

Report for The Heritage Alliance and British Council Travel Grant Scheme

Part 1.

Organisation: Lewes Priory Trust

Name : Kate Hickmott

Job title: Education Officer

Countries travelled to: Italy and France

Specific region or cities travelled to: Lombardy, Italy; Burgundy, France

Organisations visited: In Agro Calventiano; San Benedetto Po, Museo Civico Polironiano; Associazione amici del monastero, Provaglio d'Iseo; Federation of European Cluniac Sites; representatives from the University of Avignon

Dates of visit: 24th – 29th April 2019

Part 2.

1. Original purpose of the visit.

Lewes Priory is part of a European network of medieval religious houses that were under the control of the Abbot of Cluny, in Burgundy, France. Understanding of the significance of Cluniac sites is in its infancy and we have identified the need to begin to explain this significance in our education and interpretation work. The purpose of the visit was to see examples of education and community engagement work in Italy and France and to explore further what it meant (in the past) and means (today) to be Cluniac and part of this vast network. We planned to exchange existing resources between sites and to identify gaps in both knowledge and resources. Following discussions, a programme of collaborative work - aiming to address these gaps - would be drawn up using our combined expertise. The aim was that a greater understanding of the links between the sites and their shared Cluniac heritage would lead to the collaborative creation of new education resources.

2. People, organisations, projects of relevance to your organisation/project that you encountered during your visit.

Representatives from In Agro Calventiano (Associazione Culturale Vizzolo Predabissi) and visits to their Cluniac church – Santa Maria in Calvenzano : Maria Teresa Sapienza, Giorgio Prada, Franca Bassi

Representatives from San Benedetto Po (Cluniac monastery), Museo Civico Polironiano Associazione amici del monastero, Provaglio d'Iseo

Representatives from the Federation of European Cluniac Sites

Christophe Voros (Director of the Federation); Aurelien Mollard (Director of the Tourism Charlieu-Belmont- Cluniac site)

Representatives from the University of Avignon
Dr Isabelle Brianso and Dr Nolwenn Pianezza from the Culture and Communication
Department, University of Avignon who are undertaking a research project into the Cluniac
network.

3. Summary of the visit, including what went well and what was challenging.

The visit involved visiting Cluniac sites; meeting with representatives from these sites; looking at education and interpretation work undertaken; exchanging resources and ideas and discussing the production of further resources to extend public knowledge of our shared Cluniac heritage. The discussions included attempting to define what makes something Cluniac, both in relation to the past and present day.

The best part of the visit was extending our understanding of the historic, cultural and heritage importance of the Cluniac network, which has relevance today. This vast network throughout Europe was unified by the religious, political and economic practices flowing from the mother house in Cluny in medieval times. These strong links were forged before the creation of nation states. The visit cemented and enhanced our feelings of connectivity.

There are differences: the Lombardian monasteries are constructed of brick whereas in the UK they are in stone. However, the Italian churches have kept their frescos. UK Cluniac monastic churches (destroyed in the Reformation) would have been lavishly painted and so the education work on recreating sample frescos using traditional material and pigments was particularly interesting and will inform my work in the UK.

The language barrier could be problematic. Fortunately, we (mostly) were able to communicate in French but translating the education and interpretation resources will pose a challenge. There was great enthusiasm for developing and extending our exchange of ideas and good practice, but funding will be an issue as it is difficult to attract pan-European grants.

4. Experience and knowledge gained, with particular focus on how this experience and knowledge will benefit your organisation.

I have gained experience and knowledge of Cluniac monasteries in a different part of Europe which enables me to better understand the commonalities we share and the differences that exist. I have a deeper understanding of the significance of the European Cluniac network and this will inform the education and interpretation work I undertake for Lewes Priory Trust.

I have learnt new techniques and have education resources that I can use in the UK. With my Italian partners I have identified areas where we can work together to develop resources. These links have the potential to bear fruit in other areas: one of the Italian sites is interested in a project Lewes Priory Trust has undertaken with a local community choir. The choir has transposed songs and hymns from the Cluniac liturgy and the organisation in Vizzolo Predabissi is interested in arranging for the choir to sing in their church.

5. Top tips for other heritage professionals working internationally, based on the learning gained during your visit.

I have learnt the importance of keeping an open mind. The visit was about exchange of education resources, but this became a much wider, important discussion on how to define what being Cluniac actually means.

It is important to try to learn at least some of the language of the country you are working with, or at the very least establish a common language which you can use to communicate. Progress is always slower than you think it will be but making and maintaining personal contacts are vital to the success of any collaborative work.

Don't be afraid to put yourself into challenging and difficult situations. You will make mistakes, but you will be forgiven and learn so much along the way.

It is difficult to find funding for trans-national projects, so you need to be imaginative and flexible in your approach.

Only connect.

6. What are the next steps you are going to take following the visit and what resources/support might you need in order to successfully realise your ideas?

A first step is to send further examples of the education work from the UK to the Italian and French sites and to try the work they have produced (once translated) with schools and the public in the UK. I will also send further information about the choral music project to the sites in Italy and France to see if it is possible to facilitate an exchange.

The discussions on what it means to be Cluniac, and the legacy of the Cluniacs, have raised important issues for both Lewes Priory Trust and the Cluniac sites in the UK. I intend to research this question further with representatives from UK sites to understand where there are gaps in knowledge and to create a benchmark of understanding. This will inform a funding bid to link UK Cluniac sites.

Funding is always an issue in a volunteer-led organisation. This seems a particular problem when conducting projects with non-UK partners. I will need to spend time researching possible funding streams. The uncertainty over Brexit makes European funding particularly difficult at this time. Funding will be needed for resource translation, resource creation, further research and funding bid preparation.

7. In one sentence, summarise the impact the visit has had on your organisation and the organisations you visited.

We have established strong professional and personal links which we plan to develop through future practical projects.

8. In one sentence, please summarise the impact the visit has had on you personally.

There is so much more that unites us than divides us and the Cluniac network in the past and today demonstrates this.

9. Quote from Chairman of the Trust on the benefit and impact of your international visit on your organisation

This visit has produced so much more than we anticipated. It has widened our horizons regarding the possibility of information exchange and research opportunities. It has kindled greater enthusiasm to develop wider knowledge of the Cluniac network with the active assistance of our new European contacts.

10. Following this international experience, how likely is it that your organisation will fund another international visit in the next 12 months from 1 to 5 (1=very likely, 5=very unlikely)?

1=very likely though we will have to find sources of financial support to do so.

11. Will there be any follow up to this visit (e.g. jointly paper writing, online community building, future project applications, formal partnership formed, etc)

Sites will continue to exchange education resources and work on producing new resources that have relevance to all Cluniac sites. This will be subject to time constraints and funding as we are working as volunteers. It is hoped that a future project application, involving Cluniac sites in the UK and Europe, will be forthcoming in order to develop these resources in a co-ordinated way, including translation and production. Further research into the significance of the Cluniac network in the past and today will be on-going.