

## **1. OPENING PHOTO OF JANET STUART ON SCREEN**

Good morning everyone I am delighted to be here to speak to so many people from this wonderful school named after Janet Erskine Stuart, who was my great aunt. I've had to think quite carefully what to say but have persisted doggedly; for you will agree that when sister Frances asks you to do something, you do not refuse. So with my wife, Gillian, preparing some photos, I'll give you what I can.

Because Janet and I never knew each other I wondered how on earth I could find anything useful to say about this great person, especially when many people here probably know more about her than I do. My father spoke of her occasionally; I have to admit I could have been more responsive, but it was seldom that she was for long a topic of conversation in our family. For that reason I have extracted quite extensively from "Life and letters of Janet Erskine Stuart" by Maud Monaghan published in 1922 of which our family has had several copies.

She died in 1914, 14 years before I was born. But as with ships that pass in the night, I have wondered if there may be bits of kinship, which, had we known each other, would have formed bonds between us.

I can think of two particular things that are similar in both of us: First, she and I grew up in a rural environment amongst farmers and I shall return to that later on. Secondly, both of us found our field of spiritual endeavour away from the tradition of the family in which we grew up. We took however different directions.... She into the Roman Catholic Church, I into the work of Rudolf Steiner, a direction some see as unorthodox, but which incidentally is profoundly Christian.

So I'm going to be talking for about 15 minutes about three aspects of Janet Erskine Stuart's life.

- Our family history
- Janet's childhood and
- Her life as a nun

Now I'll show you pictures of the homes that Janet Stuart would have known and some of the people from whom we have both come.

## **2. PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUART HALL 1**

### **3. SEGUE TO STUART HALL 2**

The house we would have both known was the family seat of Stuart Hall in Northern Ireland. This is no longer there. Gillian, my wife and I live on the same site with lovely trees and parkland around us, but the stately home had to be replaced and is now a more modern house. Janet as a child would have visited Stuart Hall as it had been her father's childhood home.

Her father became a Minister of the Church of England, I think you would call it Episcopalian over here, at Cottesmore in England and this is the Rectory where they lived.

## **4 PHOTOGRAPH COTTESMORE RECTORY**

The family tree looks like this

## **5 FAMILY TREE**

As you can see, Janet Stuart was my Great Aunt, and her father, Andrew Godfrey Stuart was my great grandfather, there is me at

the bottom left corner, but I'm now going to focus on some of the people who surrounded her early life.

Janet's paternal grandparents Robert and Jemima Stuart

## **6 PHOTOGRAPH OF ROBERT AND JEMIMA THE SECOND EARL CASTLE STEWART**

He was a "bit of a lad"; see him in his Regency jacket here looking rather debonair. He was the second Earl Castle Stewart after three uncles, my grandfather and father I am the eighth.

Robert Stuart married Jemima Robison and their fourth son was Andrew Godfrey, Janet's father

## **7 PHOTOGRAPH OF ANDREW GODFREY STUART**

Andrew Godfrey had a family of 13 children. His first wife was Catherine Anne Wingfield, who was my grandfather's mother.

## **8 PHOTOGRAPH CATHERINE ANNE WINGFIELD**

And there is my grandfather Andrew John, Janet's half-brother.

## **9 PHOTOGRAPH OF ANDREW JOHN**

After Catherine died Mary Penelope Noel became Janet's father's second wife.

## **10 PHOTOGRAPH OF MARY PENELOPE NOEL**

Mary Penelope's father, Leland Noel, was the Rector of Exton, just as Janet's father was the Rector of Cottesmore nearby and both were Canons, senior visiting clergy of Peterborough Cathedral not far away. So she would have been to him "the girl next door". They had five children of which Janet was the youngest.

Janet's early years were formative, so I'm going to run through some of the key events in her youth. This picture show her with her nanny.

### **11 PHOTOGRAPH OF JANET AND NANNY**

She with her family had a wonderful childhood. But tragically when Janet was 14 months old her mother died, but before she died her mother committed her children to the care of Theodosia, the eldest of all thirteen children and Dodi, as she was called, took this mothering role most devotedly and was loved greatly by all her sisters and brothers.

### **12 PHOTOGRAPH OF SEVERAL CHILDREN WITH MOTHER** **Segue**

### **13 PHOTOGRAPH OF HORACE AND BEATRICE**

The role her Swiss governesses played in Janet's life was important; in particular a fine woman, Rinz von Burger, German-speaking and an exceptionally well educated person. When Janet was in her teens. She awakened Jane's interest in German thought and philosophy. Janet's enthusiasm for writing and philosophy caused her to stay up at nights reading under the table so that she would not disturb the family.

### **14 PHOTOS OF JANET AGED 6 AND 14.**

It is about this time in her early teens that her brother, Douglas, set her on her life-long quest. When she had been aged 6 and Douglas about 9, they had talked about the death of their mother and what it meant to them. This had affected them deeply at the time it happened and since.

### **15 PHOTOGRAPH OF DOUGLAS AND HORACE**

Now again Douglas brought up the subject about ultimate aims and the meaning of life. He said to her: " Aristotle says: "everyone has a telos. What is yours?" Telos is a Greek word which means "ultimate end – the reason why we are here, our essential selves". Later Janet must have felt this quest was being answered in her vocation as a nun.

I've already said that Janet was extremely keen on the operations of farming. She knew all the breeds of sheep and cattle and was known by the local farmers as a keen, competent judge of livestock. At an early age she could ride horses – her skill in that direction developed into a passion for adventures in riding with the foxhounds. The Cottesmore pack of hounds is still today one of the most favoured packs in the country.

