

A SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE (for the 38th Annual Symposium at Buckfast 4/4/2013)

I was asked to talk about the early history of my Community at Prinknash, and with special reference to Abbot Aelred Carlyle who founded it. It is now a very appropriate time; because our Community has been going 117 years since 1896 and Aelred died very near the middle in 1955. So the Community existed for 59 years during his life time and has continued another 58 years since his death.

I have called the talk “A Spiritual Adventure” because that was the title Aelred gave to an autobiography he never wrote¹. I am trying to do it for him in 45 minutes. I propose to discuss the matter in three sections, covering three different aspects: (i) the things Aelred did that influenced the Community (ii) the things he did that did not influence the Community (iii) the things that the Community did irrespective of Aelred.

I. THE THINGS AELRED DID THAT INFLUENCED THE COMMUNITY

The Community was Aelred’s invention. Born and baptised Benjamin Fearnley Carlyle in 1874 he was an Anglican medical student at Barts in 1896 with Anglo-Catholic tendencies² and out of his own head he got the idea of setting up a Benedictine Community³ in the East End of London. Individual Anglicans had been relatively successful in setting up Religious Orders in the latter half of the 19th century especially for women. But in the last decade of the century, founding communities was becoming a part of pastoral strategy in the Church of England. A Committee of 1891 claimed that “one of the most effective means of evangelising the masses will be the establishment of Brotherhoods, lay and clerical”. In London itself, the Bishop, Frederick Temple, issued a report in 1889 on organisations that might be able to reach classes which were – as he delicately put it – “outside Religious ministrations”.⁴

A Benedictine kind of Community was, however, a novelty. Aelred had read a few books on monasticism and in the 1890s visited some Roman Catholic monasteries, notably this one here at Buckfast where the Prior, Benedict Gariador⁵, later Abbot General of the Cassinese Congregation, gave him a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict; and introduced him to the life and works of Jean-Baptiste Muard (1809-1854) who had founded Pierre qui Vire from which Buckfast had originally come⁶. This is what Aelred said many years later of these excursions: “In the early nineties.....”. Aelred also visited Mount St. Bernard’s and the Charterhouse at

¹ The title was suggested to Aelred by his friend, Evelyn Thomas, who encouraged him to write “a real book of spiritual adventure and experience” (Aelred’s diary 18th March 1937). Two months later he wrote of his projected autobiography “it will have as title ‘A Spiritual Adventure’ and will be dedicated to all the friends of my life” (diary 5th May 1937).

² It could be argued that all his Anglo-Catholic ideas and practices came from what he had seen in Roman Catholic churches – notably at the Carmelite church in Kensington and at St. Gregory’s in Cheltenham (devotion to the Sacred Heart and Benediction).

³ Clerical and lay Brotherhoods were very much mooted in the Church of England since the proposals of a joint Committee of both Houses of the Convocation of Canterbury appointed in 1888. .

⁴ See A.M. Allchin “The Silent Rebellion” pp 169 and 173-4

⁵ Aelred in later life remembered “in the early nineties when I used to spend part of my holidays during the Hospital vacation at Buckfastleigh” where “wise and affectionate counsel I received from Father Benedict helped me more than anything else to form my ideas of the Benedictine life and to shape it on the Constitutions and observance of Pere Muard’s Pierre qui vire of a strict almost Trappistic Congregation strictly contemplative but with an ardent missionary spirit” (Diary of Aelred 25th November 1951).

⁶ Aelred received a copy of the “Life of the Rev. Mary John Baptist Muard” by Abbe Brulee translated into English by Rt. Rev. Dom Isidore Robot (New York 1882), at Painsthorpe in March 1906. For Benedict Gariador (1859-1936) see Buckfast Abbey Chronicle December 1936 pp 251-254

Parkminster. Armed with this information he went down to a large house at number 45 Glengall Road on the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London in the Spring of 1896 and founded a Benedictine community on his own. He had drawn up in writing some instructions on how the life was to be, but his preparations and experience of the problems were minimal.

