



Belmont Abbey

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ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO CAPEL-Y-FFIN - 1991

This will be held on SATURDAY 31ST AUGUST

1130 am The Holy Eucharist at St David's Church, Llanthony.

1200 midday Roman Catholic Mass in the private chapel at The Monastery, Capel-y-ffin.

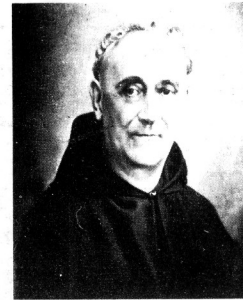
2.30 pm Procession leaves Capel-y-ffin church for The Monastery where the sermon at Evensong will be given by the Revd Thomas Dunn of Llanfihangel Crucorney.

Refreshments will be available after the service.

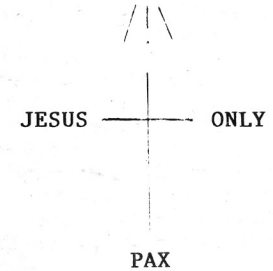
Please note that this date falls on the week-end after the Late Summer Bank Holiday - a change from our usual date. Car parking is available both in the car park at Llanthony and in the Chapel Farm field at Capel-y-ffin by kind permission of Mr & Mrs Lloyd. Visitors are asked not to attempt to park their vehicles at The Monastery itself, please, as this will cause difficulty and obstruct the pilgrimage arrangements.

Please join us for the pilgrimage both at Llanthony and Capel-y-ffin if you possibly can

WILFRED DAVIES
Hon Secretary for the Trustees



Y GWIR YN ERBYN Y BYD



NEWSLETTER NO. 19 - MARCH 1991

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Abergavenny, Gwent NP7 5YD Tel:- 0873 3543.

AN ECONOMY EDITION Most of us are conservative and readers have settled down over the years to the well-known format of our Newsletters. The change in this issue may therefore not please all. We hasten therefore to give the reason for it. Printing costs are a heavy burden upon our small income. To help to cut these to the bone, this is, in part, a DIY issue. The master copy has been prepared by one of our trustees on a word-processor. The print-off only is being done by a local firm. This has the welcome effect of halving our Newsletter costs. We trust therefore that this economy effort will be felt to be warranted. The finished product, though different, will be, we hope, not dissimilar in quality to the earlier style. This issue, however, is experimental. If it turns out to be unsatisfactory due to the DIY input then we may have to return to standard commercial printing practice.

FATHER IGNATIUS - TRACTARIAN Many will now be familiar with the insignia at the top of this page with the Welsh inscription, in translation - 'The Truth will overcome the World.' Together with the watchwords, 'Jesus Only' and 'Pax', this symbol always appeared in the series of tracts published by Father Ignatius from The New Llanthony Abbey at Capel-y-ffin during the late 19th Century. Typical titles were :-

A PRICELESS GIFT TO BE EASILY OBTAINED 1½d
WHY FATHER IGNATIUS IS NOT A ROMAN CATHOLIC 1½d
ALL FOR JESUS 2d

LLANTHONY ABBEY - The Monastic Home of
Father Ignatius.

2½d

Unfortunately, no supplies of these and others are now held in the archives. There is however a limited number of original copies of one entitled 'AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF REV FATHER IGNATIUS OSB'. This leaflet was originally written in June 1890 as a newspaper article at the request of the editor of The New York World. It was published as a 'Llanthony Tract' in October 1896 and copies were obtainable from 'The Secretary, Llanthony Abbey, Abergavenny'. As original 1896-published copies of this small eight-leaved Llanthony Tract are now a collectors' item, we can offer to send one to our readers only as long as supplies last - price £2.00, including postage - with apologies for the difference in price from those listed above !

