

fursey pilgrims

Vespers for the Feast of Fursey

At our Annual Fursey Lecture in January 2011 Dr Ann Buckley of Trinity College, Dublin gave a very well received lecture on a medieval Office for St Fursey with musical notation that she had recently discovered in a manuscript MS 944 in the Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal in Paris. Dr Buckley is a musicologist researching liturgical chant in honour of Irish saints throughout medieval Europe, including St. Fursey. This discovery is an exciting development for the Fursey Pilgrims as we had hints of an Office, but nothing substantial. Dr Buckley has transcribed the music and the text has been translated. The lecture was titled '**O Fursee pastor aime, o lucerna renitens**': the **Medieval Office of St Fursey**. The Office is based on the Vita Secunda, an 11th/12th century Life of Fursey. This Life is attributed to Serlo and Robert, two monks of Argenteuil, who wrote it at the request of Arnoul, Abbot of Lagny (d.1106). Dr Buckley's lecture was illustrated with several extracts sung by members of the Norwich Cathedral Choir.

The only complete version of the medieval Office for St Fursey is in a 13th-century manuscript, together with two accounts of his Life (Vita 1 and Vita 2) and a copy of Bede's chapter on Fursey's life and visions from the Ecclesiastical History of the English People c.731. The survival of the MS 944 manuscript is itself somewhat miraculous. It was preserved in Paris in the library of the Sainte-Chappelle, a royal library, before being deposited in the Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal in 1798 at the time of the French Revolution. The manuscript containing the Office has a particular reference to the 17th September 1256 when the Office was sung at the translation of the relics of St Fursey at Peronne in the presence of King Louis IX of France (St Louis, 1214-1270). It is thought likely to be the actual copy presented to King Louis IX on the occasion of the translation of Fursey's body in Peronne and the dedication of the church there built in his honour. It is known that Louis attended these ceremonies. A contemporary account mentions that the king placed his royal seal on the shrine along with those of the Bishops in attendance.

To honour this historic connection, the 755th Anniversary of the occasion was celebrated in Norwich Cathedral by sung Vespers from this Fursey Office on Friday the 16th September 2011, the eve or Vigil of the Feast of the Translation. It was sung in the Latin by the Lay Clerks and Choral Scholars of the Choir of Norwich Cathedral (directed by Tom Primrose, Assistant Organist) from a new edition of the original manuscript by Dr Ann Buckley. This was its first use in modern times as an act of worship. Dr Ann Buckley and the Bishop of Norwich, The Rt Revd Graham James, were present for the occasion.

The Fursey Pilgrims are very grateful to the Dean and the Precentor of Norwich Cathedral who had arranged to have this Vespers for the Feast of Fursey sung in place of the Cathedral's usual Sung Evensong. The occasion together with our Fursey Pilgrimage to Burgh Castle, usually in October but brought forward to the following day for this year only, made the weekend very special for us.

We are hoping to eventually publish the music from the Office, along with Dr Buckley's lecture, so that choirs and musicians can use extracts in their own celebrations of St. Fursey and the beginnings of Christianity in East Anglia.

An outline of the text of 1st Vespers by Dr Ann Buckley is given on page 2 of this document.

The Text of 1st Vespers

The text of 1st Vespers gives a brief outline of Fursey's life in the kingdom of the Franks introduced and concluding with prayers of praise and supplication. The proper items (i.e., texts particular to the feast) consist of five antiphons, a reading, a responsory, a hymn, a *Magnificat* antiphon and a collect.

Antiphon 1: *Nobilitate vigens Furseus* ('Shining out with excellence among the stars') praises Fursey as an outstanding priest and bishop.

Antiphon 2: *Temporibus regis Clodovei* ('In the times of King Clovis') describes how Fursey left all worldly affairs behind and arrived in the Kingdom of the Franks.

Antiphon 3: *Vir Domini post hec* ('After this the man of the Lord'), where Fursey raised Haimo's son from the dead and embraced the town of Maioc.

Antiphon 4: *Post multas igitur virtutes* ('Having performed many miracles'), rejoicing, he sought out the kingdom of heaven.

Antiphon 5: *Sancte presul venerandis* ('Holy bishop who shines out to be venerated'), a prayer of supplication to Fursey on behalf of his devoted followers to ask Christ that they too may enter the kingdom of heaven.

Reading: *Magnificavit Dominus beatum Furseum* ('The Lord has magnified blessed Fursey in the sight of kings and has given him a crown of glory').

Responsory: *Ecce fulget gloriosa* ('Behold the most glorious solemnity shines out') echoes the opening antiphon and concludes with another prayer for salvation.

Hymn: *Laudes almi confessoris* ('O voice, open up in praise of the kind confessor, Fursey') combines biographical details with a description of Fursey's miracles.

Magnificat Antiphon: *O Fursee pastor alme* ('O Fursey, gentle shepherd'), another song of praise concluding with a supplication. It is one of the few rhymed accented texts in the office which, apart from the hymns, is mostly in prose.

Ann Buckley