He stayed on the Isle of Dogs with a handful of disciples for less than two years and then left for the countryside where he tried to set up his community at various places – Lower Guiting in Gloucestershire, Milton Abbas in Wiltshire, Painsthorpe in Yorkshire - until he settled on Caldey Island in 1906. During that time he modified his original ideas. He gradually came to the conclusion that his Community should be a contemplative one, dedicated to the Divine Office in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict and occupied with no external work. In retrospect he outlined his development in the following way: “from the earliest days of the Community in 1896, we recognised as a guiding principle that the two chief characteristics of the Contemplative Life were to be found in prayer and work”. The basic idea was that “the members of the community should be monks and nothing else, dwelling at home in their monastery without any external obligations or mission, and occupied exclusively with the Divine Office, Mental Prayer and the other duties of the Contemplative Life”⁷

Aelred reiterated these principles many times without explaining what he meant by Contemplative life beyond the bare facts of recitation of the Divine Office in accordance with the Rule of St Benedict. All his successors as superiors of the community more or less repeated his principles in words down to the present day.

In 1905 Aelred set down his ideas in a systematic form in an article for the community magazine PAX entitled “Our Purpose and Method” (OPAM for short). It was re-edited in 1910 and 1915⁸. I have here an edition published at Pluscarden. It is a substantial document as you see, It quotes a large number of authorities, mainly Catholic ones, and gives an account of the life of the Community in some detail. It was not very original, nor particularly well written but it appealed to other monks who had similar ideas and practices. It is worth quoting a story of Dom Romanus Rios⁹, later an Abbot in the Cassinese Congregation, a Spanish monk who was at Maredsous around 1910. He heard the abbot, Columba Marmion, at recreation reading what he called “an article on the ideals and practice of the Benedictine life”. Unknown to either Romanus or the Belgian monks, it was in fact from OPAM. All agreed “as to the writer’s clear perception and expression of an ideal so dear to their own hearts”. They were very surprised when Columba Marmion told them that it was written “by an Anglican monk who is the Abbot of a monastery trying to bring to life the Benedictine life in the Church of England”

⁷ Abbot’s letter, PAX 50 (Winter 1916-17) p 327. There is a remarkable joint statement by Bishop Mostyn and Abbot Cuthbert Butler in 1916 asserting that “Caldey Abbey is, we believe, the one Community of Englishmen in England who are devoted to the purely contemplative life” (PAX 47 Spring 1916). When in Rome in 1914 he was assured by several abbots that “there was a place in the Order as it exists today, devoted entirely to prayer and the recitation of the Divine Office and the works of the Contemplative Life” (PAX 41 September 1914 p 279).

⁸ When he returned to the community in 1951 Wilfrid Upson, then abbot, asked Aelred to “read and rewrite or correct and bring up to date ‘Our Purpose and Method’ that I compiled 40 years ago” (Diary of Aelred 26th November 1951). In the early summer of 1953 Aelred recorded activity to provide a preface to OPAM (23rd May) and an appendix by Wilfrid explaining how some of the material was now out of date in view of the Roman Canon Law (27th July). Aelred himself thought it would be better to re-write the whole thing – “at present it is a period-piece” (29th August).

⁹ See the obituary by Abbot Adrian Taylor “Abbot Romanus Rios (1891-1955)” in PAX 274 (Summer 1955) pp 45-53 and PAX 275 (Autumn 1955) pp 89-99. The story is recounted by Abbot Wilfrid Upson in PAX 273 (Spring 1955) pp 3-4.

There were in fact definite echoes of Maredsous at Caldey. Aelred had started a scheme for training young boys in trades and work experience along the lines of something similar at Maredsous, even adopting the same name of St. Joseph. The very buildings at Caldey with pointed turrets are thought to be like those of Maredsous.

