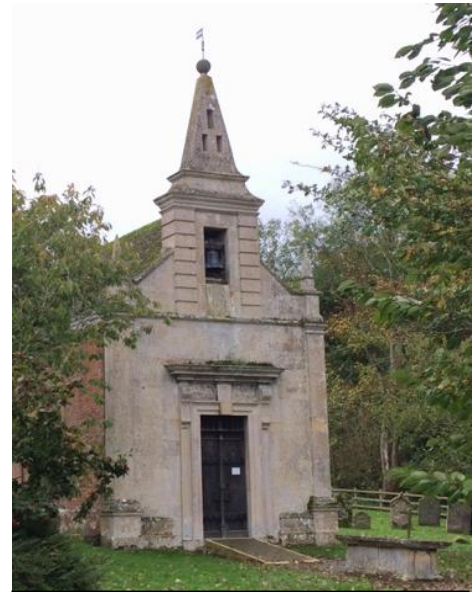


## Small Pilgrim Places Journal 12

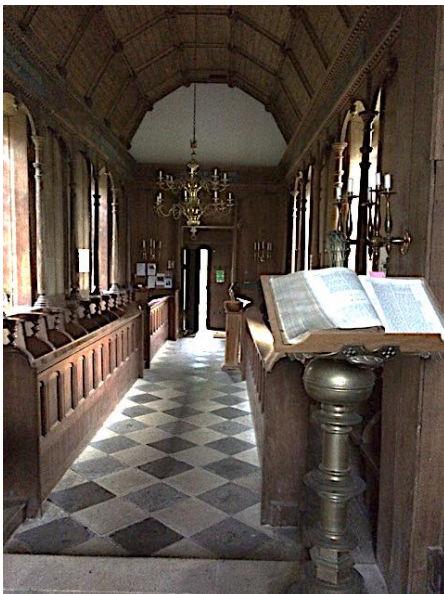
### Little Gidding and The Quaker Meeting House and Garden, Peterborough

In 1625 Nicholas Ferrar and his relatives moved from London to the manor of Little Gidding, near Peterborough. They soon restored the small church in the grounds, which for many years had been used as a barn, and the extended family of several dozen worshipped here and maintained regular daily prayer.

The Ferrar family has since been seen as an exemplar of community life based on devotion and prayer. Their home and church was visited by King Charles 1, the poet George Herbert and in 1936, TS Eliot, who featured Little Gidding in his "Four quartets". The church is now a Small Pilgrim Place, and the house a retreat centre.



St John's Church, Little Gidding



Looking towards the West end of St John's, Little Gidding

I approached Little Gidding on a footpath across a barely undulating rural landscape. The path took me past stands of healthy, mature Elm trees – more than I had seen in four decades, since the spread of Dutch Elm Disease. The Church of St John stands a few yards from the house and other outbuildings. Rebuilt in 1714, it comprises a brick-built chancel and nave, entered through a stone façade and bell-cote on the west end. Inside, wooden stalls face each other across the nave. The walls are panelled in wood, so the effect is rather dark, with glimmers of light reflecting off the brass chandeliers and lectern. At the east end is a simple communion table dating from the time of the Ferrars.

A sign in the churchyard invites visitors to the retreat house next door, and here I was greeted by Sue, the manager, who served me tea in the dining room. She told me that the house provides accommodation for pilgrims and retreatants, as well as those interested in the history of Little Gidding and poetry enthusiasts.

Later that day I arrived at a rather more modern building, the Quaker Meeting House in Peterborough, having walked along the banks of the River Nene as it passes through a pleasant country park with cycle paths, locks, steam railway and leisure craft. Beside the meeting house is a quiet garden, a green haven between several main roads near the city centre and cathedral. The central feature of the garden is a labyrinth, set in brick on the lawn, overlooked by an old apple tree and several seats and flower beds. This was



The Quiet Garden, Peterborough Quaker Meeting House, with its labyrinth on the lawn

the first Small Pilgrim Place I had visited to boast a set of swings – a lovely addition to the garden.

That evening I returned to Little Gidding, where I joined core members of the Small Pilgrim Place Network for supper. The following day the Quaker Meeting House was the venue for their National Gathering, and as guest speaker I gave a presentation about my thirteen pilgrimages over the last year to a total of 23 sites listed in their handbook, totting up about 450 miles or so of cycling and walking. I had hatched the idea as a project for my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, and since I was giving the talk on my next birthday a year later, I suppose that I've reached my goal. But as one of the members pointed out, there are still another two dozen or so sites I have yet to see, so perhaps the project will continue...

Ali Green



Ali gives her presentation at the Quaker Meeting House



Ali tries out the swing in the Quiet Garden after giving her talk at the National Gathering