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Abstract

From Exile to Exile: Repatriation, Resettlement and the Contemplative Experience of English Benedictine Nuns in England 1795–1838

Scholastica Susan Jacob

This thesis argues that English Benedictine women viewed repatriation from the Continent to England in 1795, not as a homecoming, but as a second exile. It examines five English Benedictine convents – founded in exile on the Continent in the seventeenth century and forced to seek refuge in England in the 1790s – through the lens of transition and resettlement. Arguing that the French Revolution was a pivotal event in the deconstruction and reconstruction of English Catholic religious life, it explores how these nuns negotiated their journey from survival to re-foundation, through the experience of rupture, loss and conflicted loyalties. The thesis focuses on the re-establishment of these female contemplative communities in England and explores tensions, continuities and adaptations in the nuns' daily, spiritual, devotional and reading lives. It challenges perceptions of the nuns as conservators of traditional Benedictine practice and highlights their previously unappreciated contribution to women's education, Protestant-Catholic relations and refugee narratives. Until now, there has been little scholarly exploration of the monastic female experience in England in the early years of the nineteenth century. This thesis fills in the forty-year gap in the historiography of women religious which lies between studies of early modern English convents in their Continental exile and those concentrating on apostolic orders later in the century. It reveals the period to be a bridge between the two, essential to understanding both the emergence of the apostolics and the re-flourishing of the monastics in the fabled 'second spring' of English Catholicism. While emphasising the importance of the role of the contemplatives in English religious history, it demonstrates that for the Benedictine nuns, this period was far from a triumphant homecoming. It was in fact a second exile.

FROM EXILE TO EXILE:
REPATRIATION, RESETTLEMENT AND THE
CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH BENEDICTINE
NUNS IN ENGLAND 1795–1838

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Statement of Copyright

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Abbreviations

ADN	Archives du Nord, Lille
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
AN	Archives National Paris
BMP	Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris
CAA	Colwich Abbey Archives
Copac	Consortium of Online Public Access Catalogues (now Library Hub)
CRL	Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, University of Birmingham
CRS	Catholic Record Society
DAA	Douai Abbey Archives
DSAA	Downside Abbey Archives
EBC	English Benedictine Congregation
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
HWRBI	History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland
LibHub	Library Hub (previously Copac, some entries retain the copac reference)
MIM	Monks in Motion database
SBAA	Stanbrook Abbey Archives
Wc.	Worldcat
WWTN	Who were the Nuns? database.

Introduction

‘The history of English Catholicism is also a history of exile’, wrote Laurence Lux-Sterritt of the English convents founded in seventeenth-century Europe.¹ That sense of exile did not end with expulsion from the Continent and the study of the English religious communities in the early nineteenth century must be conducted through the lens of exile and identity. This thesis contends that on arrival in England, their experience of exile was exacerbated by finding themselves aliens in their native country and refugees from the wider transnational Church.

Through an examination of the experience of five English Benedictine convents who fled France and the Low Countries after the French Revolution, this thesis proposes that the return to England was a second exile for the nuns. The years 1795–1838 are shown to be a time of impoverishment, insecurity and trauma. It was a period that required severe compromises in the accustomed monastic life. The communities were slow to replenish themselves with new members and when these did arrive, many were from disparate cultural and educational backgrounds, with different expectations, while generational tensions threatened to destabilise the convents still further. Despite the compromises the new exile demanded, prayer and *lectio divina* remained central to the Benedictine way and provided a means for negotiating the experience.² New light is shed on the spirituality of the nuns in this period through examination of their libraries and devotions: revealing their core texts to be more transnational and less reliant on the medieval tradition and Bakerite³ interiority than hitherto portrayed. Approaching

¹ Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017), p. 4.

² In this slow transition from devastation to growth the English nuns were in unison with Catholic institutions in Europe who were also rebuilding, see N. Atkin and F. Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism since 1750* (Oxford, 2003).

³ Based on the teachings of Augustine Baker, 1575–1641, mystical writer and mentor of the Benedictines at Cambrai.

the return to England of the first Catholic nuns, after nearly three hundred years absence, as a second exile makes a new historiographical intervention.

The period 1795–1838 was a bridge between established monastic experience on the Continent and the revival of English religious life from the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ During these years the ground was prepared for the arrival of the apostolic orders from the 1830s. Thus, this thesis provides a bridge not only between early modern historiography and that of the later nineteenth century but also between these two forms of female religious life, contributing a new dimension to on-going studies of apostolic women's religious life. Study of the period also shows the previously unappreciated contribution of the nuns to women's education and to growing rapprochement with Protestant neighbours and authority, while the migration narratives of the nuns also add to contemporary refugee studies.

Although it was always the declared aim of the English convents founded in exile to return religious life to England, they only envisaged this happening at the full restoration of the Catholic faith there. Thus, the forced repatriation in 1794–5 following the French Revolution was experienced as an alienation every bit as intense as that of their predecessors leaving England two hundred years earlier. The paradox is summed up by Tonya Moutray: 'England was for the English nuns both their homeland and their place of exile'.⁵ This view of second exile was shared by the nuns and their friends. A letter from Abbé Edgeworth to the prioress of the Paris community, immediately on their arrival in England, expresses this: 'May Almighty God pour down upon you [...] all heavenly blessings during your exile in this country'.⁶ The title of a memoir by Dame Benedict Anstey in the Stanbrook Abbey archives

⁴ The understanding of the period as a bridge was proposed by Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair OSB in a paper entitled 'Hammersmith: A Bridge', given at the EBC History Symposium, in 1994 (www.Plantata.org.uk).

⁵ Tonya Moutray, *Refugee Nuns, The French Revolution, and British Literature and Culture* (London, 2016), p. 160.

⁶ Robert Eaton, *The Benedictines of Colwich 1829–1929* (London, 1929), p. 68. Henry Essex Edgeworth, 1745–1807 (also known as L'Abbé Edgeworth de Firmont), an Irish-born Jesuit priest, confessor to the royal family in France, escaped to England in 1795.

indicates the nuns' perception of the longevity of their exile: 'A History of the Convent of Our Lady of Consolation, as regards Monastic Observance: From its formation at Cambrai 1623, to the Restoration Period of 1869'⁷ [my italics]: for the nuns from Cambrai the experience of exile did not end until 1869. This time-frame was replicated across the other Benedictine houses. Historical examination of the re-establishment of the convents on English soil, therefore, should be treated in the context of a renewed exile experience, with the concomitant confusion of identity and loyalties.

This thesis approaches the study through the nuns' initial struggle for survival in England and the barriers they faced (chapter one); the impetuses for, and inhibitors to growth in the early years (chapter two); the impact of renewed exile on their devotional practices (chapter three); and how that impact was reflected in their libraries and reading habits (chapter four).

First and Second Exiles

Scholarship has already approached the English nuns' history from the perspective of identity and exile but has focused exclusively on the period before 1800. Laurence Lux-Sterritt, for example, states the purpose of her monograph to be 'a study which explores traits of religious Englishness in exile'.⁸ Claire Walker, Caroline Bowden and James Kelly, examining the experience of exile for the English nuns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have described the background of persecution and isolation from which these women came and the ways in which they appropriated this experience to further their contemplative mission.⁹ This

⁷ SBAA, Annals, vol. II.

