



COSTOCK CHRONICLE 2013

Holy Cross Convent, Highfields, Nottingham Road, Costock, Loughborough LE12 6XE



Last autumn and winter the weather was the most talked about topic. Wet, wet, wet and then snow upon snow. We had made plans with the Nottingham Wild Life Trust to have the loan of three Dexter cows (a small but very hardy breed) to graze the Old Orchard. It had been grazed right up until the time we bought the property and conservation grazing is the best way to manage such grassland. We put an electric fence around the orchard but the ground was so water-logged that it was impossible to put any animals on it and the plan for the Dexters had to be abandoned. The ground everywhere squelched as the water table was so high. The poor farmers. It is a miracle that any crops were sown at all. However, at the end of August a local farmer brought four of his heifers to graze the field. There was an interesting first half hour when they managed to break out several times, disturbing a wasps' nest in the process. We enjoyed their company for a couple of months but now the job is done, the rain has come and the cows have gone home to their winter quarters. Next year we hope to have more than four as the field to the south of the building, Hares' Half-furlong and Intake Wood, also need to be grazed.

Our second year in kitchen garden was not as successful as 2011, partly because of the weather and partly because our head gardener, Andrew Jones, was off sick for some months, having developed a condition which prevented him from working. Eventually he had to leave our employment.



The kitchen garden with butternut squash, runner beans, onions and lots more.

It was sad as he had created the kitchen garden from scratch and had many plans for the rest of the estate but there was no likelihood of his returning to work in the foreseeable future. We have employed Pip Walsh as head gardener in his stead and the better weather this year has resulted in a bumper crop of fruit and vegetables. Our freezers are full and we have given the surplus away to anyone who can make use of it.

Normally we take on very few engagements to speak or preach outside the convent but on the 28th February four of us went to London as Reverend Mother was preaching at the installation of the new Master General and Master Provincial of the Society of the Holy Cross. We know both Fr Kit Dunkley and Fr Nicholas Spicer well. The Society of the Holy Cross, a confraternity of priests, was founded by Fr Charles Lowder in 1855 and in 1857 he invited Elizabeth Neale to found a Community in his parish in Wapping. There is, therefore, a strong connection between us. It was inspiring to see so many priests, (about 500 of them) many of them young, worshipping and dedicating themselves afresh to the service of God. The text of Reverend Mother's sermon can be found on our website.

Ten days later Mother Mary Luke spoke at Evening Prayer at Emmanuel Church, Loughborough; a very different experience from that of the SSC service. Emmanuel is a thriving charismatic evangelical church with a lot of young people and it was a refreshing change to be present at their worship.

Reverend Mother was impressed by the way Emmanuel nurture new Christians and by their outreach in the local community.

Jean Lamb, an artist/priest in Southwell diocese has been carving Stations of the Holocaust. Each year for the past 14 years we have had the privilege of showing the latest carving during Lent and this year all 14 were on show in the narthex to the chapel. The impact was powerful — to see fourteen of them together is much more than seeing them one at a time. We are most grateful to Jean for allowing us to be the venue for these remarkable carvings which really bring home the suffering of Christ and the Jewish people during the Holocaust.

At Easter Bishop David Hope and Fr Kenneth Court celebrated the Triduum for us again. This year we were joined by nearly thirty people from local parishes, more than we have ever had before. It is wonderful to have a chapel which lends itself to larger functions.



The high spot of the year has undoubtedly been Sister Mary Catherine's life profession on the 6th August, the Feast of the Transfiguration. Life professions are not that common these days so it is a cause for encouragement and joy when a woman or man responds to the call of God and is consecrated to the service of God in the religious vows for life.



Sister Mary Catherine's journey began many years ago. Carol, as she was then, was drawn to the religious life but as she was married and had two children, testing her vocation was not possible. In 1998, after a divorce and when the children were adult she joined the Community of St Francis. It turned out not to be the right place for her and after eighteen months, Carol left the Franciscans and returned to her home town, Stoke on Trent. Here she worked for several years as a care assistant in a residential home for people with severe learning difficulties. But the niggles that God wanted her to be a nun were still there. Carol knew the Community of the Holy Cross quite well as her parish priest, Fr Brian Williams, was a regular celebrant for us and she had visited us several times. In 2007 she asked if she could try her vocation with us and entered as a postulant on the 21st November, being clothed as Novice Mary Catherine on the 28th June 2008 at the 1st Vespers of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. She was professed in temporary vows on the Feast of St James, 25th July 2010.