But as far as the document OPAM goes, I think that anyone of my generation brought up on say Christ the Ideal of the Monk, would find it pretty standard fare. It is not particularly Marmion. It is not particularly Maredsous. Indeed I don't think it is particularly anything that could not be found in novice masters conferences and books of even non-monastic literature of the time. The monks at Maredsous found it familiar but so would a lot of other people.

In 1913 the Caldey community converted to the Catholic Church and several monks came over from Maredsous to offer their services. The extraordinary thing is that they did not recognise the monastic life in practice at Caldey as like their own at all. One of the number, Gregoire Fournier, was in fact scandalised to find how "unmonastic, uncanonical and irregular" the life at Caldey was.

It was hardly to be wondered at when one remembers how Aelred had never done a novitiate anywhere, never lived in a monastery for any length of time and simply worked out the life from his own reading and imagination. How would any of us set up a monastery when we had never actually lived the life or done a novitiate or been instructed by those who had been in it for years.

In the Anglican days the Community had been subject to no visitation – not even by a bishop because Aelred had the extraordinary idea that Caldey Island was "extra diocesan" and subject to nobody. Not that any Anglican bishops near about had any wish to exercise authority over it. The Community had grown in 17 years to a substantial 30 monks living a life of their own invention. Aelred had tried to copy what he saw at other monasteries – all Roman Catholic ones of course – but he had no really stable points of comparison or yardstick to fix the observance or general life style. It was all incredibly improvised and, in every sense, "made up".

There are however two points at least that were Aelred's own, and in part original at the time. These call for some consideration.

1. The first of these concerned the structure up of the community. As is well known a large number of monasteries in Northern Europe founded in the 19th century had a two tiered system where there are ordained choir monks up here and laybrothers down there. The two parts had very different occupations and canonical status. Aelred and his monks were opposed to it on principle. It divided the community. He expressly said "We admit no lay brothers to our Community so that all in the monastery may be considered equal in Choir and in devotion to the same duty"¹⁰

In the Anglican days Aelred insisted on everybody being a choir monk. He even began with the idea of no monks being ordained at all, and bringing in a chaplain for Mass and the sacraments. But he changed that partly because of the difficulty of finding chaplains when he moved to remote areas like Painsthorpe and Caldey. But he persisted with the idea of what he

¹⁰ PAX 27 (March 1911) p 193.

called “non-priest choir monks”. So strongly did Aelred feel about this that he asked explicit permission for non-priest choir monks at an interview with Pope Pius X soon after the conversion in May 1913. He went to Rome with Marmion who was a gifted linguist – speaking French with a Dublin accent – and Marmion did all the talking to the Holy Father in Latin.¹¹ Not only did the Pope allow the permission but added a statement that has surprised some but is given by Marmion as follows “For they have no need to be very learned in order to praise God”.

Despite the Papal approval, the community discovered that the European monastic congregations were not at all in favour. When the Community made overtures to join the Solesmes Congregation in 1922 through the services of the Abbot of Quarr, they were warned politely but firmly that Solesmes did not accept non-priest choir monks. It required “wholehearted acceptance of the French constitutions – or nothing”¹². Our community discreetly withdrew.

In 1919 Aelred did introduce lay brothers on the example of the French Congregation, assuming that was part of life in Catholic monasteries. But the existence of non-Priest choir monks continued. As a result there was in practice very little difference in the work and status of the two parts. The down side of this was that the community never had an intellectual core. It tended to attract those of the lower orders of society. They were in Chapman’s dismissive words “an uneducated lot”. The Anglican Religious at Pershore/ Nashdom and Cowley were never very complimentary either. The Nashdom monks always believed that any substance in Aelred’s theories of monasticism came from their abbot Denys Prideaux who had been an oblate on Caldey in the early days. Fr Ronald Knox remarked on the conversation in Anglican Religious houses as rather like that of a senior common room. But it was not at Caldey. Aelred had said early on his Community days that he did not particularly want graduates of universities – did not Cowley, he said, meaning SSJE cater for such. He wanted the vocation to be primary.

