



COSTOCK CHRONICLE 2016



We begin at the end with joyful thanksgiving: November 8th 2016 was a wonderful celebration of the 25th anniversary of Mother Mary Luke's Election as Superior. All was prepared in deepest secret from her until just the day before. She had no inkling of any celebration as we plotted and planned. A Mass of the Holy Cross was sung by the Warden, the Ven Gavin Kirk, the organ played by our Hon Chaplain Canon Kenneth Court. We had with us just a few close friends as this was really the Community's celebration and thanks to God for Mother's leadership. The words of the long Blessing of a Benedictine Superior, sung during the Mass, were very moving and highlighted both the gifts and the cost to her over the years, of her task. The Mass was followed by a festive luncheon, an excellent speech and toast by Sister Mary Cuthbert and, in the afternoon, tea and cake.

The year began with some new ventures. Melanie joined us to live as an alongsider on the 11th January and Andrew came on the 30th January, increasing our numbers by nearly 25%. Both have contributed greatly to our lives: Melanie took over looking after the cats, helped out in the kitchen and cleaning. In the gaps between work she went for runs as she had booked to run a half marathon in Manchester in May to raise funds for the Parkinson's Society. She did this and beat her personal best time. She left us in June and we are very grateful to her for the help she gave us in the five months she was here. Andrew has done wonders for our liturgy books as well as cooking us some splendid meals. Louise, who runs the guest house, went to a conference at Hynning for monastic guest house managers and came back with ideas for improving our hospitality.

In March we, at long last, got a new telephone system which is more efficient than the previous one though there are still some glitches needing to be sorted out. One of them is that after four rings it automatically switches onto voicemail which is why we seem always to have the phone on voicemail.

Bishop David Hope once again celebrated Holy Week and Easter for us and we were joined once more by about 40 people from the surrounding parishes for the Vigil and first Mass of Easter on Holy Saturday.

Ten years ago our GP, Dr Peter and Maggie Gordon, knowing we prayed not only for Christian Unity but also for a growing rapprochement between all faiths, invited us on May 13th to the naming ceremony of his grandson, Daniel Atkinson, at the Reform Synagogue in Nottingham. This year he invited us to the Bat Mitzvah on the 2nd April of his eldest grandchild, Kate Atkinson. Kate's father also happens to be our bank manager! Mother Mary Luke, Sr Mary Julian, Sr Mary Michael and Sr Mary Bernadette were warmly welcomed by the congregation there and once again we were struck by the correlation between some parts of the Jewish service and parts of Christian liturgy. Kate read her portion of the Law from Leviticus which was about food laws and gave an excellent exposition on what it meant to her. It was a privilege to be present at such a moving family occasion.

Mother Mary Luke then disappeared on her sabbatical of which an account appears below. During her absence we were helped out by Lynne Smith, Maggie Wadley and Rachel Marshall-Roberts who each stayed for a few weeks and gave invaluable help. Many thanks to all of them.

At times a sister will give a talk or preach at a local church. On the 25th April all the sisters went to St George in the Meadows, Nottingham where Sister Mary Julian preached the sermon at their patronal festival. On her return to Costock Reverend Mother led a day at the diocesan retreat house, Sacrista Prebend, in Southwell on contemplative prayer which was well attended. In November she preached at All Saints, Notting Hill for their patronal festival which they held on the 6th November.

There has been a lot of interchange with other communities during the past year. On the 11th December 2015 Sister Mary Julian went to the installation of Sister Edith Margaret as Provincial Superior of the Community of the Holy Name at Oakwood in Derby and at the end of August Mother Edith Margaret spent a week in retreat here. We have also received visits from sisters of the Benedictine Abbeys of Minster, (Mother Nikola and Sister Mary Bernard) Mucknell (Sister Sally) and West Malling (Abbess Mary David). This year the Society of the Precious Blood at Burnham Abbey were celebrating their centenary of their move to Burnham and Sister Mary Julian went to share in their celebrations on the 18th April. A few weeks later Sister Mary Joseph's brother and sister-in-law, John and Celia Thorpe, brought Sister Mary Laurence of Burnham Abbey to visit us for the day. In October Sister Phyllis and Sister Jean Clare of the Community of St Peter, Horbury, were brought over for the day by Fr Brian Bell. Fr Aidan Mayoss of the Community of the Resurrection conducted our retreat in September and gave us deceptively simple talks on the women in the gospels. Sister Mary Julian and Reverend Mother attended the 150th anniversary celebrations at Edgware Abbey on the 11th June.