The chapel on the morning of the 6th August was full when, in response to the command of our Visitor, Bishop David Hope, calling three times '*Come*', Sister Mary Catherine made her way down the aisle, holding a lit candle, kneeling and responding to the call each time with '*And now I come to you*'; '*And now with all my heart I come to you*'; '*And now with all my heart I come to you; I fear you and I seek to see your face: O Lord, do not put me to shame, but deal with me according to your forbearance and according to your manifold mercy.*' After the homily, which can be found on our website, and the Litany of the Saints, Sister Mary Catherine



Religious from several other Communities joined us for Sister Mary Catherine's Life Profession.

pronounced her vows, signed the charter and placed it on the altar. The Bishop said the solemn prayer of consecration and then invested Sister with a ring and placed a corona of flowers on her head. The newly professed Sister sang of her joy in the very ancient words: *“Behold, that which I long for, already I see; that which I hoped for already I hold; I am united in heaven to him whom on earth I have loved with my whole heart.”* At the end of Mass Sister Mary Catherine was presented with a breviary to signify she was now committed to saying the Office in the Church and was conducted to her choir stall by Reverend Mother. The Community



Sr Mary Catherine's friends from her old parish of Holy Trinity, Sneyd and, next to the cake, Ann Wilton.

processed out of the chapel after a rousing rendition of “*O Jesus I have promised*” and then Sister was free to greet all her guests.

The weather was good enough to eat lunch out in the garth. A beautiful cake made by Ann Wilton, a good friend of ours, was cut and the rejoicing went on till we had to go to chapel to sing Vespers.

Sister Mary Cuthbert continues to live in her hermitage at Bewerley, does the accounts from there, thanks to computers, and comes down to Costock when necessary. She was here for Sister Mary Catherine’s profession and acted as her supporter during the ceremony. Sr Mary Hannah came over from Korea for a month so we were all together for a while.

As usual we have had a constant stream of visitors. Linda Pearson, who is a trainee lay-reader in Leicester, asked if she could do her placement here and spent a week with us in April. Also in April, Gabriele Senniger came to spend a month living and working alongside as she was discerning whether God was calling her to our Community. A few days after Sr Mary Catherine’s profession she asked if she could test her vocation here and was admitted as a postulant on the 30th September.



CHC with the sisters and brethren of Mucknell Abbey.

In August last year our whole community went to Mucknell in Worcestershire to see Abbot Stuart and the brothers and sisters there and to look round their new Abbey. This year it was the turn of their community to visit us. A most enjoyable time was had and we were able to give them some of our copious amounts of vegetables. We gave Abbot Stuart a cabbage measuring nearly twelve inches across!



*At Solemn Vespers of Holy Cross. Canon Gavin Kirk presiding
and Graham Stevenson serving.*

This year we invited the oblates and associates to join us in celebrating Holy Cross Day on the 14th September. There were several last minute cancellations owing to illness or accidents but fourteen people came, including our former rector of East Leake, Fr John Smith and his wife, Kate. Although not strictly part of our Confraternity we made them honorary associates for the day. The day began with a talk from Sister Mary Bernadette followed by a sung Mass which our Warden, Fr Gavin Kirk, celebrated for us. There was time during the buffet lunch and before tea for everyone to meet each other and then some stayed to Solemn Latin Vespers. It was a most enjoyable day.

Visitors from abroad included Mr Carl Ahn and four friends from Korea. Mr Ahn is the friend of Sister Mary Hannah who has provided her with her little hermitage on Jeju Island, so we are more than grateful to him for his generosity. In October four of our Norwegian friends came to stay for a few days during which Fr Roy-Olav was clothed as a novice oblate together with our mutual friend Graham Stevenson.

There have been quite a few changes in both our domestic and church life. Lucy Lallo, who has worked for us in various capacities since 1987, decided to retire. Her husband Peter, who was our full time gardener until



Some of the Oblates & Associates enjoying some tea and talking.

August 2001, continues to work three mornings a week. Louise Watson, one of our oblates, came on 16th October to look after the guest house for us and help generally with computers, the library, gardening and any other jobs which need doing. Michelle Sheasby began domestic duties on the 1st November.

On the church front, the rector of East Leake, Glynis Hetherington, retired on the 30th June. We have known Glynis and Ron since the very first Sunday the pioneer party at Rempstone went to St Mary's in October 1978. We prayed her through the process of becoming a lay reader, then a deacon and then non-stipendary priest. When the then rector, John Smith, moved in 1997, Glynis looked after the parish during the interregnum. After two years the bishop decided that as she had made such a good job of it she might as well become stipendary and she became the rector in 1999. We wish Glynis and Ron a long and happy retirement. Always faithful supporters of the Community, we are pleased that they have moved only a few miles away, to Hoton in Leicester diocese, and so we hope to see them frequently once they have settled in to their new home.

Only two weeks after Glynis' retirement interviews were held here at the convent for her replacement and the announcement of the new appointment was made on the 21st July - must be a record for the Church of England! The new priest is the Rev'd Tim Parker, who was the curate at St Luke's, Gamston in our diocese and deanery. He was licensed and installed on the 6th November. We look forward to a happy collaboration with him.

