



## FRIENDS OF GRACE DIEU PRIORY TRUST

c/o North West Leicestershire District Council,  
Community Services,  
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Tel: 01530 454603/601, Fax 01530 454571

### “Newsletter - Summer 2006”

#### Opening of Grace Dieu Priory to the Public

We can finally announce the opening of Grace Dieu Priory to the public. Prior to 1996 it was recognised that the Priory was in dire need of attention because of erosion from natural causes and vandalism and that the last chance to save it from total demolition was fast approaching. In an attempt to save it a body of people who were interested in its future was formed. This comprised the LCC, NWLDC, Belton PC, English Heritage, Grace Dieu Archaeological and Historical Society and others. From this was formed a charitable trust company “The Grace Dieu Priory Trust” dedicated to the conservation of the Priory. During the following 10 years much work has been done by architects, archaeologists and specialist contractors and volunteers and we have now arrived at a point where the Priory and surroundings can be opened for public enjoyment. A scheme to save the Priory was drawn up and costed and this revealed that large sums of money would be required. The funding had to be found and our thanks must go to the efforts of many individuals who gave their time to embark on the task of finding approximately half a million pounds. This was eventually achieved with major grants coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Wren, NWLDC, National Forest, Belton PC, EMDA, Helen Cope Charitable Trust, Community Roots and donations from private people.

The scheme involved archaeological exploration work, computer recording of the stonework and trial contracts to establish the methodology for the conservation. When completed a contract was placed for the main conservation work, all of which has now been done. Also the paths around the Priory and the connecting path to the Sustran’s Trail, which is part of the National Cycle route and passes through Grace Dieu Woods were completed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2006.



#### The Friends

When the conservation work was complete it was necessary to ensure that the Priory did not start to deteriorate again, so a group of volunteers formed the “Friends of Grace Dieu Priory”. Their brief is to oversee the day to day running of the site and keep it in a condition suitable for people to visit and enjoy, to arrange guided tours including ghost walks and raise funds sufficient to meet the needs of the “Friends” to carry out the work at the Priory. The “Trustees” will address major works and further developments. New members to the “Friends” group are always very welcome.

#### The Opening

The formal opening is on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July and will be made by the Chairmen of the County and District Councils and will be a family day. The procession will start from Grace Dieu School at around 1-30pm and will comprise the dignitaries, a school orchestra and choir. After the ceremony there will be various events taking place, Maypole dancing and other entertainments by the children from Belton C of E Primary School and Shepshed Newcroft Primary School, plus various side-shows. These will include Falconry, Ferret racing, Woodturning and Spinning demonstrations, Miles of Huntingdon, Exhibition of relics discovered at the site. Guidebooks, Nature trail leaflets and the Grace Dieu Ghost book will also be available. Light refreshments and Ice cream will be on sale during the afternoon.

On Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July an ecumenical service will take place at 11am. There will be a church choir and organist and the Abbot from Mount Saint Bernard’s Abbey and the Vicar from St John’s Belton will officiate.

Car parking on Saturday will be available by kind permission at Grace Dieu School, and the Bull’s Head with an overflow provision at the Grace Dieu CC. Parking for the service will be at the Bull’s Head only. There will be stewards on duty but any one attending is asked to pay due consideration to the property of people who are kindly assisting us. People are asked not to park on the A512.

## Membership application

Name(s).....

Type of membership.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Telephone .....

Email.....

Cheque enclosed £ ..... Receipt required Yes/No.....



We hope that as many people as possible will come and support this historic event, not quite bringing the Priory back to life but certainly saving it from total extinction. Let's hope the Ghost approves!

To help promote the opening the Friends are participating in the Picnic in the Park at Coalville on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June.

For further information contact Angela Bexton on 01530 454603 or e-mail [angela.bexton@nwleicestershire.gov.uk](mailto:angela.bexton@nwleicestershire.gov.uk)

Or David Whitt on 01530 223201, e-mail [davidwhitt@bernay.demon.co.uk](mailto:davidwhitt@bernay.demon.co.uk)

### Further archaeological discoveries at Grace Dieu Priory By Graham Keevill

Our trial excavations at the Priory were completed in November 2005, with further revelations about the extent of the west cloister range and the monastic church. On the former, we think we have found the south end of the range, but this is well to the south of what we had assumed was the external wall of the refectory (south cloister range). It now seems clear that this standing ruin was a later medieval rebuild, perhaps reflecting a slight contraction in the area of the cloister. This suggests that the original cloister might have been rectangular in plan rather than the more usual square shape. In the church, meanwhile, we established that the three rather stubby ruins standing close together towards the west end had been additions – again

probably of later medieval date – and that in all probability they had been the lower stages of a bell tower.

Meanwhile, Peter Ryder has also finished his recording and analysis of the standing ruins, now that the walls have been cleared of vegetation. The combined above and below-ground investigations have provided a much better understanding of how the priory developed both during the medieval period and after the Dissolution. This has allowed Peter to produce excellent reconstruction drawings of how the buildings might have looked at various times in their long history of use. You can see these drawings in the new guidebook. We all recognise, however, that there are still plenty of gaps in our knowledge of Grace Dieu Priory. As well as finishing our reports on the recent work, Peter and I will therefore be considering how we might address some of these gaps through further fieldwork – and hopefully we will be able to return to the site in the not too distant future.



## Finance and Membership

Our funds have been boosted by the proceeds of ghost walks organised by John Dickinson and the generosity of the following local businesses which have sponsored and supported our opening event on 1 July :

**PA Roofing & Building Ltd** of Whitwick

**Redhall Garage Ltd** of Coleorton

**MJM Plumbing Heating & Building Services** of Whitwick

**Pukka Publications** of Whitwick

**J.B Tool Hire** of Coalville

**Pickering Plant (Measham) Ltd.**

**Marsh & Moss Accountants** of Loughborough

Sincere thanks are due to these companies which have ensured that the opening event will not deplete the funds we need to look after the site.

Welcome to **Nottingham East Midlands Airport** which has joined us as a corporate member.

**Existing members** are reminded that their annual subscription will be due on 1 August and **new members** are always welcome to join. Our fees are low to encourage active participation rather than simply raising funds, but if you wish to make an additional donation this will be greatly appreciated. Rates are as noted below and a cut-off application form is at the top of this page. Please return it to Malcolm Allsop, 15 Dauphine Close, Coalville, LE67 4QQ. Phone 01530 833632, e-mail [mal@allsop34.freerve.co.uk](mailto:mal@allsop34.freerve.co.uk)

Individual £5

Unwaged/retired £3

Household £8

Unwaged/retired household £5

Institutional £15

Corporate £25