Some visitors were politely shocked to hear one of the Caldey monks speaking with a cockney accent. In the early days a Mr Stedman, an Anglican clergyman, “thought of joining at Milton Abbas but found there were no gentlemen in the Community”¹³. There never was an intellectual tradition in our community. For those who love statistics - in all its years of existence there have been only eleven Oxbridge graduates reaching solemn profession.

On the other hand it meant that Caldey was open to a much broader section of society. Many aspirants came with skills in trade and industry rather than in study and teaching. In 1966 when the monastic authorities decided after much deliberation and many centuries that there was only one kind of monk, the choir and lay brothers were united without great difficulty. There were none of the traumas of integration experienced in other houses. Some of the former brothers took their turn as cantors – some had very much better voices than the choir monks – and one of the former brothers was ordained and has been sub-prior for several years.

¹¹ According to Aelred’s own account of the audience with the Holy Father in company with Abbot Marmion on 16th May 1913, the Pope granted “the special privileges to profess monks for the choir who have no vocation for the priesthood” (Aelred’s Diary 3rd September 1953).

¹² See Wilfrid Upson’s diary 15th January 1922.

¹³ Letter of Henry Watts to Aelred 2/11/47

2. The second point was about the general spirit. Aelred as I said was baptised Benjamin Fearnely Carlyle. Before he actually set up his community he thought of taking a religious name. He toyed with Romuald, Cyprian and Augustine, but finally opted for Aelred taking the name from the medieval Abbot of Rievaulx because he particularly liked St Aelred's idea of friendship. He wanted to dedicate his autobiography which he never wrote to "all the friends of my life – by name – who have helped me – for friendship has been to me the strong motive of my days and please God will be to me to the end"¹⁴. Aelred once said "if a man has few or no friends his life is a failure, whatever else he may have accomplished. He is out of touch with God. He must be on account of the isolation of his own soul"¹⁵. Aelred used this idea to moderate authority so that his monks could live what he liked to call "religious life without starch"¹⁶. We shall see the application of this idea in the second section to which we now turn.

II. THE THINGS AELRED DID WHICH DID NOT INFLUENCE THE COMMUNITY

Despite all his protestations in OPAM Aelred was only partly motivated in the making of his Community by the strictly monastic idea. In the years up to 1896 Aelred had clearly in mind some other reason for forming a Community. It was to find an answer to the huge social problem of poverty and squalor in cities like London. He was not the only person who thought that some form, of community might tackle the ghastly situation in the East End. But Aelred was original in thinking that a Benedictine Community could do that. It explains why he set up his first monastery on the Isle of Dogs in the very midst of the problem.

Most people then as now would probably say that the contemplative life and the pastoral care of down and outs are two different vocations and require quite different qualities and means. The Point is that Aelred never thought so. He claimed quite simply from the start that his Benedictine monastery in the Isle of Dogs "began with efforts to help the poor lads of the slums"¹⁷. His idea never worked. He gave up the Isle of Dogs in two years in 1898 and never again tried to found his monastery in a city. He went to the country Lower Guiting, Milton Abbas, Painsthorpe and Caldey and gradually evolved a monastic contemplative life as we have seen described in detail in OPAM. It was not so much that Aelred changed his view. He was always deeply concerned about the social question. But with a single exception none of the aspirants who came to his Community wanted social work. They came for the monastic life.

There is an odd thing about Aelred here that perhaps defines his personality and aims better than anything else. Aelred could never give up the idea of pastoral work with down and outs when he was living as a monk; and he could never give up the idea of contemplative life when he was dealing with down and outs. In all his life he had some success with each idea. The thing he never found how to do was to combine the two ideas in one enterprise.¹⁸

After the conversion Aelred gave up the monastic life and resigned his abbacy in 1921 and went to British Columbia where he lived as a secular priest and involved himself in social

¹⁴ Diary of Aelred 5th May 1937.

¹⁵ Diary of Aelred 17th February 1942.

¹⁶ See PAX 25 (September 1910) p 194.