⁸ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 11.

⁹ Claire Walker, 'The Experience of Exile in Early Modern English Convents', *Paregon*, 34 (2017), pp. 159–77 and 'Exiled Children: Care in English Convents in the 17th and 18th Centuries', in *Children Australia*, 41 (2016), pp.168–77. Caroline Bowden, 'Surviving in Exile: strategies and supporters of the English convents in exile, c.1600–1800', in Cormac Begadon and James E Kelly (eds.), *British and Irish Religious orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Durham, 2021), pp. 83–100 and James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe c.1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2020).

exploration has not yet been taken forward to consider resettlement in England in the nineteenth century as a further, or second, exile.¹⁰

While this thesis does not intend to be a comparison between the first and second exiles, some basic parameters should be set between the two. For the English foundresses of convents in the seventeenth century the experience of personal suffering and loss was, it may be argued, mitigated by the belief that exile was undertaken through their own agency – despite the dangers it involved – with the motivation of personal vocation and contribution to the survival of English Catholicism and the perpetuation of religious life for English women. The ideal of martyrdom was never far from the aspirations of the foundresses. Many had family members who suffered physically for their faith. Catherine Gascoigne, the first abbess at Cambrai, articulated this clearly: ‘Had an occasion of martyrdom for the defence of the Church and for the love of God offered itself [...] she thought her courage would have served her to have laid down her life joyfully and cheerfully for God’s love’.¹¹ If physical death was not to be offered then a quotidian martyrdom was the best way to serve the cause. They came to accept that it was to be ‘survival not death [which constituted their] meaningful self-sacrifice’.¹²

The nuns’ contribution to the preservation of the faith in the first exile period was primarily mediated through prayer: prayer for the conversion of England and for mission-priests and Catholics back home. In addition to prayer, many convents offered more active support for the lay communities in the diaspora which grew up around the monasteries in exile. Many became involved in the Jacobite cause – especially the convents at Ghent and Dunkirk – and in the

¹⁰ Awareness of exile and migration as a social phenomenon emerged in eighteenth century England in the wake of the French Revolution. For a study of the Romantic and literary impact which seized the imaginations of writers like William Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith and Fanny Burney, see Michael Wiley, *Romantic Migrations: Local, National and Transnational Dispositions* (London, 2008), pp. 7–55. The Romantic representation of displacement and replacements as a transformative process is to some extent reflected in the convents’ experience.

¹¹ Quoted in Anon, *In a Great Tradition* (London, 1956), p. 5. Gascoigne’s nephew, Thomas Thwenge, was martyred at York in 1680.

¹² Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and the Transformation of Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 39–40.

Catholic education of young English women.¹³ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the experience of intense personal suffering and exile was different for the new generations of women leaving for the Continent. While the majority still made this difficult journey, some were already at home there as English Catholic expatriate communities grew. From 1743, the Gascoigne family for example, lived in permanent lodgings at Cambrai, next-door to the Benedictine nuns.¹⁴ Correspondence reveals that Catholic family life in England could also be lived peacefully and prosperously.¹⁵ Alexander Lock has shown that Catholics, increasingly taking a greater role in polite society, were emerging from the ‘close and closed community’ of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ‘that regarded segregation and hardship as a providential test of their devotion and a necessary part of their faith’ and:

By the eighteenth-century, as English Catholic gentry families began to experience a greater degree of toleration amidst the genteel world of consumerism and sociability, their ancestors’ religious eremitism seemed increasingly outdated: families began to adapt their faith to this changing society in order to enhance further the informal measure of social freedom they were beginning to enjoy.¹⁶

Similarly, Lux-Sterritt asserts: ‘politics at home evolved during the course of the eighteenth century [...] and the practice of Catholicism was no longer subject to the stringent persecution of earlier days’.¹⁷ Accordingly, the sense of religious vocation as an exile, had transmuted into a journey to join an established community in a Catholic land.¹⁸ For these women, a return to

¹³ See Jaime Goodrich, ‘Cloistered Politics: English Benedictine Nuns and the Stuarts, 1600–1700’, in Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly (eds), *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Durham, 2021), pp. 121–40.

¹⁴ The Benedictine convents all attracted an English Catholic diaspora around them and many towns in France and the Low Countries had their own enclaves of Little (Catholic) England. See, Alexander Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics in the Age of Enlightenment: The Life and Career of Sir Thomas Gascoigne, 1745–1810* (Woodbridge, 2016), p. 56–96.

¹⁵ SBAA, ‘Knight Letters’. Prejudice did continue to underlie English society however, as these letters make clear in several places. See also Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England c.1740–80: a political and social study* (Manchester, 1993).

¹⁶ Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics*, p. 17.

England, despite the easing of the fiscal, social and spiritual situation of Catholics after the Relief Acts of 1788, 1791 and 1793, was far from their plans. Aidan Bellenger suggests:

It is probably true to say that the French Revolution saved the English religious communities, increasingly isolated by growing xenophobia in France and England, by transplanting them to England at a moment when, with the reduction of the anti-Catholic legislation which had made their voluntary exile compulsory, growth rather than mere survival had become a possibility.¹⁹

This view must be re-examined. The situation was more nuanced than that and their transplantation, initially at least, resulted in greater isolation and diminishment.²⁰

By the last decade of the century, martyrdom was much closer to the nuns in Revolutionary France than in England. 1789 and subsequent years brought personal experience of suffering to English religious on the Continent. All the communities encountered forms of martyrdom, including loss of life, in their adopted countries. None had intended to return to England until the restoration of Catholicism in that country and thus, their arrival on British soil was not a welcome homecoming but a flight for safety. Carmen Mangion ponders:

One wonders whether the English convents in exile would have remained in France and the Low Countries were it not for the French Revolution and the French Revolutionary Wars. A reading [of the excerpts used in this volume] suggests that despite the 1778 and 1791 Catholic Relief Acts the English nuns were not preparing to return to England any time soon. What this says about their identities, especially their national identity, needs to be explored in much more depth.²¹

Both the seventeenth-century foundresses and their eighteenth-century successors arrived in their respective exiles with personal experiences of loss and suffering for their faith. There

¹⁹ Aidan Bellenger, 'France and England: The English Female Religious from Reformation to World War', in F. Tallet and N. Atkin (eds.), *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 3–11, p. 6.

²⁰ See Cormac Begadon, 'Meandering Towards an Inevitable Death? English Benedictine Monasteries and their Responses to Enlightenment and Revolution', in Begadon and Kelly (eds.), *British and Irish Religious Orders, Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Durham, 2021), pp. 245–65.

²¹ Carmen Mangion, 'The French Revolution, The French Revolutionary Wars and the Return to England', in Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile*, VI (London, 2013), pp. 291–4.

were, however, crucial differences which were to impact on the latter's appropriation and acceptance of the alienation. The eighteenth-century refugees were not enthusiastic young women fired by zeal but tired, older and in many cases, scarred by experiences of imprisonment and near starvation.

