

A Memory of Patrick Hart

Danny Sullivan

Paul Pearson's piece on the conference at Rydal Hall in the Journal (Eastertide 2024) reminded me of conferences past and one in particular where Brother Patrick Hart was a guest and a speaker. As editor of the Journal at that time and Chair of the Society that year I was seated beside Patrick for the conference dinner. He was delightful company.

I told Patrick that as editor of the Journal I had often thought of having a poem from Seamus Heaney for the poetry section but had no idea how to contact him. Patrick told me that Heaney visited Gethsemani if he could when in the States and when he did, he baked him a cake which he always loved. He proceeded to give me details of how to contact Heaney and said to tell him that if he doesn't give you a poem there will be no cake for him the next time he visits Gethsemani.

I duly wrote to Seamus Heaney recounting what Patrick had said and he very kindly sent me something for the poetry section. He described it as an excerpt from "a little something I'm working on at the moment" ...It turned out to be an excerpt from his wonderful translation of Beowulf. He finished his note to me by writing, "there is no way I'd risk visiting Gethsemani and not have one of Brother Patrick's delicious cakes." His sharing of his work on Beowulf pre-publication was incredibly generous of him.

Danny Sullivan is a former chair of the Thomas Merton Society and currently a member of it.

Patrick Hart, born in 1925, entered Gethsemani in 1951. He was Abbot Dom James Fox's secretary from 1957 to 1966. He then spent two years in Rome. On his return to Gethsemani in 1968 he became Merton's secretary. After Merton's death he became executor of his literary estate, acting as general editor of the seven volumes of Merton's journals, personally editing volumes 1 and 7. He was a founding member of the International Thomas Merton Society. He died in 2019, having been in vows for 64 years.