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THE FIRST MONKS AT LLANTHONY by Canon Stanley Luff
(from a narrative of John Spence, alias Brother Cuthbert)



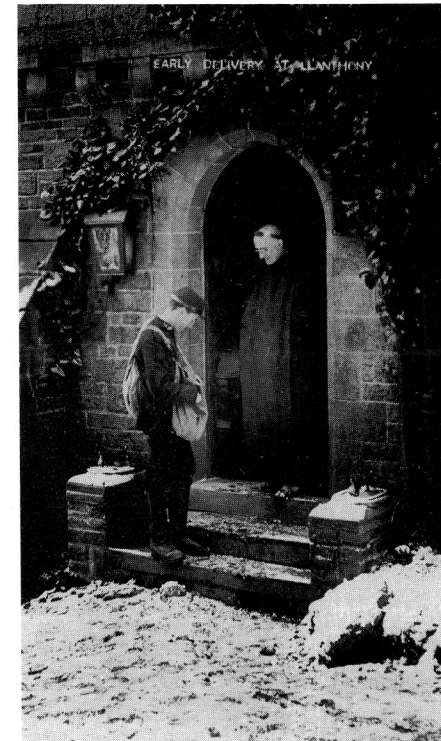
An early photograph of some of the New Llanthony Abbey community in the central garth at the monastery.
Fr Ignatius is seated second from left.

Among the archives of the Father Ignatius Memorial Trust is a typewritten narrative entitled: 'John Spence, alias Brother Cuthbert. Account of his stay with Father Ignatius, 1871.' This should read: '1871-1872'. There are 90 pages apparently numbered to correspond with the original manuscript, for three pages are indicated as missing. A few errors may be due to difficulty in reading the text.

Dom Basil Heath-Robinson, monk of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland, was formerly at Prinknash Abbey near Gloucester. In his young days - before the last World War - a friend of his, Guy Worsdell, brought a copy, or the original, of this narrative to Prinknash. It had come down to him from his maternal grandfather, John Spence.

Every page of this narrative is fascinating. It was not available to either of the biographers of Father Ignatius, Donald Attwater and Arthur Calder-Marshall, and I cannot imagine that the Baroness de Bertouch knew anything of it. This is probably the first time any of its material has been published, partly because its highly critical tone towards Father Ignatius could, in unkind hands, be used to disparage or ridicule him.

These pages will be given primarily to sketches of the community at Capel-y-ffin in the year that John Spence was a postulant and novice. There is plenty of material in the narrative for other articles.



A WINTRY SCENE

The front door of the West Wing. This was one of many postcards printed to illustrate life at The Monastery. The postman came on foot from Llanthony village four miles down the valley. Classic Victorian blizzards cut the community off from the world even more during harsh winters at 1200 feet above sea level here in the Black Mountains of Wales.

John Spence - age not stated but clearly a youth - tells us that he wanted not merely to 'retire from the world' but even to 'assist in the restoration of monastic life in England' - all that without even being a baptised Christian, which must have been unusual in the mid-nineteenth century. He corresponded with Ignatius who agreed to receive him with or without parental consent, though consent was in fact obtained - not for him to become a monk but to go to the monastery to be baptised. Father Ignatius gave him an appointment to join him at Brighton where he was 'lecturing' in December 1871. Spence arrived at the given address and two hours later Ignatius presented himself in full rig: 'a Benedictine cowl (this does not mean a

hood, but a full long-sleeved monastic habit, if Spence uses the word correctly), scapular, hood, cord, sandals and a fifteen-decade rosary.' He says Ignatius looks older than his years - he was 34 and looked 40, his 'open forehead much wrinkled'. Surprisingly he calls him 'dapper-looking'. They had a long chat which ended with a prayer and a blessing. The next day did not begin with Matins or Mass but with the brief appearance of Ignatius's younger brother, Clavering Lyne, a 'showily dressed young man' whose appearance was that of a draper's assistant! Spence saw 'small deceitful eyes, a large aquiline nose and a sallow complexion' - in spite of which Clavering was 'rather handsome altogether'.

There follows a strange anecdote. Strolling on the Parade, Ignatius and Spence met a 'disreputable-looking beggar'. The Father, 'genially patronising him,' said, 'Follow me, my good man. I always like to succour my deserving poorer brethren. Ah! Is that a baker's shop I see? Ah!' In the process of buying bread for the hungry, his monastic sleeve swept a glass of port wine off the counter (how did it get there?) whereupon Ignatius exclaimed: 'Allow me, my good friend, to pay for that glass,' to which the shopman, possibly thinking disparagingly of the revival of monastic life in the Church of England, said, 'Sir, you must pay for it.' This hardly sounds like Ignatius. Was he, outside the cloister and off the rostrum, far more class-conscious than one would have thought?