A contrast may also be drawn with the sense of purpose and commitment to a cause which the seventeenth-century exiles shared. The eighteenth-century refugees had no such sense of agency in their exile: it was imposed upon them, and they assumed it with apprehension.²² In England, their attempts to rebuild monastic life were hampered by yearnings for the past and the first twenty years of the second exile were marked by on-going efforts to return to the Continent, or obtain restitution for their losses there. Perceptions also differed: the foundresses had not seen themselves as victims. Accounts of the eighteenth-century nuns on the other hand, show that to some extent, they did view themselves in this way.²³ The response of the religious to persecution and exile is detailed in many of their migration narratives.²⁴ The trope of exile pervades the nuns' own reflection on the period; 'We don't forget with gratitude our kind reception in dear old England in [the] time of our exile' wrote an Augustinian from Bruges.²⁵

The Cambrai Benedictines:

obediently bent themselves to the highly uncongenial task of educating young ladies [and] the period at Woolton was one of discouragement. The nuns struggled on, making a heroic and pathetic attempt to uphold their religious observance and choral celebration of the Divine Office, and striving, unattractive as the work was, to maintain a school.²⁶

²² The Paris Benedictines was the only community to vote to move to England, but even they had little real choice in the decision.

²³ Although Carmen Mangion has argued convincingly that they were not passive in the face of their captors, the nuns' own self-reflections included tropes of martyrdom and oppression. See, 'Avoiding "Rash and Imprudent Measure": English Nuns in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1801', in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 247–63.

²⁴ Various narratives exist and a number have been published, see below pp. 36ff. See also, Scholastica Jacob (ed.), *A Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray and Two Hairs and a Dish of Tortoise*, from the writings of Dame Ann Teresa Partington (Stanbrook, 2016); and Caroline Bowden (gen. ed.), *Convents in Exile*, VI, pp. 291–99.

²⁵ Moutray, *Refugee Nuns*, p. 159.

²⁶ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 42–3.

The *raison d'être* of the English convents on the Continent had been to advance God's work by returning England to the true faith. This was not a passive mission; the nuns proactively engaged with their English Catholicism in a process which was 'actively creating an identity for the time when Catholicism was returned to their homeland'.²⁷ As they perceived it, the forced repatriation of 1795 was not the right time and England was not ready: return at this point was not part of their plan. Nothing shows this more clearly than the internal conflict experienced by the Paris nuns concerning their 'extra' vow of enclosure.²⁸ On arrival in England, they felt such scruples about this additional commitment that on the advice of the vicar apostolic, Charles Walmesley they adapted the wording from: 'perpetual enclosure *in* this monastery' to 'perpetual enclosure *with* this community', reflecting their unsettled state of exile and expectation of further displacement.²⁹ It is difficult to mark exactly when the state of unease and temporality ended. As late as 1826, a sense of being aliens in a hostile land was still being expressed as this excerpt from a letter to the abbess of Caverswall reveals: 'The account you give of England is dreadful, however it is very probable that the pride of this country will meet with a downfall'. The writer goes on to decry the English Government for acting 'very unworthily in giving over good old Catholic Belgium to a protestant king; the evils that occur from thence are incalculable with regard to religion'.³⁰ The experience of split identity between Catholic and English loyalties persisted.

Were the English nuns 'English women who happened to be Catholic, or were they Catholic women who happened to be English?' James Kelly argues for the latter and shows them as part of the transnational Church, as representing 'England in Catholic Europe, part of something

²⁷ James E. Kelly, 'Creating an English Catholic Identity, Relics, Martyrs and English Women Religious in Counter-Reformation Europe', in James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds.), *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 42–59, p. 58.

²⁸ Benedictines take three vows: Obedience, *Conversatio Morum* and Stability. Following the Council of Trent several female houses also added an additional vow of Enclosure: see H. J. Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the council of Trent* (Illinois, 1978), XXV: V, pp. 220–1.

²⁹ CAA, manuscript, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation', p. 203 (155542).

³⁰ Anon, 'Bishop Milner and the Nuns of Caverswall Castle', *Downside Review* (1913), pp. 3–20 (123645).

universal that transcended national boundaries'.³¹ This thesis will show that their primary identification as Catholic continued after the removal to England. The Benedictine nuns were English women, now living on English land, but they continued to see themselves as part of the universal Catholic Church. In a country where Catholics were still not free to vote or practice all aspects of their faith, the women's allegiance lay first and foremost with the Church. Tension between religious and national identity would add to the experience of conflict within their new exile.

The Period 1795–1838: A Bridge

This study focuses on the period 1795 to 1838 because, in the narratives of the communities, these dates are treated as liminal years or a 'bridge' between settlement in the trans-Catholic milieu of Continental Europe and re-settlement in not-yet-Catholic England. The term was used by Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair who described the Dunkirk nuns' residence at Hammersmith as 'a bridge' between the Dunkirk convent (left in 1795) and the fully enclosed abbey at Teignmouth (from 1862).³² These years mark the initial turmoil and displacement in England, described in some accounts as a desert period of wandering which led, through re-configuration, reconciliation and re-creation, to life in a new homeland. The nuns emerged, at the end of the period, with a firm and confident base from which to consolidate a re-flourishing of monastic fervour and creativity in the second half of the century. The terminus of 1838 is chosen as the year by which both the Cambrai and Paris communities found permanent homes. Alban Hood's assertion that the overall theme of early nineteenth century Benedictinism was 'continuity rather than change'³³ applied to the monks; evidence suggests there was rather less continuity and more change in the nuns' experience at this time. The period was pre-eminently

³¹ Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe c.1600-1800*, pp. 190–1.

³² Murray-Sinclair, 'Hammersmith: A Bridge'.

³³ Alban Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival: Continuity and Change in the English Benedictine Congregation 1795-1850* (Farnborough, 2014), p. 81.

one of precarious living and instability: all but two of the communities changed location twice in those early years.

The history of nineteenth-century Catholic England cannot be charted in neatly segmented parts with an acceleration of growth at such landmarks as Catholic Emancipation (1829) or the Restoration of the Hierarchy (1850). What is true for the history of the Church as a whole, applies equally to the revival of religious life for women in England. Thus, the period 1795–1838 can be treated as a crucial stage in the on-going, organic development of both wider Catholic life and women’s religious life in England. It will also be seen that the arrival of the contemplatives in 1795 marked ‘a new phase in the history of the religious life in Britain’ which preceded and prepared the way for the arrival of apostolic orders later in the century.³⁴

Evidence shows that during the first forty years in England the nuns were simply too tired and occupied with the demands of daily living to be able to continue the literary output for which they had once been famous. Their engagement was diminished too, by the lack of access to books. During the years in exile on the Continent all the houses had assembled significant libraries, the greater part of which were lost during the flights to England. Furthermore, the level of education and cultural background of new entrants changed significantly in this period, as did the formation they received.

Filling the Void: the historiographical gap in the study of the English convents

The period 1795–1838 has largely been neglected by scholars of religious history. Most nineteenth-century studies begin either with 1829 or 1850: less attention is paid to the earlier years where the social and cultural foundations for these events were laid. An even greater

³⁴ Susan O’Brien, ‘Roman Catholic Women’s Congregations in Great Britain and Ireland’ in Jan De Maeyer, Sophie Leplae, and Joachim Schmiedl (eds.), *Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leuven, 2004), pp. 91–115.

absence in the historiography of the period is the lack of consideration of the role played by monastic communities and especially women religious.

