

St Hugh's Charterhouse, Parkminster

St Hugh's belongs to what has always been a small order of monks. St Bruno in southeastern France founded the Carthusian Order in 1084. At the time of the reformation in England, there were 8 English Charterhouses with an average of about 20 monks in each.

Foreseeing the closure of their houses because of anticlerical laws, the French monks built St Hugh's in the 1870s. It was to be and did become a refuge for three of the French houses. The property was bought from Mr Boxall, Recorder of Brighton. Picknole, as it was then called, was built in 1866. It was flint built and housed the first monks while the monastery was being built. The architect was Clovis and Norman of Calais. The first turf was cut on 9th September 1876 and the foundation stone laid on 17th October 1877.

The excavations amounted to 31,240 cubic yards. The bricks were made from local weald clay in four kilns on the site. These kilns produced 60,000 bricks a fortnight. The stone was from local quarries, but the freestone was from Bath. Pits in the vicinity of the monastery can still be seen indicating where the clay was dug.

There are 1,107 yards of cloister all floored with giant slabs of Belgian slate. These were shipped to Shoreham and then came by train to Partridge Green. From there they were hauled by farmers and local contractors by horse and cart.

At first the community were all French but most had returned to France by the time of the Second World War. Since then the monastery has become English speaking and has also become quite international in its makeup. Carthusian monks are people who feel called by God to live a life of prayer and sacrifice for the welfare of the world and for their own salvation. They find themselves looking over their shoulder wondering why God should have chosen them in particular when there are obviously so many other better people around. But God's ways are not our ways.

The monks live a semi eremitical life, each living alone in a separate cottage leading off the main cloister. They come together three times a day in church apart from Sundays and greater feasts when they eat their meals alone.

The 1987 hurricane did considerable damage. We lost 200 trees and 9,000 slates. Since then repairs have gone on steadily and we have planted 2,000 new trees. Also in the last few years there has been an increase in vocations, which has substantially lowered the average age of the community. Last year we made a CD of our plainchant, which is available locally. Anyone wishing to visit the monastery may do so on our Internet site. The address is www.parkminster.org.uk.

Reader feedback from Mr Dubbins:

It made interesting reading but some of the points were not what I remember. The stone was not local stone but Normandy stone, and also the Belgian Slabs were transported from Shoreham up the river to Hatterell. From there by horse and cart coming out at the old school round into Littleworth and through to the monastery. That is why the rough track from Littleworth to the monastery was built. As for the monks speaking French up to the Second world war, that was also wrong because when we were children we were over at the monastery a lot and they all spoke English to us.

D Dubbins