Poland to give a paper at a seminar organised by Volvo International. He gave talks on *Virtue Ethics* to the *Midlands Fraud Awareness Group* and to the *National Police Anti-fraud Training Scheme*, on *Organisational Spirituality* at the Friends Meeting House in London and in June he gave four talks at St Mary Moorfield church in the City of London on the cardinal virtues.

Fr Alexander

Fr Alexander has been on another visit to El Salvador and Guatemala, which he says we even more enjoyable than his first trip, reported in *The Douai Magazine* 164 page 11.

Minster

Fr Gervase was invited back to Minster Abbey after Easter to give the retreat to the Oblates there. Fr Peter had made a private retreat there after ceasing to be bursar and Br Placid went there for his pre-profession retreat.

Turvey

Four nuns from Turvey paid us a visit on July 5. Sr Johanna, a novice who had stayed at Douai a number of times whilst doing a doctorate at Birmingham, Sr Ruth, the novice mistress, Sr Miriam who had previously visited Douai on a retreat while she was studying at Heythrop College and Sr Judith likewise whilst a student at

Southampton.

Oblates Day

On July 9 thirty of our oblates gathered in the Cottage garden. Many of the monks came to share picnic lunch with them. The purpose of the day was to enable oblates to get to know each other better, since many of them do not attend the same retreats. After midday prayer all of them renewed their oblation. In the afternoon Simon Bryden-Brook presented a paper which was well received and will provide much thought for discussion.

Local Schools

On July 4 some 300 children who are graduating this term from Thatcham primary schools came for a fun day and picnic in the grounds and a service in the Abbey Church. Apart from one sharp shower the day remained fine. The previous day Elstree School had held their concert in the Abbey Church. On July 15 those pupils starting at Bl Hugh Faringdon School, Reading, next term came from their primary schools for Mass and a picnic.

Boilers

Although we reported in the last issue that the new boilers were installed and running, they suffered problems in April and May, and we had several mornings without hot water. Hopefully all is well now. ◊