The most detailed account of the struggle for rebirth within the Church was given by Bernard Ward.³⁵ Published over one hundred years ago, this continues to be a major source of background information on the period, providing much contemporary documentation. It is valuable for its discussion of the dissolution of the English monasteries on the Continent and their re-establishment in England. The most significant work on English Catholic history for the period is the corpora of John Bossy³⁶, Edmund Norman³⁷ and John Aveling³⁸ although these are limited in their treatment of monastic life. Gabriel Glickman has provided essential information on the situation in the earlier eighteenth century,³⁹ while Joseph Chinnici⁴⁰ and Peter Phillips⁴¹ give valuable insights into the intellectual and political Catholic environment in England during the first part of the nineteenth century. Ulrich Lehner, Thomas O'Connor and Mark Goldie⁴² have done similar service for the transnational network of Catholic intellectual development in this period. Mary Heimann's work remains the key text on devotional and spiritual developments, but she takes 1850 as her starting point and is largely silent on the early years and on any contribution of monastics to devotional practices.⁴³

³⁵ *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England 1781–1803* (London, 1909).

³⁶ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975).

³⁷ Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984).

³⁸ J. H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976).

³⁹ Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688–1745: Politics, Culture and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2009) and 'Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743): Catholic Freethinking and Enlightened Mysticism', in Jeffrey D. Burson and Ulrich L. Lehner (eds.), *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transitional History* (Indiana, 2014), pp. 391–410.

⁴⁰ Joseph P. Chinnici OFM, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement 1780–1850* (Shepherdstown, 1980).

⁴¹ Peter Phillips, *John Lingard, Priest and Historian* (Leominster, 2008).

⁴² Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford, 2016). Thomas O'Connor, 'Luke Joseph Hooke (1714–1796): Theological Tolerance in an Apologetic Mold' and Mark Goldie, 'Alexander Geddes (1737–1802): Biblical Criticism, Ecclesiastical Democracy, and Jacobinism', both in *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transitional History* pp. 411–29 and 371–87.

⁴³ Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1995).

Research into the English Benedictine monasteries established on the Continent in the early modern period has been well documented. David Lunn,⁴⁴ J.H Aveling⁴⁵ and Geoffrey Scott,⁴⁶ have contributed to this field as too has the recent AHRC funded project ‘Monks in Motion’ website.⁴⁷ Further work on monks in the revolutionary period is in progress by Cormac Begadon.⁴⁸ The historiography of women religious in the early modern period has been greatly added to in recent years with the six volumes and database of ‘Who Were the Nuns?’⁴⁹ This provides a rich resource for the student of convent life for English women in the period 1600–1800. Amongst others, Claire Walker, Caroline Bowden, Laurence Lux-Sterritt, and James Kelly have increased our knowledge.⁵⁰ On the nuns’ experience in the Revolutionary period, Carmen Mangion’s article ‘Avoiding “Rash and Imprudent Measures”’: English Nuns in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1801’ provides a refreshing account of more robust religious women actively engaged in negotiation with the revolutionary authorities.⁵¹

There is a lacuna, however, in literature on both male and female religious life in the post-1795 period. The lack of research on contemplative nuns has been highlighted by Susan O’Brien and Carmen Mangion.⁵² Both have noted this gap and have contrasted the growth in

⁴⁴ David Lunn, *The English Benedictines 1540–1688* (London, 1980).

⁴⁵ J.H. Aveling, ‘The Education of Eighteenth-Century English Monks’, *Downside Review*, 79 (1961), pp. 135–52 and ‘The Eighteenth-Century English Benedictines’, in Eamon Duffy (ed.), *Challoner and his Church* (London, 1981), pp. 152–73.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone, English Monks in the Enlightenment* (Bath, 1992).

⁴⁷ MIM, <https://community.dur.ac.uk/monksinmotion/isearch.php>.

⁴⁸ Cormac Begadon, ‘Responses to Revolution: The Experiences of the English Benedictine Monks in the French Revolution’, *British Catholic History*, 34 (2018), pp. 106–28.

⁴⁹ WWTN www.wtn.history.qmul.ac.uk and Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, six volumes (London, 2012).

⁵⁰ Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003); Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800, Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham, 2013); Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*; Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe*.

⁵¹ Carmen Mangion, ‘Avoiding “Rash and Imprudent Measures”’: English Nuns in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1801’, in Caroline Bowden and James E Kelly (eds.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 247–63.

⁵² Carmen Mangion, ‘The “Mixed Life”’: Challenging Understandings of Religious Life in Victorian England’, in Carmen Mangion, and Laurence Lux-Sterritt (eds.), *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 165–79.

work on apostolic women, with neglect of the contemplatives. For O'Brien, who has worked on the active sisterhoods from the 1830s, there is need for a:

Study employing thematic comparisons and contrasts out of which one would expect arguments to emerge about the character of the [contemplative] nuns' experiences along with explanations of the similarities and differences. Ideally, it would sustain a balance of focus between the separate tradition of each house and their shared experiences as a group, a bi-focal approach.⁵³

Mangion also recognises that: 'For most of the nineteenth century these contemplative religious orders, enclosed behind convent walls, remained in the shadows of the "modern [active] orders"'. A footnote confirms the need for further work: 'This is a tentative observation as little comprehensive research has been published on the experience of nineteenth-century English enclosed nuns'.⁵⁴ This thesis rectifies the omission.

Even the nuns themselves have largely brushed over this period in their history. A mere two pages are devoted to the sixty-six years the community spent at Hammersmith in a history of the Dunkirk convent.⁵⁵ *In a Great Tradition* by the Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey gives just ten out of three-hundred and fifty pages to roughly the same period.⁵⁶ This oversight is not due to lack of material: all the communities have significant collections from this period.

While Tonya Moutray has provided useful insights on the English nuns in the Romantic era, her work concentrates on literary representations of nuns during the Revolution and subsequent migration. She writes that more work is needed: 'Contemplative nuns' histories in the Victorian period [...] including those in the first refugee migrations in the 1790s are less visible than

⁵³ Susan O'Brien, 'An Overview of English Benedictine Nuns in the Nineteenth Century', paper given at the English Benedictine Congregation History Symposium (1994), p. 1, www.plantata.org.uk. See also 'French Nuns in Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), pp. 142–80; 'Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), pp. 110–40.

⁵⁴ Carmen Mangion, 'Women, Religious Ministry and Female-Institution Building', in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (London, 2010), p. 79, n. 44 and p. 91.

⁵⁵ John Stéphan, OSB, *A Brief History of St Scholastica's Abbey for Benedictine Nuns; of its Foundation at Dunkirk and its settlement at Teignmouth* (Ashburton, 1971).

