

endeavours for the glory of God seem to have led only to this deserted monument which cannot be said to possess even the dignity of an ancient ruin. The trees will have to grow to a great height before they can actually hide the church, but the birds have sown seeds of rowan and silver birch in the buttresses, and the very coping of the roof is gay with a young sapling covered with scarlet berries. We peeped in on the night of our arrival to take rough stock of the work ahead of us, and we were greeted with the awe-inspiring whoop of a great white-breasted barn owl which flew lazily down from above the vaulting and out at the south window, ghostly in the silver moonlight'.

In that passage the anonymous brother has captured the mood of the ruined church as you might find it today, should you return on a moonlit night. By day, with the passage of fifty years, it has acquired a touch even of that dignity of ancient ruins.

According to that account it was impossible to save the great organ, and there is a mere allusion to the departure of the high altar which readers of last year's Newsletter will know is now at St. Julian's, Newport.

If any reader is able to fill in or correct this account, which is almost limited to information from the pages of 'Pax', the compiler will be grateful to hear from them.

A number of new trustees have been appointed since last year - a very welcome strengthening of our small team:-

Mr. Stanley Knill, who bought the Monastery and lands in 1984. Mr. & Mrs. Knill live there with their family. There are also three spacious self-catering apartments available for family holidays or short breaks throughout the year.

The Procession at Capel-y-Ffin, 1986. The choristers were from St. Teilo's Church, Llanillo Pertholey.



The Revd. Stanley G. Luff of Our Lady's Church, Llandoverly. Fr. Luff has supported our annual pilgrimages for many years and is the author of this year's Newsletter feature. He also celebrates a Roman Catholic Mass in the private chapel at the Monastery at mid-day on Pilgrimage Day and would welcome more support from visitors and pilgrims on that occasion.

Mrs. Joan Wheeler and Mr. W.H. Jackson, both of whom have helped with the practical tasks of managing the annual pilgrimage event for many years.

It is interesting to recall that on 29th August 1889, Fr. Ignatius was made a member of the Druidic Circle of Wales at the National Eisteddfod in Brecon where he preached to a gathering of some 12,000 visitors. He was given the Druidic title of 'Dewi Honddu' on that occasion. 29th August also happens to be the date of this year's pilgrimage to Capel-y-Ffin, exactly ninety-eight years since that event.

1987 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the founding of The Father Ignatius Memorial Trust. Pilgrimages to Capel-y-Ffin have gone on annually ever since the death of Fr. Ignatius in 1908, with breaks during the war years. However, it was not until 1967 that this Trust was formally founded, recognised by the Charity Commissioners, and charged with the duties of looking after the Abbey Church and tomb and making it available as a place of public worship for Christians of all denominations.

And so to the details of this year's pilgrimage which will be held on:-

SATURDAY, 29th AUGUST, 1987

- 11.30am The Holy Eucharist at St. David's Church, Llanthony.
- 12.00 Roman Catholic Mass in the private midday chapel at the Monastery, Capel-y-Ffin.
- 2.30pm Procession leaves Capel-y-Ffin Church for the Abbey Church where the address at Solemn Evensong will be given by the Revd. Hugh Allen, Vicar of St. Matthew's, Newport.

Please note that this is the week-end of the Late Summer Bank Holiday. Car parking arrangements will be as usual in the field at Chapel Farm, with our thanks once again for the regular use of this facility to Mr. Ivor Lloyd.

Please join us for the pilgrimage if you possibly can

WILFRED DAVIES
for the Trustees

THE FATHER IGNATIUS MEMORIAL TRUST

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NEWSLETTER NO. 15 - MARCH 1987

CAPEL-Y-FFIN AND CALDEY by Fr. Stanley Luff

STAYING with the Cistercian monks on Caldey Island, I thought a few hours might be usefully employed in reading through back numbers of 'Pax', from September 1904, when the Anglican Benedictine community under Abbot Aelred Carlyle first published what was for many years a most informative and entertaining monastic review (it was later published from Prinknash Abbey, Gloucester, and has now ceased). I hoped to find information regarding the Abbey of Llanthony Tertia at Capel-y-Ffin, from the death of Father Ignatius in 1908 to the arrival of Eric Gill and his family in 1924.