Father Ignatius went back to London with his postulant, himself staying with an 'associate brother' while Spence was sent on to the Priory at Feltham. The atmosphere, judged from the outside and from the parlour, was of 'poverty rather than severity'. He was joined by Charlie, destined to be an 'acolyte' at Llanthony; this description accounts for boys who would traditionally be called oblates. In the nuns' parlour Spence encountered the 'Infant Samuel', aged ten, who, when only four, had accompanied Father Ignatius, Father Philip and Sister Ambrosia to Rome and Malta and who, in Catholic circles, seems to have occasioned more amusement than scandal. He was wearing a white habit, had short hair rather than a shaven crown and had 'full red lips which promised to grow coarse.'

The young John Spence was, as a critic, not merely perceptive but sharp - too much so for happy relationships. He was told the child Samuel was destined to be the head (!) of a Carthusian monastery, which not only suggests what delusions Ignatius could entertain but also a sideline of his idealism never subsequently developed. The boy was not in fact to realise any monastic vocation - and no wonder! Spence says 'Samuel' was only a nickname; his official style was 'Brother Ignatius'. He was more or less correctly called an oblate - given to the church by his mother at Norwich after the father had abandoned her; the mother was now dead. Needless to say it had gone the rounds that Ignatius was the father. Spence adds, 'Father Philip knew all about the oblate, only you could never trust a word he said.'

Next morning Spence was measured for a habit and the party of four - Father Ignatius, John Spence, Charlie and 'Baby', travelled second class to Abergavenny, changing at Worcester.

Ignatius had to bear with some rather crude chaff from a French Protestant woman. She patted the Father on the back, doubtless felicitating his paternity, which - you will be surprised to hear - made him laugh a good deal. The journey was completed by carriage and four.

The foundation stone of Llanthony Tertia had been laid the previous year, 1870, on St Patrick's Day, March 17th. Only the west wing was up. Father Ignatius had doubtless been describing it as he saw it in his mind's eye, so that when he exclaimed, 'There it is; there is the Abbey!', John Spence could not conceal his disappointment at the 'small, mean-looking building'. They left the carriage at the little 'ravine', where there is still a steep footpath approach to the monastery and entered by what is now the 'front door', three monks kneeling to receive the Father's blessing. With Ignatius, Spence, the acolyte and 'Baby' the community now totalled seven. The three monks were Father Philip and Brothers Placidus and Ethelred. There was a troublesome acolyte waiting to be dismissed, who went off in the carriage.



The Refectory

At this point we may begin to assess John Spence's reliability as a fair judge in this chronicle of a year in his life which was also an important one in the development of Ignatius's community. I think he was an observer of no mean quality but, like some others with that skill, enthusiastic, easily disappointed, prejudiced and prone to spitefulness. It was not true, as some hint, that Ignatius was able to enlist only religiously romantic and feeble-minded young men - too many of the community later attained respected positions elsewhere in Church life or in other monasteries for that to be fair. I think Ignatius had a weakness in craving affection towards himself as well as respect for and loyalty to his ideals, and

he sincerely believed that seeking 'Jesus Only', plus some intangible gift called 'vocation', was what made a monk. Discussing this with Francis Kilvert (in 1870) Ignatius said a monk needed to be a philosopher or a 'holy fool'. John Spence was a young man of education and class; maybe Ignatius thought he was a bit too much like himself. There are clear signs that he thought Spence might develop into a first assistant. They became fond of one another and, at the same time, mistrusted one another, and Ignatius had enough defects for Spence to fill his critical quiver. At the end of the narrative they are to betray in one pathetic gesture the intimacy that had arisen between them - and that failed them.

We now have pen sketches of the brethren, beginning with Father Phillip, the faithful and humble follower of Father Ignatius, one of the few he admitted to life vows, who nevertheless in unexplained circumstances finally left him for the Catholic Church. He went to Belmont Priory near Hereford, but there is no evidence in the registers there that he was received into the Church, let alone into the community. His name was William Pointer, a 'short, sunburnt man of about thirty', brought up by grandparents at a Norwich public house, The Three Jolly Dyers. Later, in a more disparaging passage, he is described as having a 'most satanic face, deeply sunken eyes, oak-coloured skin drawn tightly over the bones' - later, on reflection - 'though so dark and evil-looking, he had a handsome face like Mephistopheles'. He entered the Elm Hill Priory at Norwich on his grandfather's death about 1862 and he soon exceeded the Rule of St Benedict by running away seven times (Holy Rule, Chapter XXIX: 'Let him be taken back until the third time.' The mediaeval practice at Cluny was to take delinquent brothers back even more often.) He told John Spence he had taken life vows not from conviction but because of the 'persuasion of the Reverend Father!' Spence writes of Philip: 'He was a hard-hearted, selfish, misanthropic man; he would rarely do a kindness for anybody.' Just reading the narrative you can dismiss that as pure vinegar. Spence remarks on Philip's work and exhaustion in several places and admits that 'when we had worked hard and suffered together, we became friends.' Father Philip had perhaps an ambivalent relationship with Father Ignatius - he could be reduced to a state of 'maudlin' distress if Ignatius ignored him, but, says Spence, 'I believe he had a sort of attachment to him, though he used to revile him behind his back.' In 1872 Philip became effectively the Cellarer or manager of the farming side of the property, previously rented out, in collaboration with a local farmer, James Jenkins, who was soon to take over seven acres as lessee.