⁵⁶ Anon, *In A Great Tradition*. This was written largely as a tribute to Dame Laurentia McLachlan (1866–1953) but it is the only substantial history of the community.

those of active women religious'; and again: 'the tricky position of contemplative nuns in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England has yet to be fully explored'.⁵⁷ Moutray presents a different perspective on nuns' historiography in her approach to English perceptions of women's religious life, through contemporary literature and culture, and indeed of the nuns changing perceptions of themselves. Most significantly, she recognises the existence of a double exile: exile from England to the Continent in the seventeenth century and from the Continent to England in the late eighteenth century. Describing the reluctance of the communities to leave France and the Low Countries she writes:

There is still much to discover about the ways in which these early refugee communities [...] worked around (or in spite of) anti-Catholic attitudes, interacted with [...] local communities, all the while keeping their traditions alive in a rapidly changing society.⁵⁸

Hannah Thomas has contributed to the historiography in her study of the settlement of Sepulchrine nuns in England⁵⁹ and work on their history continues with the Sepulchrine Fellowship, held by Cormac Begadon, at Durham University. The Sepulchrines however, were not strictly monastic in the sense of living a fully enclosed, contemplative life and Begadon contends that for them, the transition represented continuity rather than change.⁶⁰ As we have seen, work on religious women's history in the nineteenth century, has concentrated on the apostolic orders and institutes. Recent books by Carmen Mangion, Susan O'Brien and Barbara Walsh⁶¹ have furthered study on the sisterhoods in England. The development of Anglican

⁵⁷ Moutray, Tonya, *Refugee Nuns*, p. 166.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 170.

⁵⁹ Hannah Thomas, *The Secret Cemetery: A Guide to the Burial Ground of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre in the parishes of Boreham & Springfield, Chelmsford* (Leominster, 2017). The Sepulchrines were founded in Liège and migrated to England in 1794.

⁶⁰ Cormac Begadon, 'A Case for Continuity? From Liège to New Hall: the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre', paper given at a workshop 'Female Religious and Narratives of the French Revolution: Identity, Memory and History', 14 September 2021.

⁶¹ Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Manchester, 2014); Susan O'Brien, *Leaving God for God: The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Britain 1847–2017* (London, 2017); Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800–1937: A Social History* (Dublin, 2002).

women's orders has also received some attention.⁶² One exception, useful but all too brief, to the notable absence of published work on enclosed women in nineteenth-century England is Janet Hollinshead's account of the nuns from Cambrai who settled in Woolton from 1795 to 1807.⁶³ The view of historians may be summed up in the words of Alban Hood:

Perhaps the comparative neglect of female contemplatives in recent research is unsurprising, given that a distinctive feature of the nineteenth century religious revival was the introduction of new active apostolates for female religious. Nevertheless, the contribution of the nuns was an important part of English Benedictine life.⁶⁴

This thesis responds to calls for more research and redresses the neglect by focussing on the specific issues which differentiated the female from the male experience. These include enclosure, the nuns' agency and self-perception within a male hierarchical structure and a distinctive feminine spirituality within the Benedictine monastic framework. As Hood has observed: 'more research is needed to assess the contribution made to Catholic life in England [...] by these women [English Benedictine nuns] whose contemplative life counterbalanced the active apostolate of the monks'.⁶⁵

He has shown that the chief challenge facing the monks in adjusting to life in England was the change in their missionary apostolate. The big catalyst for change for the monks was the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850. It is argued in this thesis that for the nuns, the watershed-moment came earlier. The rupture of 1789–95, which drove them from Catholic Europe to unplanned exile in not-yet-Catholic England, struck at the very core of their lives. Their whole existence, which was predicated on continual prayer through silent contemplation and the recitation of the monastic Office day and night, was compromised by the demands of survival in England. For most of the communities this involved running a school; grappling

⁶² Susan Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (Leicester, 1999).

⁶³ Janet Hollinshead, 'From Cambrai to Woolton: Lancashire's First Female Religious House', *Recusant History*, 25 (2001).

⁶⁴ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 209.

with the French state for compensation or restitution and more focused fund-raising activities, all of which called for hitherto unpractised public relations skills in dealing with open hostility, suspicion or prurient curiosity. In the early years, this activity was undertaken without the external symbols – and security – of full enclosure and the habit.

Thus, for the nuns, unlike their male counterparts, these years were the ones of greatest change: by 1850, they were on the road to resettlement and revival as vocations increased, full monastic observance was restored and external relationships negotiated. By then, they were either established, or about to be established, in appropriate premises that would be their homes well into the next century.⁶⁶

The importance of this time-frame for the nuns has been confirmed by recent studies on apostolic sisterhoods. Susan O'Brien proposed a 'revisionist approach' to the 'history of the post-Reformation religious life for women in England which begins not in the mid-nineteenth century with the active congregations but in the 1790s with the return of the enclosed communities'.⁶⁷ Her argument, building on that of Bossy, Heimann and others, is that the traditional view of English Catholic revival beginning in 1850 with the 'second spring' is mere 'tenacious ecclesiastical propaganda'.⁶⁸ It began much earlier in the century and the enclosed orders were part of the growth. The apostolic orders did not emerge spontaneously in the mid-century; their arrival must be studied in the context of an on-going, organic development begun by the arrival of the enclosed nuns fifty years earlier. By focusing on the neglected history of the first nuns to appear in England since the Reformation, this thesis will show that the study of the active apostolates can be fully understood only in the light of the arrival of their enclosed

⁶⁶ See the table 'Movement of Nuns' below, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Susan O'Brien, 'An Overview of English Benedictine Nuns', p. 3.

⁶⁸ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, p. 297. See also Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome* (London, 1978), pp. 19–50 and Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, p. 7.

sisters earlier in the century.⁶⁹ It will provide further context for study of the active orders: stressing that together, the two form an integral part of the history of religious life for women. The contemplatives prepared England for the arrival of the sisterhoods by familiarising that society with the presence of habited nuns, the provision of Catholic schools, the promotion of an alternative lifestyle for Catholic women and the dissemination of Catholic spirituality. The advent of the apostolics allowed the contemplatives to focus on a fully monastic life.

Treating the period as a second exile also highlights an omission in historical refugee studies, particularly those concerning religious persecution, which has not yet recognised the nuns' migration experience as the time of rupture, trauma and exile that it was.⁷⁰ Examination of the libraries and reading habits of the nuns contributes to the historiography of the Book: treating the preservation of texts and appropriation of the book, as means of cultural self-identification among a hitherto unconsidered group.⁷¹ It also exposes a gap in wider fields of study: particularly the omission of religious women as educators by writers such as Jane McDermid⁷² and in the history of mental health.⁷³

Outline of Thesis

Faith interacts with the world in complex ways. It cannot help but be affected by external factors. In order to survive, a religious community must identify what is essential to its lived faith experience. That poses questions such as: what is of the essence, what is peripheral? What is of a particular age, what is timeless? The nuns grappled with such existential questions in

⁶⁹ The Mary Ward sisters were the only continual female Catholic presence in England, in their convents at York and Hammersmith, but they have a different historical narrative. See Gregory Kirkus, *An IBVM/CJ Biographical Dictionary of the English Members and Major Benefactors (1667–2000)* (York, 2007), pp. 1–30.

⁷⁰ Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Kroeker, Charles H Parker and Jonathan Ray (eds.), *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe: Strategies of Exile* (London, 2014).

⁷¹ See for example Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1834–1914* (Oxford, 2002).