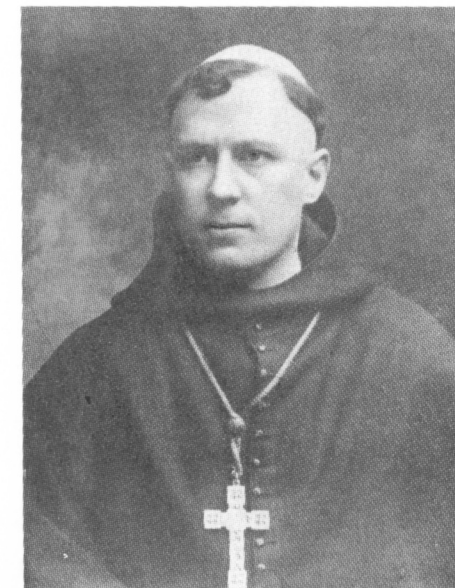
The reason why this review of the Caldey Benedictines should be interested in Llanthony is that the Abbey at Capel-y-Ffin came into their

hands - as it proved, much to their embarrassment. It happened in this way. Father Ignatius's deepest concern was that his New Llanthony should remain a monastery. To this end, when Aelred Carlyle's community was seeking a home, before they acquired Caldey Island, he invited them to Llanthony. From what Abbot Aelred wrote, he and Ignatius met, then or later, but it was found difficult to agree upon conditions satisfactory to both parties. One cannot imagine either Father Founder ceding his authority. So, according to Aelred, Ignatius left the property to 'certain members' of his community. The Superior of the group was Brother Asaph Harris (who after sixty years of monastic life died a monk of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland). Aelred raised the whole issue in the 'Pax' of December 1908 to refute 'widely circulated reports' that Ignatius had left Llanthony to Caldey'.

Aelred wrote guardedly but graciously of Father Ignatius: 'It is difficult for me to write about one whom I loved and revered very much as a personal friend, but with whose point of view I could not always agree . . . The power of the Father's personal love for our Lord always greatly attracted me, but his strong convictions about Religious Life were very different to mine. I never had to fight the same battles he encountered at the beginning of the revival of the religious life in England, and I confess the pronounced opinions he had formed during fifty years of struggle did not appeal to me as a man so much younger than himself who, not possessing his wonderful gift of oratory and missionary power, desired only to lead the contemplative life in a community established under proper authority'.

That was quite a neat assessment. Aelred Carlyle was later to experience 'battles' and 'struggles' to compare with those of Father Ignatius, but up to that point in his career he had learned how to pronounce any opinions in ways that favourably impressed the Archbishop of

Dom Aelred Carlyle, O.S.B., Abbot of Caldey



Canterbury and others, so that the **Church Times** had been able to write in 1905 praising his community for its 'stability, loyalty and vitality' in contrast to earlier attempts, which undoubtedly included that of Father Ignatius.

In December 1909 Aelred Carlyle explained that the 'certain members' who inherited Llanthony were Father Asaph and 'a Sister in the Convent'. It seems there were four other brothers, and they all felt unable to carry on. From my own memory of Father Asaph I would not have thought the gifts of leadership were his. Anyway, Aelred went to Llanthony, preached a retreat and presided at a Chapter, at which he read a letter from the Sister stating that, in the interests of continuing monasticism at Llanthony, she would herself leave and make over her share to Asaph. Three brothers, and Father Asaph, went to Caldey to 'test their vocations', and Llanthony was made over to Caldey.

In the years that followed, the Caldey monks, both up to and after their conversion to Roman Catholicism, seemed never to seriously consider colonising Llanthony. They tried only to keep it going in the hope that some future, consonant with its monastic character, would emerge.