A collective groan went up from all the Sisters when we heard that our bishop, Paul Butler, was moving to become the bishop of Durham after only four years in Southwell. He has proved himself to be a wise leader of the diocese and we are not surprised that he has been moved up higher. We will miss him very much as he has always been very supportive of the Community and has had regular Quiet Days here. Southwell is one of the dioceses which have actually grown in the past few years so Durham is fortunate to have Bishop Paul's pastoral, reconciling and mission skills.

As a result of Jonathan Baker's transfer to be bishop of Fulham a new bishop of Ebbsfleet had to be appointed. The Rev'd Canon Jonathan Goodall was consecrated at Westminster Abbey on the 25th September and Reverend Mother and Sister Mary Julian were present for the splendid occasion.

After the success of the concert by *Octave* last year, on the 19th July Fr Simon Lumby and Fr Jeff Hopewell, ably accompanied on the piano by Edgars Cusinskis, gave a concert of '*Popular Music of the Past 400 Years*' — *solos and duets ranging from Purcell via Brahms to Aaron Copland and Ralph Vaughan Williams*. The content was much lighter than last year's concert, with some very humorous songs, and ended with what is probably the most famous duet for tenor and baritone from *The Pearl Fishers* by Bizet. It was a very hot evening and probably the weather kept some people away but they missed a glorious treat.



CATSTOCK CHRONICLE

It has been a good year. We have continued to consolidate our position as goddesses in this household though there are still areas to be worked on, such as doors we are not allowed to go through. We have, however, learned to jump in through the kitchen window to scrounge what titbits we can find on the table. We can't see what attraction spaghetti has for humans but they are a weird mob. We are doing our bit to recycle waste by shredding cardboard boxes. Individual possession of such boxes is an important part of our relationship. (*see photo*) One human mentioned that the corridor looked as if Armageddon had been fought there; we are very efficient. Now we are looking forward to Christmas and Thea will have another attempt at being the fairy on the top of the tree. Last year the branch broke resulting in a humiliating fall, bringing down several glass baubles on the way. Summa is waiting for the stable building with nice straw to arrive, though she hopes there won't be a funny lump in the boxy thing which otherwise makes a cosy place to go to sleep in. We wish all our benefactors a very happy Christmas with plenty of giblets and gravy.

Suzza & Thea

When we moved to Costock in 2011 we didn't finish the building as we weren't sure what our income and expenditure here would be and needed to make sure we had enough money to pay the bills. As a result four cells on the first floor were left as shells and we didn't build the planned hermitage. A hermitage has already been built - a log cabin which was much cheaper than a building with foundations. Sister Mary Catherine was the first person to stay there for her retreat before her life profession and we have since used it for retreats and holidays and are very pleased with it. With the advent of Gabriele and Louise we now haven't got enough cells in the convent if Sister Mary Cuthbert and Sister Mary Hannah are both home at the same time. We are therefore planning to complete the four rooms upstairs and put in a lift. The work will begin (we hope) in December and be completed by Easter.

And so we come to the end of another year; not perhaps quite as dramatic as the past two but still filled with various activities. It is easy to become inward looking and forget the needs of the world outside the convent. Fortunately the groups that come here and individuals as well as the priests who minister to us, expose us to local, national and international concerns. The Nottingham Street Pastors do an amazing job on Friday and Saturday nights in the city. When they are on duty the number

of people needing to be dealt with by the police or ambulance services drops by a third. The Jericho Road Project befriends and supports those involved in the sex trade. Both these charities are joint church initiatives in Nottingham. Several members of Christian Partners in Africa stayed for a weekend in January and told us about their work to restore hope and dignity to individuals, families and communities living in poverty in Africa, mainly in Ethiopia and Uganda. We do have a newspaper five days a week so are aware of the appalling happenings in Syria, Egypt and other volatile areas of the world.

All this is fuel for our prayer. More and more there is a need for the message of Christianity to be spread throughout the world. We are about to celebrate Christmas; not just the charming story of a baby in a manger born to a virgin named Mary, but the birth of the Son of God who was born, grew up, worked, prayed and taught in a world very similar to ours. His message was not received and eventually he was subjected to a brutal death at the instigation of the religious authorities of his day. Why did he do it? Perhaps one of the reasons is to show that the only thing that can defeat evil is self-sacrificial love and that the person who loses his or her life in this way will be restored to life in the resurrection. Love is stronger than death. Christmas is the beginning of the story but already there are hints of what is to come. The last verse of the carol, 'Christians, awake, salute the happy morn' runs:

*Like Mary let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind;
Trace we the babe, who hath retrieved our loss,
From his poor manger to his bitter cross;
Then may we hope, the angelic throngs among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song.*

So let us ponder God's wondrous love in sending us his Son to redeem us and his Spirit to carry on the work and let us also live this out in our lives and bring this message to all whom we meet.