Sr Mary Catherine attended the ordination to the priesthood of Tom Montgomery at Westminster Cathedral on the 25th June. They had been Franciscan novices together before they each went along different paths but have kept up their friendship; Tom attended Sister Mary Catherine's life profession three years ago.

On the 1st October there was a Vocations Conference at York sponsored by the Organisation RooT, Religious of Orthodox Tradition, to which five men and four women came. Seven different communities sent brothers and sisters and a very interesting day was spent talking and answering questions about the religious life. At the end of the day we had Mass at St Mary's, Bishopshill, which interestingly enough, is a parish where our sisters worked a hundred or more years ago.

We have a new Dean at Southwell, the Very Reverend Nicola Sullivan, who was Archdeacon of Wells before she moved north. Reverend Mother attended her installation on the 17th September which was a joyful occasion.

CAISTOCK CHRONICLE 2016

Honestly, you just can't get the staff these days. For a few months at the beginning of the year there was a good slave who gave us our food on time and didn't mess us about. So what happens? As good slaves go, she went! Now we are dependent upon the whims of the regular staff who are very haphazard in their care.

A new venture is that we have joined a choir. Our voices raised in harmony penetrate through closed doors and make our presence and needs known. It is



remarkable how quickly a slave emerges from her room, eager to hear the exquisite melody, though at one stage Thea pointed out that the baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds really *didn't* want to hear 'Hark the Herald Angels' AGAIN! Still, there are worse places to be and on the whole we are quite comfortable here, especially when curled up on a nice warm lap.

May you all have warm laps this Christmas, to welcome any who need them.

Thea and Summa

And so another year comes to an end. In the United Kingdom we have a new Prime Minister and by the time you receive this the people of the United States will have elected a new President. The Middle East is in ferment. The implications of the Brexit vote have yet to make themselves clear but what is clear is that everything is in flux. There is a lot of anxiety around because the future seems so uncertain. But our stability is not in this world. We know that our stability rests on God's promises. There will be trials and tribulations in this life but nearly two thousand years ago God made good his promises and Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Lord we believe: help our unbelief! At this season of Christmas we are reminded once more that God can bring good out of evil and all we have to do is remain faithful, pray and not give up hope.

We wish you all a Christmas of joy and that the New Year will deepen our love and faith so we can face the future with hope.



Mother Mary Luke's Silver Jubilee Sabbatical

This year I have completed twenty-five years as Reverend Mother and to mark the occasion my Sisters very generously allowed me to have a three-month sabbatical lasting from April till June.

In the past few months I have had time to ponder my experiences and try to see if there was any unifying thread. If I had to sum it up in one word, that word would be GRATITUDE. Gratitude for my Sisters' generosity in allowing me to go away for three months: gratitude to family, friends and others I met who added to my enjoyment and gave much hospitality: gratitude most of all to God for, in the words of the Prayer of General Thanksgiving my 'creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life, but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory.' The means of grace have always been with me, even if at times I have used them unwisely or abused them. They have always been there for me to reach out and take hold of them, to accept them through no merit of my own. My life has been grace-filled. So the sabbatical was in part a recognition of this and a desire to give thanks.

It began on the 6th April when Sister Mary Cuthbert drove me up to Bewerley to stay a few nights before going up to Alnmouth for three weeks of retreat. On Friday she had prepared a surprise for me. I knew there was to be a Mass at the chapel but I was not expecting the celebrant to be our Visitor, Bishop David Hope. He had driven over to Bewerley to make sure I had a good send off and gave me a lovely blessing after Mass.



The next morning Sister drove me up to Alnmouth and I checked in at the office of the letting agency from whom I was renting a cottage for the three weeks. Jeannie's Cottage was a tiny cottage with a living/dining area, kitchen and bedroom with ensuite shower and in spite of horrific décor (seven large pictures of teddy bears on the walls and any spare space taken up by old advertisement posters) it was warm, comfortable and well-equipped. Only five minutes' walk from the Franciscan Friary so I could get to Mass easily, and about ten from the sea, with a good bus route into Alnwick (free bus passes are wonderful!) it was ideal for my needs.

For the next three weeks I prayed, read, walked around Alnmouth and Alnwick. The weather was typical for Northumberland in April but it didn't matter. It was a much needed wind-down time, letting go of responsibility and being happy just to be. There was one beautiful, warm sunny day when I caught a train to Edinburgh to spend some time with an old nursing friend. After the best fish and chips I've ever had, eaten outside, we looked round the Scottish National Gallery and caught up with news of family and friends.

The next phase of the journey began on the 29th April when Sr Mary Cuthbert came to pick me up and then we drove to Scotland through Melrose and round Stirling. We had hoped to eat a picnic lunch in the ruins of Melrose Abbey but it was raining heavily and sleety so we pushed on to Loch Awe. By this time the weather had cleared and it was a beautiful evening. After checking in at our B&B we explored a fascinating church just across the road.