Apart from being interested in farming her interest was the education of children. In her teens Janet conducted three Sunday Schools in her father's parish every Sunday. Her outstanding contribution in later life to Education and the care of children was showing itself then at this early age. Without attempting comparisons, but going back to things we might have had in common I too have been closely involved in schools, both Rudolph Steiner Schools and as a school governor of the public school near where I lived when I was a farmer.

During one of her occasional

## **16 PHOTO OF EXTON PARK**

visits to Exton Park with her sister Beatrice and brother Douglas, Janet met a Mrs. Ross, who became a great influence on her religious life. Mrs Ross introduced Janet to the Jesuit priest,

Father Peter Gallwey of the nearby church at Farm Street, London.

### **17 PHOTOGRAPH OF FATHER GALLWEY**

This sadly led to an estrangement between Janet and her father, who sought to dissuade her from the way she was going and even arranged for Janet to meet with the Prime Minister of England, William Gladstone, for his guidance. But even he could not change her mind. The situation was deeply tragic both for Janet and for her father, since they adored each other. They kept in touch in later life, but she could never again stay at the Rectory, which had been her home. Sad though this was, it was understandable at the time, given her father's standing as the Rector of the parish; thankfully today times have changed in England and the two churches Roman Catholic and Anglican work much more closely together.

### **18 PHOTO OF GLADSTONE**

Janet took Instruction from Father Gallwey and on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1879 was Received at the Altar of the Sacred Heart in Farm Street, London.

### **19 PHOTO OF FARM STREET ALTAR**

After being Received Janet went to Ireland working with local people in and around Mount Errigal in County Donegal and continued the country sports of riding and fishing which she so enjoyed.

### **20 PHOTO OF MOUNT ERRIGAL DONEGAL**

Now a word to show how Janet felt the moment of being called to be a nun. The decisive moment was in May 1882 and I quote her words: "I was thinking of a religious life and saying to God, 'I

should like it very much, but you see it is impossible to think of it at present and then and there, by my side was a bed of blue hyacinths – I saw it all, so I went to the convent chapel. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and a nun was on the prie-dieu” (that is a kneeling desk for prayer near the altar). “I asked God as a sign that, if the ‘word’ was from Him, He would put me on the prie-dieu instead of the nun. Almost immediately the nun left the prie-dieu and came to beg me to take it, saying she felt too ill to stay – so I did not doubt further.”

Janet joined the Order of the Sacred Heart at Roehampton as a novice and learned difficult lessons under mother Digby who was sub-mistress of novices.

## **21 PHOTO OF MOTHER DIGBY**

After some years Janet Stuart became the sub-mistress of the novices at Roehampton; in later years she was to become their Mother Superior, but when Mother Digby became the Assistant General of the Order throughout the world Janet became her assistant; they visited all the schools and centres of the Sacred Heart in North America between 1898 and May 1900.

In early 1901 Mother Digby felt confident that Janet was able to visit the many centres of the Sacred Heart in the Americas. Janet was away from Roehampton for nine months, visiting:

## **22 MAP of LATIN AMERICA**

Puerto Rico; Cuba; Panama; Chile and Argentina. Her childhood spent at the country Rectory at Cottesmore proved a great advantage for this arduous travelling, much of it done on horseback or uncomfortable horse driven carriages in all kinds of weather as when, for example, her carriage broke down in pelting

rain and got stuck in the mud and the horses they rode had to jump mountain streams when up to their hocks in water during a twelve hour journey from a remote convent at Talca in Chile.

On the death of Mother Digby in 1911 Janet was 54 and became Superior General for the Order throughout the world.

### **23 PHOTO OF JANET – SUPERIOR GENERAL**

By 1914 she had visited centres in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Vancouver and Montreal. Far more than the exertion of travelling, for her was the human challenges she must have met in giving guidance to so many different people and communities must have tested her to the full. Many of the people she met would have been troubled with deep problems and difficulties.

In 1914, soon after the First World War had broken out, Janet, exhausted from her previous travels, returned to the Mother Convent at Ixelles in Belgium. But the German army was marching into Brussels.

### **24 PHOTO OF CHAPEL AT CONVENT IN ROEHAMPTON**

Janet managed to escape and returned to Roehampton where she remained exhausted and ill. On Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1914 she died and was buried in a vault at the foot of the altar in Roehampton.

### **25 PHOTO OF ALTAR AT CONVENT IN ROEHAMPTON.**

Clearly Janet was a woman of outstanding talent. She had an instinctive ability to communicate, a wonderful love for all people. She made a huge contribution to education.

I am grateful that I did not say “NO” to Sr. de la Chappelle, when asked to give this talk, because it has helped me to appreciate more than I did before the greatness of Janet Erskine Stuart. I feel I may have gone over familiar ground to some people here, but I would like to put to you particularly to the older ones, upper school and onwards; one question; this is: “If Janet had been born in 1957 instead of 1857, how would her calling have come to her? Would it be to go the same way now as it did then?” We cannot know the answer, but it may be something worth thinking about in the context of the way the world has changed in 100 years. The certainty to me is that she would have had a deep calling.

**26 FINAL PHOTOGRAPH - HYACINTHS -**  
**HOLD ON SCREEN TO CLOSE**

She had a formidable mind but also true humility, total belief in what she was doing, love and a deep understanding of those around her, both adults and children. This made her into a true leader.

I am happy to have had this opportunity to learn more about her and meet with you all here. Thank you.

Duration : 14’00” approx.