¹⁷ Diary of Aelred 3rd December 1948

¹⁸ When working as a pastor in Princeton in 1931 he remarked to a friend "I love the life and work here, but the contemplative part of me and all my life's training calls for the Cloister and some strict and hidden monastery" (Aelred letter to Gertrude Petty FCJ 28th January 1931).

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issues, eventually becoming a prison chaplain in 1937. He returned to Prinknash in 1951 and died as a member of the community in 1955. The immediate reason for his departure from Caldey in 1921 was a scandal – in fact two scandals, one sexual and the other financial. (If you are interested I have a brief summary of the scandals. But I had better warn you they are rather disappointing and the evidence very inconclusive.) But it is quite likely that he would have left Caldey and monastic life anyway eventually. He was getting restless and had been absent from the monastery for long periods in the last four years before his departure in 1921. He wanted something else to do. He explained it later as a change of vocation. But perhaps it would be truer to say that he wanted to realise his pastoral interest in social issues in a freer context.

He went to British Columbia. He was secularised in 1935 and lived as a parish priest in Vancouver diocese. In 1937 he was appointed chaplain to Oakalla Prison at Burnaby seven miles north of Vancouver.

One has to appreciate that a prison at that time in a place like British Columbia was rather different from say Long Larten or Ley Hill is now. For one thing it catered for young Indians – we should have to say indigenous Canadians I suppose nowadays – who were living in the reserves and got out, got drunk and committed sometimes serious crimes and landed up in Oakalla. They came under Aelred's jurisdiction because they were at least nominally Roman Catholics. They belonged to tribes converted by Jesuit Missionaries and OMI in the 19th century. In the prison there were paddlings, a black hole and other euphemisms that were pretty general in prisons at that time, I believe. Although most of the prisoners were on relatively short terms – the long terms were in the Penitentiary nearer Vancouver – it was nevertheless the place where executions by hanging were regularly carried out. Aelred as a chaplain was present at 8 or 9 of them.

I am aware that we are entering a different dimension here from what is normal in a discussion of monasticism. But Aelred was not now a monk. He had been and something of his monastic background entered even here. Like most prison chaplains he met a huge cross section of society among offenders from the inadequate to the vicious. He had no theories about penology beyond thinking that prison and its punishments were a pretty awful and outdated system that left scars – sometimes literally - on everyone. What he believed prisoners needed was – listen to this – friendship of which his monastic patron St Aelred of Rievaulx had spoken long ago.

In 1947 he reflected on his time as chaplain at Oakalla and said of the prisoners he had met there “I must have made friends and dealt with more than 7000 men”¹⁹. In the same year he was writing about a prisoner found guilty of murder and he was about to interview. He said “I make it a rule not to pry into the conscience of a man sentenced to capital punishment... First and foremost the man must know that I am his friend”²⁰

I must tell you a story. It is not a good story and it proves nothing but at least it is true. It comes from the pages of Aelred's diary in 1943. There was a prisoner at Oakalla named Robert Beatty He was English actually, born in London but had lived in British Columbia most of his life. He shot and killed a taxi driver in October 1942, and was now in the condemned cell. He had absolutely no faith, “he believed” said Aelred “neither in God, nor

¹⁹Aelred's diary 27/4/47.

²⁰Diary 22/1/47.

the devil, nor heaven, nor hell”²¹ saw no point in repentance and believed there was nothing after death. His only problem was the evangelical prison minister who threatened him daily with apocalyptic punishments in hell. He was fed up and asked the authorities if he could have a different chaplain and asked for the RC one. Aelred obliged and found him “a good companion, with certain honesties and restraints”²² an interesting man. Aelred didn’t try to convert him. But he walked with him to the scaffold and blessed him just before the hood was pulled down over his head. Beatty had made no arrangements; he had no relatives and claimed to have no friends. He was wrong about the last point. Aelred carried out his funeral on his own and managed to get Beatty decently buried at New Westminster. Beatty was listed among the special people in the diary thereafter whom Aelred prayed for. Not everyone prays for unrepentant, unbelieving murderers; but he did. That was Aelred.