St Conan's Kirk was built in the late 18th century by Arthur Campbell using stones from many places including an original window from Iona. Eclectic in style it had Saxon, Norman and Early English features with a cloister and garth. The landlady at the B&B said it is only rarely used for services now: some weddings, Christmas and Easter.



The week on Iona was very different from last year. The welcome from Sister Jean at The House of Prayer was as warm as ever and the other guests friendly and interesting. Weather wise the first few days were so wet and windy that twice the ferry to Mull was cancelled but as I was there basically to give thanks to God for all the benefits I had received last year it didn't matter. I spent a lot more time at the Abbey as I had made friends with some people working there and it was not until almost the last day, when the weather became sunny and warm, that I walked to Port Ban which was the furthest I went this year.

The week over, and it was back to Oban where Sr Mary Cuthbert was waiting for me. We had booked a room in a chalet in Glencoe for two nights. The weather



was superb and driving round the lochs to Ben Nevis taking in the scenery was a joy. On the Sunday we went to Mass at St Andrew's, Fort William. Sister Mary Cuthbert had connections with the parish as her grandmother and aunt used to live and worship there. Many people in the congregation remembered Mary Wallace and welcomed us warmly.



The greatest surprise came after Mass when we were talking to the vicar, Fr Alexander Guinness and the churchwarden, Alisdair Campbell. They showed us a beautiful carved door in the baptistery which was erected in honour of Fr Charles Lowder, our co-founder! How it came to be there no one knows but the parish vicars have usually been members of the Society of the Holy Cross which was founded by Fr Lowder two years before he asked our Mother Foundress, Elizabeth Neale, to come to Wapping to help him in his parish. We are so pleased to have this link with St Andrew's and hope to develop a relationship of prayer and support with the parish.

On the 9th May we drove back to Bewerley and the next day Sr Mary Julian collected me and took me back to Costock for one night. Then it was on to London for a night before spending some time with my brother and sister-in-law in Bournemouth. This was a time of thanksgiving for my early years—most of the first seventeen years of my life were spent there---and my family and school played a great part in my life, not just giving me a good education but also giving me a firm foundation in the Christian faith and many friends who are still my friends now. I attended the church where I had been confirmed and gave thanks to God there.

I had then booked to stay for four weeks at St Matthew's House, Westminster. It was an ideal location for re-engaging with people and places from the following seventeen years of my life. I met up with old nursing friends, friends from the theatre world, school friends, flat-mates and friends from the British Airways world.

London is still a place where I feel ultra alive. Westminster Abbey was just round the corner, and there were endless opportunities to worship there or with the staff at St Matthew's or in churches which have been formative in my life or where

we have priest friends. One Sunday was spent at St Peter's, London Docks, the parish where we were founded in 1857, where I was warmly welcomed by Fr Trevor Jones, Bishop Robert Ladds and the congregation; the next Sunday was spent at St Mary's Somers Town where Fr Paschal Worton is now the priest; the third Sunday I went to St Stephen's Gloucester Road, the church I used to attend before entering the Community. There they were celebrating the end of their Arts Festival and there was an orchestra and small choir which sang Mozart's Coronation Mass. Bliss! During coffee after the service I was delighted to meet one of the congregation whom I remembered from 1975.

The cultural scene in London is as vibrant as ever and I was thrilled one lunchtime to get a centre stalls ticket for the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Barbican for just £10. As the weather was fine most of the time I did a lot of walking and was able to visit the National Gallery, where I saw the original of the Fra Filippo Lippi *Annunciation*, a copy of which by one of our departed sisters hangs in our hall. I also visited the British Library and the V&A museum.



Mother Mary Luke with nephew David Wise

My days were getting filled by people wanting to see me and they all wanted to give me food which I wouldn't normally eat at the convent. I was also treated to meals in places that nuns don't usually go, such as my nephew's club, the Century, in Shaftesbury Avenue and the Athenaeum by courtesy of our Warden, the Ven Gavin Kirk

In the evenings I went frequently to the Abbey for Evensong and twice was present for a special occasion; the first being the arrival of a relic of St Thomas a Becket loaned by the archdiocese of Esztergom in Hungary. The Hungarian President was there with his entourage as well as the Archbishop of Esztergom and Cardinal Vincent Nichols. The second special occasion was to mark the 50th anniversary of the Anglican Centre in Rome. The sermon was given by the Archbishop of Canterbury. After the service there was a dinner at Lambeth Palace given by the Nikean Club in honour of the Anglican Centre to which I was invited by Fr John Brownsell, vicar of All Saint's, Notting Hill.