The first plan was for the Anglican Benedictine Nuns of Malling in Kent (where Aelred himself had been professed monk) to take over, but they found the place 'too strait', and their architect pronounced adversely on the state of the buildings. 'Pax' thought this was just the moment to ask Father Ignatius's admirers to pay up £10,000! However much they received, they felt able to place over the Father's grave a tiled memorial, renewed later by our own Trust.

In June 1910 the Abbot of Caldey reports: 'I must say that Llanthony is a place about which there have been many illusions'. Of the four brothers who had gone to Caldey only Asaph persevered. The others were allowed to return to Llanthony awaiting 'something definite'. Many years later one of these returned to Caldey and died a monk.

In September 1911 there are more disparaging remarks: 'It can honestly be said that Llanthony has a much greater reputation than it deserves'. A novice staying at Llanthony wrote back to Caldey: 'We have a constant feeling we should like to blow out windows and let in some light and break down doors to let ourselves through'.

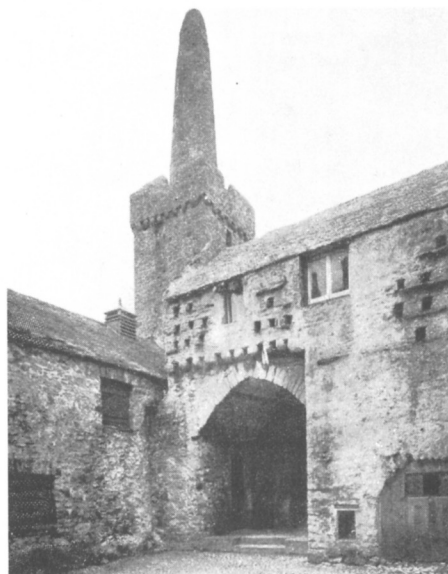
The same number says an oblate housekeeper is to be installed pending the inauguration of a plan to run Llanthony as a retreat centre and house of studies for clergy - one of many Caldey projects never realised, but it proved an occasion to appeal humbly for £300.

Whoever the caretaking brother was, over the next few years he showed scant literary skill, beyond advertising the sale of Ignatius's Mission Hymns at threepence, no reprint guaranteed, and all the old stock of picture post cards and publications.

Caldey too had reason to be taciturn in these years before the outbreak of the First World War, for at long last some of Aelred's observations were being judged by Bishop Gore of Oxford as incompatible with a future in the Church of England. The conversion to Roman Catholicism of Caldey and its sister Abbey of nuns at Milford Haven led to a wonderful welcome from certain quarters - Dom Columba Marmion, the Irish Abbot of the Belgian Abbey of Maredsous, and Dom Bede Camm, one of its English monks, but from other quarters letters breathing 'hatred and contempt'. The only reported consequence at Llanthony was that someone sent the caretaking brother copies of the Catholic 'Universe' newspaper. In August 1913 Dom Bede Camm spent a week at Llanthony. The brother advertised for men guests at 30 shillings a week with the special bait of fishing tickets available. Llanthony now had the disadvantage of being fifteen miles from the nearest Catholic Church at Abergavenny.

Other visitors that year were Dom Paul Saillour of the exiled French Benedictines at 'Caermaria' near Cardigan and the spiritual writer Dom John Chapman (later Abbot) of Downside.

The Priory Gate House of the Mediaeval Priory on Caldey.



That last Christmas before the War, Brother Cadoc, the caretaker, and a companion went fifteen miles by horse-drawn vehicle to Midnight Mass at Abergavenny, slippery roads compelling them to walk part of the way back.

