



FRIENDS OF GRACE DIEU PRIORY

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“Newsletter - Autumn 2007”

Hello to All our Members

It seems a long time since we last issued a “Newsletter”. This is not because we have had nothing to tell you, but rather because events happened that kept overtaking us.

We have now been open to the public for over one year and although we have had our ups and downs, on balance we believe it has been a successful year. Your committee has continued to work tirelessly to continue to improve the Priory’s attraction.

Following the opening event weekend last year 1st and 2nd of July we had hoped to end the year with a Carol evening at the Priory to celebrate Christmas. Unfortunately as the Bull’s Head, which provides our car parking was due to be refurbished it had to be put in abeyance.

We decided that our summer event this year would have a medieval theme and unlike last year we would try and raise funds from it. It was scheduled for the 23rd of June and we worked on the basis of last year’s event but with more attractions. All of the planning was going well and work on the terrain around the Priory was proceeding at a great pace. We now have a contractor on board who is cutting the grass for us and despite the wet weather had made sure it had been cut.

Ten days before our event disaster struck, thieves raided the Priory.

Much of the stainless steel reinforcing that had been installed to support arches was stolen and in the course of which substantial damage to the masonry occurred. When it was discovered most of the members were in shock, it seemed inconceivable that anyone would do such a thing especially as the financial gain for the thieves would probably have been small. The police were informed but despite a good response from the local public no culprits were apprehended.



Urgent meetings had to be held and eventually with only days to spare emergency work was carried out which enabled the event to go ahead.

Most of this time the weather was foul but come the 23rd of June the sun came out and we had a magnificent sunny day, well done Roesia.

We had children from the local schools with music, dance and song, ferrets, fortune telling, falconry displays and a very noisy and colourful performance from the Sealed Knot enactment group, although when the cannon and muskets were let off one

of the large owls from the Falconry beat a hasty retreat to distant trees.

There were also many trade stands and food.

The complete event was MC’d by our local charity radio station and was a thorough success.

The best method to repair the damage caused to the Priory is still being assessed by the experts but regrettably we think it will cost many thousands of pounds to reinstate so it may be that the Trust will have to ask for help from English Heritage to cover the bill.

We are now looking forward to Christmas and yes; we are having Carol singing this year. The date has been fixed for Friday 7th December. We plan to have lighting playing on to the walls of the Priory and the Carol singing will take place in the cloisters following a lantern lit walk through the woods to the Priory. It will be a free evening but we will make a collection for Priory funds.

We have also fixed the date for next years summer event it is on 22nd June a change this time from a Saturday to a Sunday hopefully this will make it easier for families to attend also the format in 2008 will change.

Donations to those who help us

Following our successful summer event we are again this year able to give £100.00 each to Shepshed Newcroft and Belton Primary

Schools and also The Carillon Radio Station who have been very supportive to the "Friends" over the last two years.

The donation that was given to Shepshed Newcroft last year was used to purchase Tabards for their music stands, which we understand helped them become the Champion junior School orchestra in the East Midlands and Belton used their donation to provide equipment to help the children practice their Maypole dancing.

A presentation is being arranged for this year when it is hoped the "Press" will be present.

Grace Dieu Priory and a 2007 Heritage Award

In May this year, Grace Dieu Priory was entered for the "Special Event" category in the annual County Heritage Awards. We put forward the "Re-Opening of the Priory to the Public", held on 1st July 2006, and the "Service of Thanksgiving", which took place the following day.

We highlighted the fact that costs had been minimal and funded from donations and Friends' subscriptions; that money was subsequently given to the two participating schools, Newcroft and Belton Primaries; that labour was entirely voluntary and mainly came from the local villages; and that the shared values and sense of partnership meant the educational benefits of the two days were profound.

At the Heritage Awards Evening, held at the Sir John Moore Foundation, Appleby Magna, on Thursday 26th July, the Grace Dieu Priory Trust and Friends gained a **Highly Commended** certificate and much praise by the three judges for their inspired weekend.

Grace Dieu Priory Account Book 1414-1418

Very little is extant about medieval English nunneries' affairs and the

existence of a little book, measuring 9 1/2" x 6 1/4", in the National Archives at Kew is remarkable. The cellaress at Grace Dieu at the beginning of the 15th century, Dame Petronilla Dunwich, religiously kept the accounts of her priory in this book and, somehow, it survived the vicissitudes of the centuries.

Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, and a Shire Grant from Leicestershire, the Grace Dieu Priory Trust commissioned Dominic Johnson, an expert in transcribing and translating medieval Latin, to do just that. There are 112 double pages of medieval scrawl, some well-nigh indecipherable, written occasionally in dog-Latin; this has needed professional skills of the highest order and exemplary patience. The transcribing was completed earlier this year, and Dominic is now translating the sheets into English.

The result will be a valuable record of the economy of a small, poorly endowed religious house. There are also many names mentioned - of nuns, servants and business associates AND even the nunery's cows! Watch this space.

Christmas Cards for Sale



Another new innovation this year is the production of Christmas Cards showing the Priory these will go on sale shortly, in plenty of time for Christmas.

Details of the forthcoming events and how to purchase the Christmas cards can be obtained from our website www.gracedieupriory.co.uk

Walks and Talks

This year has seen a large increase in the number of organised "walks, talks and visits to the Priory, thanks mainly to John Dickinson and his helpers. With over 600 people attending the various events this resulted in £2000.00 being added to the maintenance fund.

Another 'New' for the Friends

With the help of the Helen Jean Cope Trust who made a grant of £1000.00 to us we have been able to buy a Laptop computer and projector. This enables us to give very professional presentations and talks to interested organisations. We do not charge for this but donations are always very welcome and have provided a valuable source of income in the past. If you know of any group who would be interested in having a visit from us then please refer them to our website where all of the details can be found.

Finance and Membership

Thanks are due to all members involved in fundraising activities, which have contributed to a healthy surplus for the year ended 31 July. All funds raised will be used to keep the site in good order and to improve access and information for visitors.

In addition we are grateful to the Helen Jean Cope Trust for a grant towards a laptop computer and projector for use in our presentations to groups.

Membership fees are £5 for individuals and £8 for families (£3 and £5 concessions respectively). Concessions are available for senior citizens, students and those not in paid employment.

If you would like to join the Friends please contact the Treasurer, Malcolm Allsop 15 Dauphine Close, Coalville, LE67 4QQ, Tel 01530 833632. (email mal@allsop34.freeserve.co.uk)