On the 11th June I went up to Edgware and met Sr Mary Julian at the tube station before we both joined a throng of people at Edgware Abbey where Mother Mary Therese and Sr Barbara were celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Community's foundation. As usual at these celebrations, religious were out in force and it was good to meet up with and exchange news with many old friends.

Wednesday the 15th June was my last day in London and I had been invited by the priest at St Matthew's to join him and the pastoral workers for Mass at the St Matthew's Junior School. There is a weekly Mass at the school and I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the children, a lot of whom received communion.

Sandwiched into my stay in London was a fantastic week in Sweden from the 2nd-9th June. Sr Gerd Swensson is one of our oblates and works part of the year with Fr Brownsell at All Saints, Notting Hill and part of the year running a retreat house, Christian's Acre, at Ostra Grevie near Trelleborg, South Sweden. This year she wished to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its foundation and very generously invited Sisters from the Community to spend a week in Sweden at her and Fr Brownsell's expense. Sr Mary Catherine and I met up at Luton Parkway station to fly to Copenhagen. The temperature when we left England was about 8 degrees; when we arrived in Copenhagen it was 26 degrees! After a hot and sweaty journey by train across the bridge to Sweden we changed to a branch line which took us straight to Ostra Grevie where Sr Gerd met us and drove us the mile to Christian's Acre. What a beautiful place! A converted farm, it has room for up to 15 resident guests as well as facilities for day groups.

The following day more guests arrived including Bishop Jonathan Baker and his wife Susie and a large contingent from All Saints Notting Hill. Very sadly, Fr John Brownsell was unwell and not able to make the journey. He was greatly missed.



The 4th June dawned swelteringly hot. The guests helped out in the kitchen putting out mounds of food, all of which Sr Gerd had prepared or cooked herself. Other guests began to arrive and it was good that the weather was fine as there was no way in which the 60-70 people would have been able to get into the chapel. Mass was in the courtyard and Bishop Jonathan presided, concelebrating with five priests, both English and Swedish, who belong to the Society of the Holy Cross. Bishop Jonathan consecrated a new bell and after it was hung Sr Mary Catherine had the honour of ringing the angelus on it for the first time. Among the guests were two other members of our Confraternity: Ingrid Gjertsen who had made the journey from Oslo and Graham Stevenson who had come out from Nottingham.



At 4pm we had Benediction after which most of the day visitors left. We enjoyed the cool of the evening until supper and Compline, finally getting to bed at 9pm after a most marvellous day.

The following day a coach took us to Lund for Mass in the college chapel of St Lawrence, a place roughly analogous to Pusey House in Oxford. Term had ended but there were many students there for the degree ceremony so the church was full of young people. After Mass we all, students as well as us, had a buffet lunch provided by Sr Gerd in the refectory.

The coach then took us to the cathedral which being romanesque with twin pepper pot towers reminded us very much of Southwell Minster. Inside there was a famous astrological clock and we arrived in time to see it strike at 1pm when the figures of the shepherds and kings emerge and traverse round the Virgin and Child. Afterwards we went for a walk round the city which impressed us, as did all of Sweden, by being so clean and well kept. Most of the English party then left us to catch their flight back to England.

During the next few days Sr Gerd and John Watts drove those of us who were staying on till Thursday round the south end of Sweden, visiting charming harbours such as Skanor and Kaseverga, where there is a stone circle dating back to the pre-Christian era, visited Malmo and its church, St Peter's, went to Smygehuk, the most southerly point of Sweden and Ystad. On the last day, Wednesday, we went to Rogleback Kloster, where there is a community of Dominican nuns, one of whom, Sr Cecile had been present at the celebrations the previous Saturday and joined them for Sext. Sr Cecile wasn't there but the Prioress made us very welcome. Afterwards we visited the church at Dalby which is one of the oldest stone churches in Sweden. At one time it was the cathedral of the area until the bishop moved the seat to Lund. It then became an Augustinian priory until it was shut down at the reformation.

On Thursday 9th June it was time to say goodbye to Sr Gerd after a most interesting and enjoyable week. Sr Mary Catherine and I flew back to Luton with so many happy memories and then she took the train back to Loughborough and I returned to St Matthew's House, London. It was the weekend of the Queen's official birthday and on Sunday I went out to Twickenham to join Fr Alex Lane and some of the congregation at All Saints for a birthday tea.

I returned to Costock on the 16th June and had a couple of weeks winding down in the hermitage, though I managed to visit Walsingham for a couple of days. On the 4th July it was back to work after a most interesting, enjoyable and stimulating three months.