A young woman is at present working on the diaries. Her father has relatives in Vancouver and he hopes to take her over there for research on Oakalla prison. I hope I live to see her write a book on Aelred’s life as chaplain. It would be an interesting read.

You may say all this has nothing to do with monasticism and, in a sense, that is perfectly true. No member of his community ever thought of prison work. We have a prison in Gloucester but even in the days when outreach was everything, nobody ever thought of visiting there. Most of the monks never knew their founder did that. But his life at Oakalla came out of something in Aelred who was in fact their founder.

III. THE THINGS THE COMMUNITY DID WHICH DID NOT COME FROM AELRED

The main thing here was the work. Aelred, as we saw, set up a contemplative community. But, as others have found out before, you cannot live on air. He had vague ideas of monks helping in the harvest in Painsthorpe or the garden in Caldey. But work for Aelred in OPAM was a kind of occupational therapy, something that reminded monks they had arms and legs. For the son of a railway engineer, Aelred was not a practical man and never saw positive possibilities in what his monks could do.

But from early on there were monks in the community – Samson Carrington in particular – who could make things; vestments were his speciality. It was rewarding. Samson ran a little workshop at Painsthorpe with a few more items advertised in PAX. It never made much money but it was an idea. It came to fruition many years later after Carrington had left the community.

David Knowles says somewhere that one of the problems with contemplative communities is finding a work that is interesting, integral to the life and involving several monks, and worth its while. After manuscript illumination turned professional in the high middle ages, monks never found a substitute. I would suggest incense. Carrington started making it in 1905. It is still made at Prinknash and it is a winner. It’s a work for several people, it is mildly interesting, it doesn’t interfere with the life, indeed it’s a service to requirements. And it’s like cornflakes, consumable, and therefore in constant demand. And as Prinknash found after world War 2, and especially in tandem with speedy charcoal which the monks themselves

²¹ Diary 14/11/43. Later Beatty said “I shall die just like a pig taken out of the pen and shot. I believe in nothing at all” (20/11/43).

²² Diary 22/11/43 – this was the day of the hanging. Aelred spoke to him the night before and came to him at 5 a.m. on the day of execution and walked in front of him to the gallows room.

invented by dissolving saltpetre in a solution to be mixed with the raw charcoal, highly lucrative.

The upshot of this in the 1930s was that the community became a body of monks with arts and crafts, where some skilled workers and some patient drones carried on quite successful industries which enhanced the community and kept the monks busy and in a way fulfilled. We are so used to thinking of monasteries as places where the monks study or teach or do something intellectual, that we forget what an original idea Prinknash was. Peter Anson in his days as a monk at Caldey went for a rest to Farnborough and was surprised to see monks filling in their hours between choir offices by going to the library or their cells to study their books. The Caldey monks went to work. It was not the lay brothers who worked but all the monks.

There were at this time in 1930s in the West country a number of secular and quasi-religious groups that did arts and crafts²³ and were able to make a living²⁴. (George Hart, for instance, a silversmith at Chipping Camden who provided Prinknash with chalices and other things over many years). Prinknash contributed its own artefacts in return weaving cloth, designing vestments, making stained glass, art work, and – incense. All of these were integrated with the liturgy and life of the house²⁵. (I would like to quote to you a few words of the Superior at this time – Prior Benedict Steuart – see footnote 25).

In the community at that time was an artist of repute named Theodore Baily. He died in 1966²⁶. There has been a revival of interest in Theodore in recent years. His name – almost invariably mis-spelt – appears in the life of Eric Gill and the foundation of the Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic at Ditchling Common. It is sometimes argued that Theodore helped shape Gill's ideas of a religious artistic community and he helped to underpin Gill's medieval thinking on St Thomas Aquinas. Gill and Theodore remained friends to the end of their lives. Theodore had a life of his own at Prinknash in the 1930s. He designed the vestments, woven on our own looms; made the designs for stained glass windows and the lino cuts for book plates. Theodore was also in on the early days of Prinknash pottery, designing statues for the Royal Doulton Potteries in Staffs and strictly religious items favoured by Prior Benedict as an integral part of the monastic life.