⁷² See Jane McDermid, 'The Education of Young Ladies', in *The Schooling of Girls in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1900* (London, 2012).

⁷³ See in particular, Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (London, 2008), and Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London, 1997).

the early years in England and by the year 1838 can be seen to have discarded the ‘peripherals’ which tied them to the past. By the middle of the century, they focused on transmitting the essentials of their monastic life into the future. The articulation of this transition, experienced through renewed exile, will be explored in the following chapters.

The first two chapters analyse the collective history of contemplative English Benedictine women during the years 1795–1838, by examining relationships and connections within the conventual houses, and between those houses and wider society. Chapter One examines the nuns’ engagement with the exile experience and explores the struggle to negotiate the transition which would, eventually, enable resettlement in their native land and reconciliation of their Catholic and English identities. It considers the challenges and hardships the women experienced in the transition to England and assesses the strengths and weakness of the communities through an analysis of their age profile and death rates. These trials were exacerbated by the loss of components intrinsic to monastic life – enclosure, the monastic horarium and the habit. The impact of these is discussed. The chapter examines how any attempts to re-build in the early years of exile were hampered by most of the communities’ efforts to return to the Continent. Beneath this narrative however despite the nuns’ shattered health, poverty, perceptions of exile, and conflicting impulses to return or to rebuild, they were not passive victims but were able to assert agency in the economic, spiritual and social spheres of their new exile.

Chapter Two charts the slow journey to recovery. It explores the parameters within which growth took place and reveals the compromises that had to be made by the older nuns, the changes in socio-economic and educational backgrounds of new vocations, and negotiations required between the generations. It also examines the toll that second exile took on the health, both physical and mental, of the nuns and explores their delicate relations with Protestant neighbours. Considerable space is given to the establishment of schools as this is an area

neglected by historians to date and fills the gap between the early modern and later nineteenth century studies.⁷⁴ A school was one of the main means by which the nuns attempted both integration into the local community and economic self-sufficiency. It was however, to prove inimical to the contemplative life and increased the pressures of second exile.

Development of spiritual experience and its expression are essential to a living faith and the subsequent chapters provide an historical analysis of the areas at the heart of the contemplative life. Chapter Three considers the nuns' response to their new exile through their interior life of prayer, liturgy and devotion. It identifies ways in which their spirituality evolved and integrated later devotional exercises originally extrinsic to the Benedictine experience. It sets devotional practices which had developed in the eighteenth century alongside traditional contemplative ones and explores how both provided sustenance for the nuns and linked them to the wider transnational Church. This charts the nuns' spiritual journey and places them in the revival of mystical Benedictine traditions as well as the dissemination of what were perceived as 'Continental' devotions.

In Chapter Four a similar approach is taken regarding the nuns' expression and internalisation of exile through their reading and writing. It begins with an overview of the libraries in England examining the provenance of the books and goes on to discuss factors that influenced reading habits. It provides a survey of the books in the nuns' collections, identifying broad subject categories and discussing each for insights into the nuns' religious practices. These also reveal insights into their responses to Catholic Enlightenment and subsequent reactions such as millenarianism and the mystical tradition, both of which are vital to an understanding of their place in nineteenth-century Catholic England. The section continues with a comparison with other – non-Benedictine – libraries before and after the migration.

⁷⁴ Marie Rowlands has been a significant contributor to this field: 'Independence and obedience: Three Catholic Women Teachers 1820–1850', *Catholic Archives*, 38 (2018) and I am grateful to her for sight of 'The Fortress Church Forming the English Catholic Community in a changing society 1791–1840' (unpublished).

Nuns' textual interaction embraced not only reading but writing, copying and translation too, and the chapter ends by analysing what these express of their exile experience.

The English Benedictines

While research in the early modern period has surveyed the rich variety of English female religious orders founded on the Continent, this thesis concentrates solely on those within the Benedictine tradition – whose English identity was particularly strong.⁷⁵

Seventeen of the twenty-two English convents founded in exile on the Continent arrived in England in the years immediately following the Revolution. The five Benedictine communities have been selected for this study as representing an indicative sample of the English nuns' experience. The English Benedictines' archive collections are all relatively accessible and contain a wealth of material.

The Benedictines were founded in each of the two main locations of exile: France and what is now modern-day Belgium. They therefore reflect the different administrative/legal systems all the English convents lived under and the various experiences they had during the French Revolution. Their return to England covered the range of journeys made by the English convents; from the fairly orderly departure of the Brussels and Ghent nuns, who were able to bring many of their belongings with them, to the imprisonment and escape in near destitution of the Cambrai, Paris and Dunkirk communities. In community make-up they may also be seen as representative encompassing the very small (Paris) to the larger and more politically involved (Brussels and Ghent). Like all the English convents they were strictly enclosed but interaction with the outside world was maintained by them all. The approach to school-keeping (the main outreach activity) is also representative, from the somewhat larger schools at Ghent

⁷⁵ The other English houses, all of which migrated to England at the same period, belonged to the Augustinian, Bridgettine, Carmelite, Conceptionist, Dominican, Franciscan, Poor Clare and Sepulchrine orders. For a brief account of their journeys see Caroline Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 1 (London, 2012), pp. xxix–xxxiv.

and Dunkirk to the absence of any school at Paris which mirrored some of the smaller Poor Clare and Carmelite experiences.

After arrival in England the Benedictines' experiences also reflect the wider English nuns. They settled across the regions and in a mixture of urban and rural settings. They also represent a similar physical journey in terms of peripatetic early years followed by a move to more established homes in the mid-nineteenth century. The challenges encountered in terms of poverty, enclosure, wearing of the habit were common to all the returned convents.

Most of the English convents in exile were enclosed contemplatives and I argue that the Benedictines provide a good representative sample of this group. It would be instructive to compare the experience of the contemplatives with those who sought a less enclosed and more active outreach. The obvious example here is the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre whose main focus was education. Research has revealed that their migration to England was less upheaval and more continuity.⁷⁶ While a wider examination of the impact of the migration experience in England on other Orders is beyond the scope of this research, it should be part of future study.

The Benedictine Order had been a central pillar of the spiritual, social, cultural, educational, economic and political infrastructure of pre-Reformation England. After the Dissolution, the English Benedictine Congregation (EBC), which claims canonical continuity with the congregation established in the thirteenth century, was re-aggregated in 1607 and English Benedictine monasteries for monks were established on the Continent – in Douai (1606); Dieulouard (1607); St Malo (1611 – although this ceased to be an English house in 1669) and Paris (1615).⁷⁷ In the seventeenth century, the EBC consisted of five monasteries for men, after the incorporation of Lamspringe Abbey in 1643, and one of women (at Cambrai). The emphasis

⁷⁶ This has been proposed by Cormac Begadon see footnote 60, page 14.