The conversion of the Caldey community enlarged the possibility of disposing of Llanthony to a Catholic community. Exiled French Carthusians who had already built a 'quadruple' Charterhouse at Cowfold in Sussex optimistically considered further development and sent monks to inspect Llanthony. They apparently recommended it to a group of Carthusian nuns in the south of France, and Aelred, thinking the War would be a flash in the pan, counted on their arriving in the Spring. Now they seemed only too glad to see the back of Llanthony which 'has been such a responsibility and expense'. Caldey was ready to let it go for 'a small sum'. According to a later article by Sir David Oswald Hunter-Blair, Abbot of Fort Augustus in Scotland and popular author of several volumes of 'Memories and Musings', the English Benedictines also showed interest in Llanthony at this time, which may account for that visit by Dom John Chapman.

After so many aborted projects there is small wonder that in Autumn 1927 'Island Notes' had to contradict 'rumours circulating during the past three years about the once-Anglican monastery of Joseph Leycester Lyne' - an unkind description and the lowest ebb in Caldey's feelings about Llanthony. The rebuttal does not even say what the rumours were, but it admits, after such a long silence, that the caretaking brother had been withdrawn, much of the land sold, and that house and church, especially the latter, were dilapidated. The disclosure goes on to admit that the monastery was now rented out as a private house, that the Church has been abandoned, but that a Caldey priest was now resident there to say Mass for the new occupants and neighbouring Catholics in a 'semi-private chapel' in the house. The following year impoverished Caldey monks, no longer led by Aelred Carlyle, who had removed himself to Canada, sold Caldey to Belgian Cistercians and themselves transferred to an old monastic grange near Gloucester called Prinknash - where they still are, but in a new Abbey.

What had happened at Llanthony - years before these explanations of 1927 - was not told in 'Pax' till September 1941, when the sculptor Eric Gill had died and Peter Anson, himself a former Caldey monk, contributed his 'Memories of Eric Gill'.

He tells how he was at Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight in the autumn on 1923 when he first met the famous sculptor and 'master of letters':

'He was seriously considering the question of settling on Caldey Island or perhaps an island off the west coast of Ireland . . . I had a brain wave: 'I wonder if Llanthony would do for you'. 'What's Llanthony?' he enquired. So I went on to give him my impression of Father Ignatius's monastery in the heart of the Black Mountains and so attracted was he with the word picture I painted of this solitary retreat that he went on to Caldey to discuss ways and means of renting or buying the property at Capel-y-Ffin'.

Next year Peter Anson visited the Gills at Llanthony. He wrote, 'When I watched him chipping away at one of his characteristic Madonnas I could not help wondering what Father Ignatius would have thought of this type of art . . . A chapel had been fitted up in the north cloister, the stone altar slab resting on a monolith with a completely veiled tabernacle, being the prototype of the altar in the chapel at Piggots (Gill's later home near High Wycombe) and in the church at Gorleston on Sea'.

The nearest Pax gets to reporting the presence of Gill at Llanthony appears many years later - 1934 - in this vague assurance: 'The monastic buildings may well have suffered a worse fate than to fall into the hands of a fervent Catholic family, who will not only respect the memory of Father Ignatius and tend his grave, but who in their private chapel will often have Mass said and will pray for the soul of one without whose generous efforts such a shower of graces would never have watered the valley he loved so well'. I wonder whether the Caldey - Prinknash silence was at the request of Gill himself, to help preserve Llanthony's solitude?

In March 1934 'Pax' reported that on the previous Christmas Day the community had used for the first time the Llanthony choir stalls, removed from the now crumbling church to an extended choir at Prinknash Abbey. This item of news aroused interest and one of the two brothers who had been sent to dismantle the Llanthony choir wrote an attractive account.

'The walls, which had never been pointed with any better mortar than the shallow soil of the mountain, are slowly and relentlessly crumbling away; the slender columns with their daintily carved capitals carry the eye irresistibly up to the lofty groined roof, only to find it has fallen in here and there to let in the August sunbeams, but to give no less easy access to the rains of winter and the sweeping drifts of snow. A solitary panel of stained glass still survives at the top of one of the north lights and, saddest of all, at the sanctuary steps is the grave of him whose generous