



FRIENDS OF GRACE DIEU PRIORY

David Whitt
1 Sadlers Wells
Belton, Loughborough
Leicestershire LE12 9TS

“Newsletter - Autumn 2008”

Review of the Year

Well another year is drawing to a close with the onset of autumn and I thought it a good time to let all our “Friends” and anyone who is interested in Grace Dieu Priory know what we have been doing in the last year and our plans for next. We have had our highs and our lows but I think I can say overall we are still heading in the right direction.



2007 closed with us doing our first “Carols in the Cloister”. Being the first we had no idea how it would go but I can report it was a great success. We had about 80 people come on the evening, which was cold but fine. They started from the car park at the Bulls Head and came down to the Priory in torch lit parties, an adventure in itself. On arrival mince pies and mulled wine were served to get them in good voice. The MC for the evening was Neville Ireland and the music provided by Sandie Coupe, both members of the “Friends”. The Priory looked great, I suppose the first time in 800 years that it had been lit up and we must thank JB hire for the generous loan of generators and lights. It was so successful and by popular demand (ghosts and all!) the event is being staged again on the 5th December 2008. (Full details are in the coming events section on our website).

We had Christmas Cards on sale featuring a photograph of the Priory, these sold very well. We have a new card for this Christmas designed by one of our members: David Fairbrother.

2008 arrived and in the spring we started work on preparing the Priory for the

summer and our next event, which was our Garden Party on the 21st June. In 2007 we used a contractor to look after the major grass cutting around the Priory, which worked very well, but in 2008 we ran into a number of problems and had to call on the Friends to save the day with rakes, lawn mowers and rolled up sleeves to get the Priory ready for the event.

We decided this year on a slightly different format for the event. We did not charge an entry fee but had more activity events manned by “Friends” and also ran our own refreshments tent. Newcroft Primary School along with Sandie Coupe entertained the visitors with music and singing, plus for the first time we had a folk group as an extra. We had a diverse range of stalls: all the traditional ones plus “Welly Wanging”, Falcons, Ferrets and Nev’s wine stall (a great attraction especially if you won a bottle of wine). We are working already on next year’s event and the date will be towards the end of June.

Next year there will also be another first, we are planning an afternoon “Musical Picnic” in the cloisters in conjunction with a local theatre group who will provide the entertainment. It is scheduled for the 17th May 2009.

As I mentioned earlier we have had some downs as well which with a site such as the Priory I suppose is inevitable. We had the theft of a small plaque but fortunately they did not take the explanatory plaque, which we installed this year, which shows the layout of the Priory. We also suffered vandalism to some of the masonry and on two occasions the entrance gate to the Priory was torn off. Fortunately the Grace Dieu Priory Trust have now received the final payment of the Grant from the Heritage Lottery fund and are able to fund the repairs, regrettably this could be an on going problem.

I wish to thank all of the committee and other helpers who have worked so hard to make the Priory attractive to visitors and our events a success this year. Also thanks to Grace Dieu School and the Bull’s Head for their continued co-

operation for car parking and to Xervia for maintaining our Web Site.

David Whitt Chair to the “Friends”

Scale Model of Grace Dieu Priory

One of the delights of writing the guidebook to Grace Dieu Priory was the time spent with archaeologist Peter Ryder, discussing and puzzling over the changes, additions - even contractions - of the buildings over the centuries. As a result of further debates with Graham Keevil, the other archaeologist involved in investigating the remains of the priory-cum-mansion, Peter drew three projections - the priory as it may have appeared shortly after its foundation in the early 13th century; as it may have appeared shortly before the Dissolution in 1538; and its appearance after its conversion to the Beaumont mansion by the end of the 16th century.

It was decided that a three-dimensional model would be an excellent



way of explaining to members of the public the layout of the priory in its heyday. Philip Durden, the model-maker who had already produced two excellent models of the Ivanhoe Baths and Ashby Castle, both on display at Ashby Museum, was commissioned. Philip made a site visit to the Priory to take photographs and also to collect drawings made by Peter and other illustrative material. Needless to say, he was captivated by the aura of the site.