⁷⁷ St Malo transferred to the French congregation of Saint-Maur.

of the monks in exile, differed from the pre-Reformation model; their primary function became a missionary one for the re-conversion of England.⁷⁸ Although some internal tension existed between the proponents of the mission as against the monastic ethos, the emphasis continued to be missionary into the nineteenth century – a fact which was to have implications in this period.⁷⁹ Six English houses of Benedictine nuns were founded on the Continent. Those at Brussels, Ghent, Ypres, Dunkirk and Pontoise⁸⁰ considered themselves to form a congregation, although this was not technically the case, as each was completely autonomous and had its own independent abbess. Each was subject to the jurisdiction of the bishop of the respective diocese, who conducted conventual visitations. They did however, all follow the same Statutes and Constitutions. The Cambrai community was founded in 1623 by the EBC monks and remained part of the Congregation. The Paris convent was founded from Cambrai but came under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Paris (see pp. 26–7 below).

The nuns also had a missionary role: pursued within the enclosure through prayer for the re-conversion of England and the preservation of English women's religious life. As well as this potent silent witness, their outreach took other forms: in the small schools attached to most of the monasteries; among the boarders accommodated within or outside the enclosure; with visitors they spoke to at the 'graytes' or communicated with by letter. Some of the convents provided refuges and bases for English activists in the Catholic cause.⁸¹

⁷⁸ The English monks took a fourth vow: to the mission, in addition to the traditional Benedictine ones.

⁷⁹ Even in the seventeenth century, this missionary emphasis had its opponents within the monasteries. Augustine Baker, in his writing on the EBC, warned of the spiritual dangers of the missionary life for monks. See, John Clark (ed.), *Treatise on the English Mission, the First Part* (Salzburg, 2011).

⁸⁰ Founded in 1652 at Boulogne from Ghent and moved to Pontoise in 1658, it was disbanded in 1786. The Ypres convent was founded in 1665, also from Ghent, but came under Irish jurisdiction in 1682. Neither is included in this research.

⁸¹ Claire Walker, 'Crumbs of News: Early Modern English Nuns and Royalist Intelligence Networks', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42 (2012), pp. 635–55.

The lived experience of the nuns differed in many aspects from that of the monks. Following the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) they were strictly enclosed, rarely leaving the monastery after entrance:

No nun shall after her profession be permitted to go out of the monastery, even for a brief period under any pretext whatever, except for a lawful reason to be approved by the bishop [...] Neither shall anyone [...] be permitted, under penalty of excommunication [...] to enter the enclosure of a monastery without the written permission of the bishop or superior.⁸²

For the English women who ventured across the Channel: ‘It was certainly not a career for the ambitious, a refuge for the indolent, or a dumping ground for the feebleminded and the unmarriedable’.⁸³ Their life was entirely contemplative and centred round the prayers of the Divine Office, which they celebrated in the seven monastic ‘Hours’ in choir and at Mass as well as periods of silent contemplative prayer. The liturgy was preeminent and observed with full ritual and ceremony. In addition, as Benedictines, great emphasis was placed on study, both the sacred reading of *lectio divina* and wider perusal, composition and copying of texts. The apostolate of the pen formed part of the nuns’ outreach.⁸⁴ Inevitably this rhythm changed in the post-1795 era and contributed to the new exile experience (see below pp. 253–59).

Communities in the Study

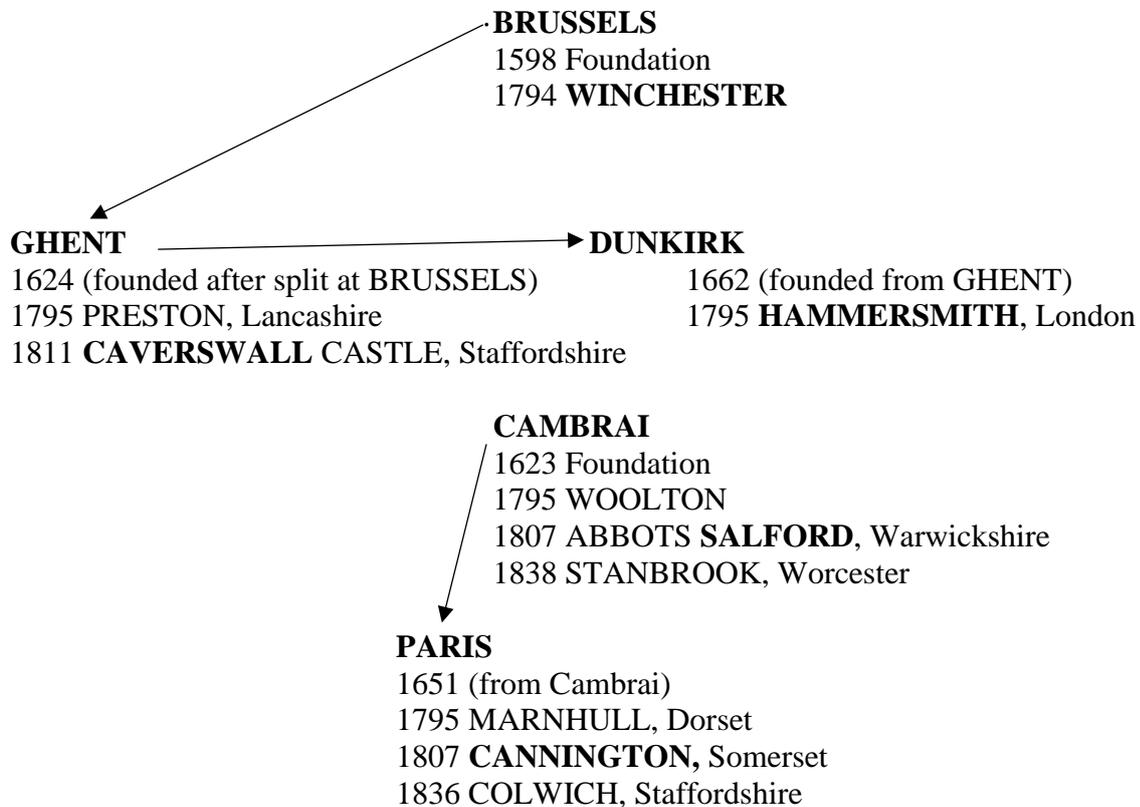
In this thesis the communities are referred to by their main residences in the period, unless referring to a particular time in their history when they stayed at a different location thus: the community from Brussels, ‘Winchester’; the community from Cambrai, ‘Salford’; the

⁸² Schroeder (ed.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, XXV: V, pp. 220–1.

⁸³ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p. 73.

⁸⁴ See Jaime Goodrich, ‘Translating Lady Mary Percy: Authorship and Authority among the Brussels Benedictines’; Jenna Lay, ‘The Literary Lives of the Nuns: Crafting Identity through Exile’, both in Bowden, and Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile*, pp. 109–22 and pp. 71–86.

community from Ghent, ‘Caverswall’; the community from Paris, ‘Cannington’; and the community from Dunkirk, ‘Hammersmith’.



Benedictine Nuns from Brussels (Our Lady of the Assumption)

The first Benedictine house for women was founded in 1598, at Brussels, by Lady Mary Percy. Although Percy had trained in Ignatian methods of meditation with Jesuit priest John Gerard and spent time with the Augustinian nuns at Louvain, she founded her monastery with a Benedictine abbess under the Benedictine Rule.⁸⁵ Percy remained faithful in upholding the Rule in face of those in the community who favoured Jesuit directors. During this period loyalty to, and rivalry between, Ignatian and Benedictine theologies was played out in the convents.

