

HARTLAND ABBEY - MARCH 2005

Newsletter no 2

Dear Visitors,

Last year we wrote our first newsletter which was very popular with visitors and was, I think, of interest to people who wanted to know a bit more about what goes on behind the scenes. Also we think it is fun for people to know what is going on in our rapidly increasing family!

Thanks to so many people coming to the Abbey, 2004 was our record year with over 10,000 visitors. We are not quite in the league of Windsor Castle with hundreds of thousands of visitors, but we are so grateful to everyone who makes the effort to travel this far to come here, to this remote corner of the British Isles!

As usual the winter has been very busy. Immediately we close in October all the benches, notices and anything that could blow away have to be stored safely out of the gales. We now leave the kiosk roped down all year as replacing it has been very expensive and an unnecessary burden on finances. It had a terrible habit of taking off and landing in smithereens in the drive. The gales here can be horrendous, frequently force 10 or 11 and force 12 on occasions! All our wonderful staff take their well-deserved holidays in the winter.

Our main achievement this winter has been installing smoke alarms throughout the house. It was not something that we were longing to do as it was very expensive and does not exactly enhance the house, but it was something that had to be done. Luckily it didn't create too many problems. Two portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Perkins in the Library have been away to be cleaned in Bristol; we have missed them and at this time of writing we are eagerly awaiting their return! The two Miss Luttrells in the Little Dining Room have also been away but are proving more difficult and so may not be back in time for opening at Easter. Apologies if there are two large spaces on the wall but I am sure they will be back soon!

We have also had enormous fun restoring the Gazebo. This small summerhouse was built at the end of the 19thC in a wonderful elevated spot overlooking the sea. In the 1950s it was caught up in a gorse fire and the roof was destroyed. Since when it had become lost and had partially fallen down under whitethorn, gorse and bracken. With help from a Countryside Stewardship grant, we have been able to rebuild it with traditional materials; we were lucky to have a photograph from the turn of the last century which you can see in the photograph exhibition, and this has made the task easier. Chris Heard and Keith Meaker from Hartland have done a wonderful job and if you are walking to the beach, do visit it as it really looks so wonderful again and there is a bench to sit on and admire the view. The new path, following the old line is rather stony and uneven but will soon grass over. The violets are quite beautiful beside the path.

We have been doing all we can to help disabled visitors have better access and facilities here. It is not a very easy house to adapt, nor are the gardens but hopefully we have made visiting a little easier and more enjoyable. Please do ask any stewards or at the kiosk for help.

Since our last newsletter in spring 2004 we have become Granny and Pop-Pop again! We now have three wonderful grandsons; Thomas and Eddie are now 5 and 3 and are the sons of George and Amber, our eldest son and daughter in law; Ben is the latest addition and is the first son of Peter and Susie, our second son and daughter in law. He was born last July and is now a really fine chap on the verge of crawling! If you don't see any of them I am sure you will hear them as they are all regular visitors!

On top of all this we have a very happy event to look forward to. Charlotte, our eldest daughter, is marrying Tom Scudamore here in the summer. Both are involved in racing, Tom being a professional jockey and Charlotte rides in point-to-points. Horses have been their lives from even before they could walk! So this summer will be a busy one.

Lucinda returned from Australia last summer with a lot of pictures, nearly all of which she has sold; her Brahmin bulls were particularly popular! She is now working very hard for some thoroughbred horse vets in Gloucestershire, which takes her all over the country as well as painting commissions of horses and dogs.

The three guinea fowl were reduced to one thanks to the ever increasing fox population. He was so miserable on his own but we brought over eight more from the farm and as soon as he heard them arrive he dashed down from the Bog Garden where he was at the time, and they have been inseparable ever since! All the bantams have been eaten in the winter but hopefully we shall have some chicks at the farm soon which we will bring over. It is very sad when one's friends are eaten.

The black sheep are lambing at the moment at Affeton but will be back here just as soon as it is safe to bring them; we don't want them to go the same way. The donkeys have had a good winter and have hardly needed any extra food as the grass kept growing all winter up to the cold spell in February. We had 11 peacocks and peahens here last summer; nine seem to be still around but we are hoping they are all alright. They are very difficult to count as not all appear at the same time. They are favourite food for foxes too, unfortunately.

Joanna and Nigel have been very busy in the gardens clearing the Italian Terraces and laying some good paving to walk on which they dug up under the tomato bed in the greenhouse! There is so much work for them in the winter and not nearly enough time to do it all! Joanna is amazing, seemingly loving the ghastly winter weather here; in fact the worse it is the happier she seems to be. The same could not be said of many 26 year olds! Dave has spent a long time pulling up mountains of bramble and Leighton has spent an age repairing and painting the loos and making them more disabled friendly, while also repairing the Blackpool Mill Cottage roof which had become like a sieve!

Mary Heard, our part time administrator, was very unwell in the winter but

thankfully is really on the mend now. We all feared the worst but she had picked up the dreaded MRS A bug while visiting hospital; it was awful for her over Christmas being unable to eat anything at all.

Last but certainly not least, Carol our wonderful housekeeper, has painted the dairy, the tearooms, the downstairs loo and lots more as well as spring cleaning the house from top to toe. Carol is normally to be found in the shop so if you feel the house is looking good, do please tell her as it really is a labour of love! The house is freezing in winter, normally much colder than outside, and Carol always keeps cheerful and is so hardworking. Our thanks to all our wonderful staff who do so much as a team to keep the Abbey going. Hugh and Angela Stucley 2005