Interlarded in the narrative is a long letter from Father Philip to Spence, by then Brother Cuthbert (no address given but I surmise he was at Feltham Priory, trying to recover from some upset). He writes with sentiments hardly Mephistophelean: 'If the real spirit of Christ was on us all, we should be much different and (show) more love to one another and (be) more like Jesus.' At one time Spence wrote a letter of complaint about Philip (Ignatius at Feltham must have dreaded every morning's post) and, in words that let us glimpse the genuine spirituality at Llanthony, after we have laughed over their funny ways, he received in reply this counsel: 'Our

blessed Lord Jesus does not will that Father Philip should be as he is, but He permits it for our good. I can truly say this, for I am sure that Father Philip has been a means of grace to me and has, by trying me so much, helped me to conquer self, self-love and self-will to a considerable extent' - the rest of the letter is a model of spiritual advice and mutual tolerance. One thing clear about Father Philip is that he was a confirmed misogynist - he 'never could abide women and didn't understand them when they had got their complaints on.'

Next we have a sketch of Brother Placidus (sic) - surely Placidus after the young disciple of St Benedict - Kilvert seems to have got it right in his Diary. His secular name was William Henry Wicking and his father was organist at the Dutch Calvinist Church in London, (presumably Austin Friars, since bombed and rebuilt) and he lived at Woodbine Cottage, 98 Holly Street, Dalston. He was 16 and had first heard the Father preach when he was 11. Spence says he joined the community at Feltham, meaning no doubt the short-lived Priory at Laleham, nearby. He was 'easy, sleepy, good-tempered, fond of outdoor work and almost always employed in cooking' - 'He had nothing of what we called a vocation, but a blind enthusiasm for the Reverend Father.' Reading an observation like that it pays to recall the advice of St Teresa of Avila to a nun who confessed she had joined the convent for the wrong motives: 'Sister, it matters not so much why you came, as why you stay.'

Placidus was 'a big boy, very pretty, with white even teeth and a ring of crisp, curly, golden hair', Kilvert writes of him as he waited upon a Lyne family party lunching in the dingle: 'he had a peculiarly sweet and beautiful face.' In spite of his name this novice was to fall foul of Father Ignatius. Letters he sent to Father at Feltham seem to have brought matters to a head, for Ignatius wrote to Cuthbert (Spence) - obviously at this time much in his confidence, 'I am sorely grieved with poor Brother Placidus's letters....I can see the world will be his destiny in August next.' So Placidus received the fatal summons to Feltham and 'left one morning in monk's clothes, in pouring rain'. Philip drove him down, missing the train as usual. He wrote to Cuthbert to say he planned to take up engineering.

Next comes Brother Ethelred, in the world John Jones, an orphan of twenty who had run away from a chemist in Abergavenny, waiting to inherit £9,000 within a year. He was dark, small, physically weak and employed in the sacristy. He was the only brother Spence esteemed his intellectual peer. In fact, with wasted foresight, they 'helped each other on with visions of a future structure much purer and higher than this, that we hoped to raise on Ignatius's ruins.' Later in the year, after an unpleasant tiff with Ignatius and during one of his absences, Ethelred was alarmed by a swelling on his breast. He disappeared overnight, leaving a dummy in his bed. Later he wrote to Farmer Jenkins from Church House, Ewyas Harold, asserting that he was 'going to live as an anachoretic friar of the Church of England under the Rule of St Augustine,' and Farmer Jenkins was to tell Brother Cuthbert that he was having 'a nice little cell built in a quiet spot here, and a private chapel.' In time, he returned penitent but there was an

unfortunate scene with an intransigent Ignatius who refused to allow him time to settle some affairs. He was solemnly cursed and driven away. Ignatius still tried to get him back but failed.

