



# FRIENDS OF GRACE DIEU PRIORY TRUST

c/o North West Leicestershire District Council,  
Community Services,  
Council Offices, Whitwick Road  
Coalville, Leicestershire. LE67 3FJ  
Tel: 01530 454603/601, Fax 01530 454571

## “Newsletter - Autumn 2005”

Well we are almost there. There have been many false dawns in the past number of years so now that we are on the threshold of completion it gives me a great sense of achievement to think that this is the first time in approaching 400 years something positive has happened at Grace Dieu Priory. The conservation work on the ruins has now been completed and I am sure anyone passing by cannot fail to be impressed by the new image of the ruins, how much larger they appear. This transformation has come about by the efforts of many people dedicated to seeing that Grace Dieu Priory survives for many generations to come and so far at a cost approaching half a million pounds. The largest proportion of which came from the “Heritage Lottery Fund”. The remaining tasks before the official opening are the digging of the trial pits by the archaeologists and the laying of the footpaths around the ruins and the connecting footpath over the old canal bed to the path through Grace Dieu woods all of which we hope will be completed before Christmas. When these tasks are completed we will start to plan the official opening to the public, hopefully early spring 2006. This event we hope will launch Grace Dieu Priory as a place people will want to come and see in Leicestershire. At this point the work of the “Friends” will be-

come vital to the continued progress of Grace Dieu Priory. Having made the efforts that we have, we cannot allow the Priory to fall into disrepair yet again and be lost forever.

*David Whitt*

### Trial Excavations at Grace Dieu Priory

The first stage of our excavations at the Priory has been completed, with seven small pits being dug. As is often the case these tended to pose as many questions as they answered, but the results were very encouraging. The original 13th Century masonry was found to be in excellent condition both on the south wall of the church, and in the west cloister range. In the latter case we were lucky enough to uncover a buttress, built to support the outer face of the wall. Both the west cloister and the church walls had very fine double chamfers (diagonal offsets in the outer wall face), of much better quality than anything visible above ground today. We also exposed a number of later walls, some perhaps added later in the medieval period (e.g. three walls of a possible tower



towards the west end of the church), others more probably belonging to the post-Dissolution manor house. We were also surprised at the quantity of finds, with plenty of pottery, building debris and glass—including small window panes, most probably of the medieval nunnery, and 17th/18th Century bottles.

The new questions relate to the church (especially that possible tower) and the west cloister range, which we now know extended much further to the south than expected. English Heritage have given us permission to open up new pits to address these questions. We expect to do this work in early November. At the moment, therefore, it is a matter of ‘watch this space’, as we continue to reveal fascinating details of the Priory’s long history.

*Graham Keevill*

### Friends of Grace Dieu Priory Trust Membership and Finance

Following the initial public meeting at Grace Dieu Manor School in May 2005 to establish a Friends group, we now have in excess of 40 paid up members. Membership fees are low (individual membership £5, concessions £3) with the intention of encouraging participation rather than raising funds, but fund raising and practical volunteering at the

site will be an important part of future activities.

Funds have been boosted by a generous donation by John Dickinson from the profits from his book *'The Ghosts of Grace Dieu'* and from the proceeds of a guided tour given by Ken Hillier. Our funds presently stand at about £700.

There are no firm plans yet for expenditure but we expect to have to bear some of the site maintenance costs and to publish guides and other literature to interpret the site for visitors.

If you were at the initial meeting and have not yet paid a membership fee, or have friends who you think might be interested in joining, please contact *Malcolm Allsop* on 01530 833632.

### Paranormal Interest in Grace Dieu Priory

Since 2003 there has been a growing interest in the paranormal phenomena associated with Grace Dieu Priory. Several guided walks and ghost walks have been organised by the local Grace Dieu Archaeology and History Club, the Community Services Department of the local District Council and the Blue Badge Guide Organisation.

These walks have been very successful in creating and furthering local people's interest and knowledge of Grace Dieu Priory.

Recently groups to have visited the Priory were the East Midlands Dowsing Association, a paranormal investigation group from Nottingham and also requesting a visit is the scientific paranormal investigation group called "Haunted Britain" based in Leicester and London.

Results of the "Dowsing Day" gave indications of: water tunnels, stone circles, energy

lines, a possible entrance to the Priory in monastic times, also the site of the original Priory water mill and the site of the Priory infirmary. Some of these we can verify from previous archaeological surveys and some from our own surveys, they also confirmed many of the field boundaries suggested by F. Hartley and P. Liddle.

Reported sightings of the White Lady of Grace Dieu still reach our ears even up to this point in time!!!

*John Dickinson*

### This free leaflet is the first of the publications planned for Grace Dieu Priory.

It has been written by Peter Wilkinson, onetime Biology teacher at Ashby Grammar School, with sections by Paul Monk and Kenneth Hillier on the Geology and History of the site respectively. The trail starts on the old canal course and takes the walker on a circular route round the Priory ruins. A series of numbers on a plan of the site draw the reader's attention to the varied flora and fauna over the changing seasons. Golden Saxifrage mingle with Dog Mercury in the woods; mosses and fungi grow on fallen tree trunks; Elephant Hawkmoth can be found feeding on the Great Willowherb in the Summer, whilst in Spring the meadow is bright with the yellow flowers of the Lesser Celandine. Along the brook can be found Butterbur, Ramsons and Wood Anemone, in amongst the Oak, Ash, Beech, Yew, Hawthorn and Holly. In and around the large pond,

coots and mallards thrive and a lucky watcher might see a Kingfisher.

Once the priory opens to the public, the leaflet will be available at the Bull's Head, Ashby Tourist Centre and Museum, Snibston Discovery Park and other local attractions.

Other publications will include a Primary Schools Pack, a Secondary Schools Document Pack and an illustrated Guidebook.

*Kenneth Hillier*

### The Future

Forthcoming opening will be early next year.

We are looking for ideas, suggestions, helpers to make this an outstanding event. (Please see people to contact below).

**Finally** I am sure there must be a tremendous amount of information about Grace Dieu Priory that has not seen the light of day for many years. If you are a "Friend" or would like to become a "Friend" then please contact one of the following. If you do not wish to become formally involved but maybe have some old photographs, memories or stories of Grace Dieu we would still like to hear from you.

### Contact Details

*Ken Hillier*  
kenhillier@moonfleet69.freemove.co.uk  
Tel: 01332 865315

*John Dickinson*  
jmdick06@hotmail.com  
Tel: 01530 458859

*Malcolm Allsop*  
allsop34@allsop34.freemove.co.uk  
Tel: 01530 833632

*Angela Bexton*  
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