The model is based on the priory shortly before the Dissolution. Phil faced the same problem Peter had done - so much had disappeared before the first known drawings (the Buck brothers in 1730) and it was still not entirely clear what was

Membership application

Name(s).....
Type of membership.....
Address.....
Postcode..... Telephone.....
Email..... Cheque enclosed £.....



priory and what was mansion. Phil could follow closely Peter's drawing for 75% of the building - but how to portray the east and south sides! Inevitably, guesswork, however inspired, has had to come into it; and there will be (and have been!) disagreements as to the result. Nevertheless, the model residing in Ashby Museum (complete with a freshly dug grave) does the priory proud. A bonus is that it is portable and can be put on show at events run by the Friends when needed. Ashby Museum is open to the public Mon - Fri 11 am - 4 pm, Sat 10 am - 4 pm. Closed 1 - 2 pm. **Ken Hillier**

Guided Walks and Ghost Walks

If the 2007 walks and talks programme tested the stamina of the "Ghosts" of Grace Dieu, then 2008 must have stretched them beyond belief. The number of illustrated lectures, guided walks, ghost walks, given by our members during 2008 is as follows:

20 talks with 300 attendances

13 guided walks with 272 attendances

27 ghost walks with 332 attendances

3 paranormal investigations with 48 attendances. In total 63 events produced around 952 attendances. This will generate an income of over £2000 for the Year 2008. Thanks for supporting this programme go to Ernie Miller, Ken Hillier, Rose & Dave Whitt, Ann Petty, Billy Newton, Steve Middleton, Gill Hibbert, Jo Brown, the NWLDC and the ghosts of Grace Dieu Priory.

The Priory has been filmed by the BBC as part of the introduction to some of its national programmes and articles have appeared in the local press and it has been featured on local radio.

The ghost walks and paranormal evenings have highlighted the reputation of the Priory as one of the most "Haunted Locations" in the Midlands. We have had enquiries from Ghost Hunting groups from around the country and the Priory has been included in a number of web sites relating to the paranormal. So our fame is spreading far and wide and people attending the walks are coming from all over Leicestershire and surrounding counties. We are grateful to the Bulls Head Pub for

allowing the parking of cars and allowing hospitality to often cold, wet and bedraggled ghost hunters!

Although this year we have not been able to photograph any ghosts in the flesh so to speak! People have found evidence in their photos of; orbs, ectoplasm and strobe lighting, which I am expertly informed, indicates the presence of spirits.

We have already fixed dates for walks in 2009 and begun to receive bookings, so I hope we will have another very "active" year. If any one is interested in helping on these walks please ring a "Friend" of Grace Dieu Priory, we would like to hear from you. Contacts can be obtained from our web-site www.gracedieupriory.co.uk

John Dickinson

Presentations and Talks to Clubs and Societies

Last year talks about the history and refurbishment of the ruins proved to be very popular and by borrowing equipment from members of committee we were able to advertise the Priory. This year the "Friends" successfully applied for a grant from the Helen Jean Cope Trust to enable us to purchase our own equipment, we are now the proud owners of a Laptop computer, a digital projector and a screen.

The story is now told via PowerPoint and we have various versions to cover all possible audiences and adjustable to cover the time available.

In the last 12 months nearly 20 talks have been given, as the word spread what an interesting place Grace Dieu is, many of the talks were followed by guided walks, both the standard ones and the ghost walks.

The income generated by these activities helps towards the cost of keeping the upkeep of the Priory.

If anyone is involved with a group that requires speakers don't forget to recommend us, they won't be disappointed and we need the income. The best way to contact us and book a talk is through the Web site. **Ernie Miller**

Membership and Finance

The Friends Of Grace Dieu Priory are registered with the Charities Commission and we have submitted an annual return for 2008, which shows a sound financial position.

The purpose of our fund raising events is to generate money to keep the site in good order and available for the general public to visit and enjoy. Our main sources of income are from guided walks, ghost walks and talks given by members, the sale of guidebooks and the annual garden party. Much of the income is spent on paying a contractor for mowing grass and the purchase of other materials to aid in ground care.

We are grateful for grants by the Helen Jean Cope Trust and the Leicestershire & Rutland Museums Forum, which have enabled us to purchase equipment helping us to present our illustrated talks in a more professional manner, and an interpretation panel, which is attached to the Chapter House wall to help visitors understand more about the Priory.

Membership is around 50 and we are grateful for member's subscriptions and donations and for the time that some members are able to give to keep the Priory in good condition. There is no minimum requirement to being a member (other than a small membership fee) and if you are interested in joining you will be made very welcome. All our committee meetings, social and fundraising events are open to all members. A membership application form is at the top of this page. Subscriptions are: individual £5 and family £8, (concessions £3 and £5 are available for senior citizens and anyone not in paid employment), Institutional £15.00 and Corporate £25.00. Completed forms should be returned to Malcolm Allsop, 15 Dauphine Close, Coalville, LE67 4QQ

If you are able to supply an E Mail address it is much appreciated as it enables us to keep you better informed.

Malcolm Allsop

Visit our website at www.gracedieupriory.org.uk for forthcoming events and publications.