On Christmas Eve after his December arrival John Spence had been baptised by Father Ignatius who also stood as godparent; a week later he was given a habit and on 25th January took vows for one year as novice. This of course was contrary to all monastic precedent. I suggest Father Ignatius instituted it as a way of bringing pressure to bear on his candidates to stay out the year - except when he wanted to be rid of them. We continue from now to call him Brother Cuthbert.

In February Thomas Bray arrived, to become Brother Dunstan. He had been a 'page' to Major and Mrs Fowler of Plymouth, and formerly a choirboy at St Peter's where Ignatius had been curate. He had a good voice and could cook, but Cuthbert calls him 'a mean and treacherous fellow'. It is difficult to write about this young man because the narrative tells us one moment of Brother Dunstan formerly Thomas and next of Brother Thomas formerly Dunstan; the same person seems to be intended. Dunstan or Thomas was at Feltham later in 1872, not in particularly bad odour, and wrote humbly to Cuthbert, 'I am only fit to be laughed at, that is all I am fit for....I have three blackbirds, quite tame' - he shared with Cuthbert an interest in birds. Father Ignatius wrote that the fleas in his bed were to await the attention of Brother Thomas, who was clearly good with the humbler creation.

When Father Ignatius returned it was not with Thomas (Dunstan) but with a new postulant, Sidney Crews; he became Brother Pancras, 'a great pleasant fellow generally laughing, but kept the Rule well. We thought he was some relation of Gilby (Gilbey) the wine merchant. He was a gentleman, spoke correctly and read beautifully' - but by October he was summoned to Feltham and does not appear again.

I was puzzled why Brother Serene was missing from the community listed in December 1871, because he had been a pioneer founder with Philip in 1870, seen on the spot by Francis Kilvert. Later in 1872 he returned in a penitent frame of mind (according to Ignatius's sister Harriet Lyne, in conversation with Kilvert, he had been a drunkard). He was 'a man of about 29 with a handsome face, good teeth and sunken blue eyes', a hard worker at all sorts of tasks but with a temper. Somehow Cuthbert fell foul of Serene and he attributed the final collapse of his relations with Ignatius to a letter from Serene. Serene admitted as much and tried to retract it. Those relationships had been crumbling anyway.

By Ascension Day a Brother Charles appears in the text, creating a diversion at the pilgrimage celebration of the Eucharist down at the little church at Capel-y-ffin by falling on his back in the mud. This seems to have provoked laughter as if they were at a circus instead of at worship. Writing from Feltham in May, Father Ignatius seemed willing to let Charles go (he calls him by his name, Redhalls, as if he had already left) to make room for other postulants. It appears he

had been in the community before as Brother John. He ran away on account of 'divers misdeeds'. A passage in a letter from Ignatius seems to imply that Charles had put an expectant cat in the Superior's bed. Cuthbert dismisses him as 'this eccentric individual'.

One Powell arrived, 'plain looking and poor', to become Brother Oswald. He fell ill and raved at night, thinking he saw the devil. His brother, a strong, handsome young carpenter, came down to take him away. This he resisted but he ran away soon after.

It remains to consider briefly how John Spence's own vocation came to a close. Soon after his clothing as Brother Cuthbert, he was chosen to accompany the Father on a preaching tour to Clifton, Bath and Torquay. I think this experience undermined their relationship. Spence certainly had a gift for blunt speaking and I think Ignatius put up with more than most religious superiors would tolerate from a raw recruit. As he observed, 'Brother Cuthbert, there is no need to help you with words; you can always express yourself, though it may be in a disagreeable manner.' On one occasion when Philip could not suppress a smile at the Superior's wrath, Ignatius turned on Cuthbert, 'And you,' he said, 'the only reason you did not smile is that you are a gentleman and have worldly notions of propriety, that is all.' Still, the letters from which I have quoted show us Ignatius confiding in Cuthbert with regard to the community. Probably tittle-tattle brought so many indiscreet criticisms to the Father's ears that their relationship was at last strained beyond healing. When the awful summons to Feltham arrived, Brother Cuthbert was prepared and perhaps even resolved to break with Llanthony. His last hours at the monastery stamped themselves on his memory: 'At thirteen and a quarter minutes past eight o'clock on Tuesday morning, Jane Pryce starched me a collar and pocket handkerchief and mourned over my departure, for she loved me much.' At Feltham a rather silly but significant conversation ensued: 'I said, 'Dear Father, you appeared to have an objection to me and used to gather up your garments in passing me as though I were a leper.' 'Dear Child,' he said, 'I always thought you passed me as though I were one.' It was midnight when they left the convent for the station. They encountered a group of night-watchmen. Ignatius blessed them all and turned away. Spence called out 'Goodbye' and Ignatius 'ran back, blessed me vigorously and all but wept.'