It was out of this situation that there emerged a group of artists in what was called the Company of St. Joseph in 1934 which met at Prinknash and tried to align its work to the Office and spirit of the monastery. An architect Geoffrey Webb, brother of Bruno Webb in the Community was the leader. Each year up to 1938 he came with fellow artists to make a retreat at Prinknash, to study and pray and advertise wares as expressions of the life. At least three of the community shared in the work. It was in a way a fulfilment of what Samson Carrington and other – but not Aelred – had dreamed of in the early days at Painsthorpe in the 1900s.

²³ Usually traced to the establishment of the Guild and School of Handicraft by C.R. Ashbee at Chipping Camden in 1902.

²⁴ See Richard James "A half century of Cotswold craftsmanship" PAX 260 Autumn/Winter 1951 pp 111-116.

²⁵ See especially the article by the Prior, Benedictine Steuart, "For Glory and for Beauty" (PAX 136 August 1932 pp 112-4: "Vestment making, incense making and the various other labours, both intellectual and manual, undertaken in the monastery are all forms of prayer, means of union with God, all to be carried out in the spirit of the liturgy- the completest form of prayer – which gives monastic life its colour". Note also Edmund Fatt "A monastic craft in war-time" PAX 221 Winter 1941 pp 209-216.

²⁶ Theodore Baily 1894-1966, clothed and professed at Downside, came to Caldey in 1919; died at Farnborough from lung cancer.

This is why Prinknash in 1930s has been looked upon by some members of the Community as the “golden age”. There was a simple and secluded life graced by white peacocks on the terrace and some eminent visitors in the parlour. Princess Louise, one of Queen Victoria’s granddaughters came to Prinknash in 1937 and was shown round; and bought some of Theodore’s paintings. It was not something that Aelred had ever envisaged and he had no part in its development. But it could be said that his original idea of a united Community without any distinctions between priests and brothers or choir monks and workers, made it possible. The kind of people his Community had attracted from the start were not intellectuals or University graduates but rather artisans and workers.

The decline in monasteries is as we know a widespread phenomenon and evidently due to factors that are common throughout western Europe and America. But there were specific local factors. And these can be noted at Prinknash. It can be said that Prinknash declined because it lost its charism which was the life in the arts and crafts integral to the whole work and liturgy of the community which was what Prinknash did and stood for. The looms were given away to lay workers; the pottery went into mass production; the farm was given over to a bailiff. The stained glass was sent up to Scotland and taken over by experts. The brothers were amalgamated with the choir but the very idea of monastic craftsmen modestly integrating prayer and work gradually petered out. The influence of Mr Butler’s Education Act changed the level and aspirations of the people who came to join the Community after the Second World War. In the place of the arts of crafts there arose some unilateral education. But we had no facilities or personnel to teach the new recruits. There were complaints about the studies and students were in consequence sent away to Heythrop, Rome, Munich, St Benet’s Hall and elsewhere and only one of them ever came back.

Suddenly we all got old and had nothing to do.

It may still be worth considering how physical work, especially when a primary and daily activity, organises and shapes a community. The jealousies and frictions in ordinary life are perhaps resolved differently. It is easier to sink differences in common enterprises. At Prinknash it is all over now but it may be something that might be worth analysing if only to understand the way we lived.

There may still be a point worth thinking about. Physical work seems so important to men even to intellectuals. That creates a problem today where so many men, including monks are glued to computer screens. The idea of something creative, hard, active and time consuming in a monastery may yet be something to consider.

