

# AN 'IMPRESSIONISTIC' HISTORY OF THE TURVEY MONKS AND NUNS



**Priory of Our Lady of Peace  
(Turvey Abbey)**



**Monastery of Christ our Saviour**

Inspired by Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem: 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection', we take an impressionistic look through photographs at both nature in action, and the unfolding story of the two Benedictine communities now living at Turvey 'through all the changing scenes of life' from 1952 to 2012.

## **That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection**

**By Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89)**

*(The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is famous for his insistence on ever-present change in the universe, as stated in the famous saying, 'No man ever steps in the same river twice')*

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-  
Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in  
marches.

Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,  
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.  
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare  
Of yestertempest's creases; | in pool and rut peel parches  
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches

Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there  
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on.  
But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selvèd spark  
Man, how fast his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!  
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark  
Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone  
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, | death blots black out; nor mark  
    Is any of him at all so stark  
But vastness blurs and time | beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,  
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, | joyless days, dejection.  
    Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. | Flesh fade, and mortal trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; | world's wildfire, leave but ash:  
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,  
    Is immortal diamond.

## Setting the Scene

In 1892, the Bénédictines de L'Imaculée Conception, of Igoville, near Rouen in Normandy, were affiliated to the Olivetan Congregation of Benedictines.

In 1901, the French government acted against many religious communities, especially those with schools, and those whose 'centres' were outside France. The Igoville Olivetan nuns had either to disperse in France, or find a new home in another country.

A group made their way to Bicester in Oxfordshire. They were offered a house by the diocese of Birmingham which was also to serve as a chapel and school for the local Roman Catholic people—it was 'mission' territory.

The house was bought in the winter of 1901 and the nuns moved to England during 1902. The Bicester community was very poor and they never recovered the money due to them from the forced sale of the Igoville property. They continued precariously at Bicester during the years of the first world war. They were joined by two Irish sisters.

Around 1920, the diocese moved the community, now badly in debt, to Eccleshall in Staffordshire, they had moved in by Christmas 1921.

In January 1923 the young Belgian monk Constantine Bosschaerts, came, via Ramsgate Abbey, to be chaplain at Eccleshall. He interested the sisters in his ideas for a new kind of Christian monastic life.

In 1924 Dom Constantine went to Rome in response to the Pope's plea that Benedictines work for Christian unity. There he met Dom Lambert Beauduin and through him Mgr Roncalli, whom he accompanied to Bulgaria as secretary. Mgr Roncalli would have liked to detain him, but plans were ripening between Dom Lambert and Dom Constantine for an ecumenical foundation in Belgium, under Cardinal Mercier's protection.

The Eccleshall Olivetan nuns would provide the 'moniales de réunion' of this new project, and the Eccleshall community moved to Antwerp (and ultimately Schotenhof) in the spring of 1926.

By the 1930's, the Olivetan Benedictine abbot Constantine Bosschaerts had created a 'Vita and Pax' (Life and Peace) centre at Schotenhof, on the edge of Antwerp, was planning a similar foundation in England and looking for a suitable location . . .

The Archdiocese of Westminster offered a site on the edge of North London, where a Roman Catholic parish was very much needed. Abbot Constantine, a man of vision with an immense love for the liturgy of the Church, and also trained as an architect, would provide both parish church and monastic centre for monks, nuns and oblates—but now it was just a few fields, too far from central London to be of much interest to property developers.

In 1936 the Parish of Christ the King, Cockfosters, was established, a school was opened—then the Second World War came and plans were disrupted.

Abbot Constantine died at a relatively early age in 1950, but his vision lived on . . .