John Spence wrote this account four months after leaving Llanthony, that would be late April 1873. He seems to have kept in touch with Dr and Mrs Pryce who sent him news. If you read this narrative several times, you receive a variety of impressions. They are not mutually exclusive, even if they look like it. They need to be related. It is a counterpoint of recrimination and affection. I feel hardly anyone who left Father Ignatius and Llanthony could ever forget their experience or cease to love and reverence the place - and the man.

A FATHER IGNATIUS SOCIETY ?

Our readers will recall that in last year's Newsletter (No. 18) we said that we were considering extending the activities of the Trust to form a society. We invited your comments. A pro-forma type questionnaire was also distributed at last year's pilgrimage on 25th August. A very small but keen number of our friends responded encouraging us to explore the matter further. We did so, to discover that due to the terms of reference of our Deed of Trust, the formation of a society would mean not only our setting up a self-supporting organisation quite separate from the Trust as we know it, together with the usual Society-type structure, recruiting new members, a management team plus the usual committees, but also devising a separate constitution, instituting membership fees and opening a separate bank account. There was the feeling that many old friends and supporters of the Trust would have found this division both administratively and financially confusing.

However, we very much want to respond to those who are keen on the Trust developing more society-like activities. Therefore, in addition to our annual pilgrimage to St. David's, Llanthony and to Capel-y-ffin, we will hope to arrange other events from time to time, together with friends who have a kindred interest in Llanthony - for example, please see details below of the forthcoming function at Belmont Abbey.

SYMPOSIUM AT BELMONT ABBEY

A two-day event has been arranged at Belmont Abbey, Hereford in July this year for all friends interested in the life and times of Fr Ignatius. The Abbot has kindly agreed to provide fourteen residential places and a further fourteen non-residential daily attendance places - a maximum number of twenty-eight in all. The programme will be as follows :-

TUESDAY 16th July

Residential guests to arrive not later than 6pm if possible, please.

Vespers can be attended at 6.25 pm if desired.

Evening meal at 7 pm.

WEDNESDAY 17th July

Monastic Sung Mass at 8 am.

Breakfast at 8.40.

Talk by Dom Simon McGurk on the history of the Abbey at 1000 am.

WEDNESDAY 17TH July (Contd)

Coffee at 11 am.

Tour of the Abbey followed by lunch.

Afternoon visit to Kilpeck Church. Tea at 4 pm.

Talk on 'The Spirituality of Father Ignatius' by Canon Stanley Luff at 4.30 pm.

Assistance at Vespers at 6.25 pm will be welcomed.

Evening meal at 7 pm.

THURSDAY 18th July

Anglican Eucharist at Clehonger.

Return to Belmont for coffee at 11 am.

To Capel-y-ffin for Vespers as from the Fr Ignatius Service Book.

Talk on 'The Apparitions at Capel-y-ffin' by Canon Ivor Davies followed by picnic lunch and drive via the Gospel Pass and Hay-on-Wye to visit Kilvert's grave at Bredwardine. Return to Belmont for winding-up round table discussion. Evening meal - 7 pm.

FRIDAY 19th July

Residential guests depart after breakfast.

CHARGES

Residential:	£40	(including evening meal on Tue and breakfast on Fri)
Non-residential	£7.50	Coffee, lunch and tea
(per day)	£3.50	Evening meal

Friends of the Trust wishing to attend should make their reservations direct with The Guestmaster, Belmont Abbey, Hereford HR2 9RX by completing the enclosed booking form and a deposit as follows :- Residential - £20: Non-residential - £5. Cheques should be made payable to 'Belmont Abbey'.

There are Ignatius associations both with Kilpeck and Clehonger. Guests are asked to make all arrangements for local travel by private car, please.