CONCLUSION

It is not easy to make judgements about the early history of a community when one is actually part of it. I remember six of the early monks who joined before the conversion in 1913; and although I never knew Aelred, there are numerous things that he did which I did and still do as a member of the community he founded and to some extent shaped. Other early members I did know. Leo Packer entered the Community at Painsthorpe in 1902 – that’s 112 year ago – but I knew him. I can still see him clipping the yew hedges at the foot of the lower lawn in a blue smock in 1956. He is real to me. I met Theodore Baily once at Farnborough about 1961. He had no intention of renouncing a life time occupation with silence and withdrawal, to waste his time with a garrulous junior from Prinknash. I couldn’t

make him out. He looked grey and ill. He must have been suffering from the lung cancer that killed him, I never met him again and forgot all about him until many years later. I have read all his poems and read the meticulous articles he wrote on art and liturgy for PAX in 1930s and tried to get an inkling of the thoughtful, lonely and creative person that he was.

The received history, so far as there is one, would see that early Community as part of a romantic effort in the second half of the 19th century to revive Religious Life in the Church of England, engineered by more or less eccentric enthusiasts; and see Aelred himself as a dreamer creating an order that had no more real substance than Prospero's dream.²⁷ The view could be partly supported by Ronald Knox's description of the pre-Conversion Community on Caldey as a kind of "fairyland" among the fuchsia hedges, a dream or even "make believe" invented by Aelred as with a wave of a wand. Knox like Peter Anson was reminded of Prospero²⁸. Some of the oddities might be substantiated by Compton Mackenzie's description of an Anglican monastic community in Sinister Street²⁹, seeing that the novelist was a friend of Aelred and had visited the Community at Milton Abbas in 1899.

But, on the other hand, the early Community impressed some reliable observers at the time; notably Dr Darwell Stone on his visit in January 1913³⁰. He reported to Dr Gore the very favourable impression he received of the dignity and fervour of the liturgy on Caldey. In 1909 Aelred gave a retreat at Mirfield at which the Fathers were very interested in Aelred's ideas on Community³¹. And Ronald Knox was certainly very taken with Caldey at the time when he spent seven weeks with the Community in 1911. He says that he experienced "extraordinary happiness and peace"³². It was quite different from the life of the Cowley Fathers which seemed to him more like the extension of life in an Oxford college with which he was so familiar; and on the religious side rather stilted.

And of course the Community survived. It lived on after its Anglican days and established itself in the Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines in the Catholic Church. It lived to produce a golden age of its own in the 1930s and it still exists today with a flourishing house at Pluscarden and an overseas mission in Ghana. The life style does still raise important questions for the future of monastic life. And in any case it is the story of which even I am a part. I am glad that it is. It won't need a hagiographer or perhaps even an ecclesiastical historian to recount. It would need a novelist to do justice to the brethren.

Finally one thing about the Community is that they never had a founder who lived on when his charism and energy had faded. Aelred left early and did not impede the development which owed a lot to people and ideas that had nothing to do with him. But in the end perhaps there was something of Aelred and his original formation which shaped and motivated the Community all the way. It was after all part of his spiritual adventure.

²⁷ P.F.A. Anson, *Building up the waste places* pp 269-70 with a full quotation of Prospero's speech from 'The Tempest'.

²⁸ R.A. Knox, review of "The Benedictines of Caldey" in PAX 215 (Summer 1940) p 84; and see the same author's article "Dom Aelred Carlyle: a memory" in PAX 277 Spring 1956 pp 28-31..

²⁹ "Sinister Street" vol 1 published in 1913 describes the hero's visit to Clere Abbas in c 6.

³⁰ Darwell Stone was sent by Dr Gore to survey the situation at Caldey prior to a visitation. Darwell Stone wrote a report in which he said "The whole conduct of the Services made a very favourable impression on us". "We were present at the sung office and at the Conventual Mass. The singing of the Office was careful, dignified and devout, and was marked by great precision and distinctness. The Mass also was careful, dignified and devout"

³¹ See "Walter Frere" edited by B. Gordon-Taylor and N. Stebbing p 231.

³² R.A. Knox, *A Spiritual Aeneid* (1918) p 88.