

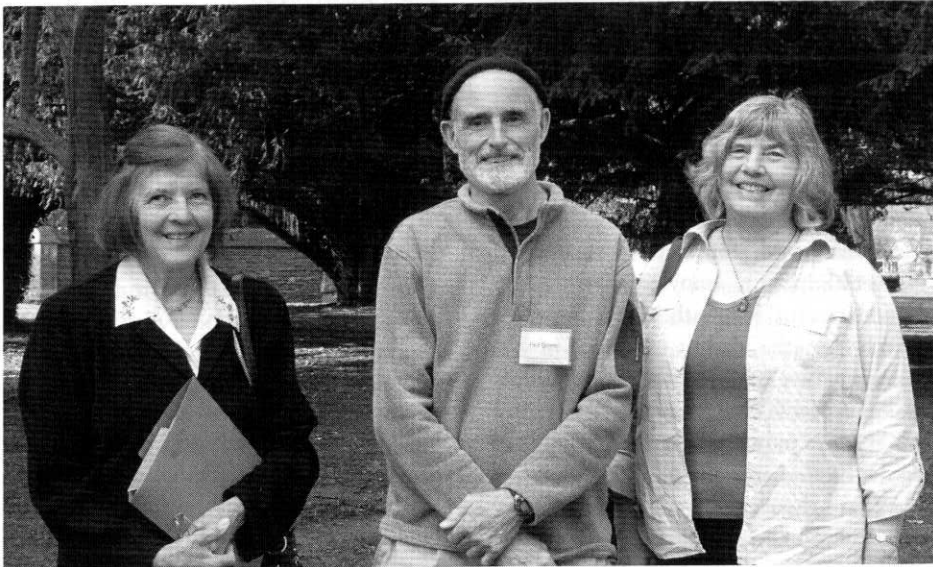
Oakham 2010 – A Personal View

Tony Pannett

We are now in the most perfect days of the Vale of Belvoir (pronounced beaver). I'm misquoting Merton for he says, 'We are in the most perfect days of the Appalachian spring, late April days of dogwood and redbud blossoms. Cool clear days with every delicate shade of green...' But this is what I remember of the days of the conferences spent at Oakham School where Merton was a pupil. Each time we are greeted by huge scudding clouds of dazzling white against an azure blue sky and the rich green of the school's playing fields. The Vale of Belvoir, with its undulations leading to the small town of Oakham, is where, this spring, all who attended each experienced the night spirit and the dawn air

The third part of Merton's book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, was the inspiration for the theme of the conference and was discussed by the three keynote speakers who took us on a journey of exploration by opening to us a new landscape. Brother Paul Quenon OCSO gave us a fascinating insight into his two years with Merton as his novice master and the rich humanity that he was to bring to all who served under him. Mary Grey with her lecture on 'Earthing our Spirituality' guided us skilfully through the current thoughts on ecotheology and the practical implications on justice and reconciliation.

Margaret Silf gave us what I felt was an unusual and fascinating talk. She explored



Keynote speakers (left-right) Mary Grey, Paul Quenon and Margaret Silf.



Paul Pearson presents David Scott with a 'Louie' in recognition of his work promoting Thomas Merton in the U.K.

with us the search for a new spirituality using mythology, story and the urgent need for us to be prepared for change in both our outer and inner journeys, and to see chaos as a challenge rather than a disaster. She left us a question: 'What helps us to welcome the new creation and embrace it?'

There were of course the usual selection of workshops offering an opportunity to explore the unusual and the challenging facets of Merton's life and writing which he has left us. As he says, 'Here is an unspeakable secret: paradise is all around and we do not understand...,' "Wisdom" cries the dawn deacon, but we do not attend'. But we do attend and sometimes we do understand, for that is the nature of Merton's spirit that encourages us on. May these conferences continue to do so.

Tony Pannett is an Anglican priest, a teacher of meditation and a member of the TMSG&I.

The committee of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland would like to inform its membership of the society that due to procedural omissions in custom and practice at the committee meeting held on 4th February 2010, Larry Culliford's term of office as chair ended at the Oakham general meeting on 9th April 2010.

Derek Reeve has taken the position of interim chair until such time as a formal structure for the society is in place. At the next committee meeting a proposed constitution for the society will be discussed.

The current committee is: Derek Reeve (interim chair), Heather Lyons (meetings secretary), Stephen Dunhill (treasurer and membership secretary), Larry Culliford, Lyn Ellis, Fiona Gardner (journal co-editor), Karl Goswell and Reuben Preston. Paul Lyons will attend the next meeting with a view to joining the committee.