⁸⁵ The first abbess was Joanna Berkeley, WWTN BB015, an English nun from the French Benedictine house in Rheims.

At Brussels, the tension was such that it resulted in the establishment of a ‘breakaway’ house at Ghent in 1624.⁸⁶

At the request of the President of the EBC in 1623, the abbess of Brussels sent three nuns to assist in the formation of the novices at the newly established convent in Cambrai. Difficulties arose during this period concerning the transmission of what was felt to be Jesuit teaching to these young Benedictines. After the formation period however, two of the three Brussels nuns transferred their stability to Cambrai, despite having originally been ardent followers of the Ignatian way.⁸⁷ The community left Brussels and returned to England in 1794.⁸⁸ It settled successively in Winchester, East Bergholt, Swynnerton and Haslemere and closed in 1979.

Benedictine Nuns from Ghent (Abbey of the Immaculate Conception)

Ghent was not strictly a foundation by Brussels but was established following bitter internal spiritual and governance controversies which resulted in a breakaway group in 1624. The nuns who settled in Ghent sought out Jesuit confessors and observed a more Ignatian-based spirituality.⁸⁹

Like their sisters in Brussels, they were able to escape the French revolutionaries and were never subject to arrest or imprisonment. Both communities dispatched some property to England and did not arrive on British shores entirely destitute. The nuns from Ghent landed in two parties in June 1794. They settled first at Preston in Lancashire and then moved to

⁸⁶ See Jaime Goodrich, ‘Authority, Gender and Monastic Piety: Controversies at the English Benedictine Convent in Brussels, 1620–23’, *British Catholic History*, 33 (2016), pp. 91–114 and Paul Arblaster, ‘The Monastery of Our Lady of the Assumption in Brussels (1599–1794)’, paper given at the Benedictine History Symposium (1999) (www.plantata.org.uk), pp. 54–77.

⁸⁷ Dames Frances Gawen [Gawine], WWTN BB089, and Pudentiana Deacon, BB058, remained at Cambrai. Dame Viviana Yaxley, BB201, returned to Brussels, but through duty rather than conviction according to the Stanbrook annalist: see SBAA, Annals Vol. 1.

⁸⁸ Although the abbess, Dame Ursula Pigott, WWTN BB140 (who had experienced mental health problems for some years) refused to join them and spent her last years on the Continent.

⁸⁹ See Veronica Buss, ‘Influences Which Have Helped to Form our Spirituality’, EBC History Symposium paper, 1977.

Caverswall Castle, Staffordshire before finally settling at Oulton Abbey in 1853. The community closed in 2019.

Benedictine Nuns from Dunkirk⁹⁰

The Dunkirk community is the least chronicled of all the English houses. It was founded from Ghent in 1662, when that house had expanded to full capacity.⁹¹ The Ghent convent was involved in supporting the Catholic cause in English political activities and received support from the Stuart Court and Catholic nobility at home, which enabled them to obtain financial patronage for the new foundation.⁹² The Dunkirk house, like its founding mother, remained firmly allied to Jesuit teaching and retained Jesuit confessors.⁹³

In 1793, the convent was seized by French revolutionaries and the nuns took refuge with the English Poor Clares, first in Dunkirk and later at Gravelines, where they were imprisoned for over a year. They suffered extreme hardship and only narrowly escaped the guillotine. Despite attempts to recover their property in Dunkirk (the monastery building was burnt to the ground but the nuns owned other houses in the town), they departed for England in 1795. A collection from the annals, entitled *A History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk*, was edited by the community in 1957.⁹⁴ This remains the main published account of their history. The community, which later moved to Teignmouth in Devon, closed in 1987.

⁹⁰ Official sources give no titular for this community although a book in the Hammersmith Library List is inscribed 'Belonging to ye Immaculate Conception, Dunquerk [sic], 1618': DAA TVII A h5 (143249). As this is the title of the Ghent convent it is possible the Dunkirk nuns kept the same patronage.

⁹¹ The town of Dunkirk was, like Boulogne, the property of the English crown. After the sale of the town back to France in 1663, the Dunkirk convent was elevated to the status of an abbey.

⁹² Political activity was less in the houses at Cambrai and Paris.

⁹³ See Murray-Sinclair, 'Hammersmith: A Bridge', p.1.

⁹⁴ Anon, *History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk* (London, 1957).

Benedictine Nuns from Cambrai (Our Lady of Consolation)

The English Benedictine monastery of Our Lady of Consolation was founded in 1623, under the auspices of the EBC, with nine young English women recruited by Benet Jones OSB.⁹⁵ Three Brussels nuns introduced to direct their formation, despite being ‘fervent and exemplary in their religious life’, were not successful in this task, due largely to their Ignatian methods of spirituality.⁹⁶ In 1624, the English Benedictine monk and mystic, Dom Augustine Baker, was sent to provide contemplative input.⁹⁷ Baker was significantly more successful and inculcated in the novices a distinctively Benedictine spirit, based on contemplation, silent prayer, the study of Scripture and mystical texts. The nuns produced prolific works in their scriptorium and played an important role in the preservation and dissemination of a variety of spiritual works.⁹⁸

After 171 years at Cambrai, the community was placed under house arrest in the autumn of 1793, and subsequently imprisoned in Compiègne. They endured eighteen months of hardship, during which four of the community died and they were in danger of following fellow-prisoners, the Carmelite martyrs, to the guillotine. In May 1795, they made the voyage to England, after efforts to regain their property in Cambrai had failed. A detailed, first-hand account of the experiences between 1793–5 was written by Dame Ann Teresa Partington, soon after arrival in England.⁹⁹ The community settled first in Woolton, Lancashire and moved, in 1807, to Abbots Salford (Salford) in Warwickshire where they remained until 1838, when they relocated to Stanbrook Abbey, Worcestershire. They are now based in Wass, North Yorkshire.

⁹⁵ MIM 689.

⁹⁶ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Augustine (David) Baker, 1575–1641, MIM900.

⁹⁸ See Placid Spearritt, ‘The Survival of Mediaeval Spirituality among Exiled English Black Monks’, in Michael Woodward (ed.), *That Mysterious Man: Essays on Augustine Baker OSB 1575–1641* (Abergavenny, 2001), pp. 19–42. Jaime Goodrich, ‘“Attend to Me”: Julian of Norwich, Margaret Gascoigne and Textual Circulation among the Cambrai Benedictines’, in James E. Kelly and Susan Royal, *Early Modern Catholicism, Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation*, pp. 105–121.

⁹⁹ See Scholastica Jacob (ed.), *A Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray and Two Hairs and a Dish of Tortoise*, from the writings of Dame Ann Teresa Partington (Stanbrook, 2016).

Benedictine Nuns from Paris (Our Lady of Good Hope)

By 1650, the monastery at Cambrai numbered forty-five nuns.¹⁰⁰ Under both spatial and financial pressure, the nuns acquired permission from the EBC to make a foundation in Paris. In February 1652, eight nuns from Cambrai moved there. To possess property and admit novices under French law, the community were required to come under the jurisdiction of the local bishop and thus left the EBC.¹⁰¹ The Priory of Our Lady of Good Hope always remained an English convent however, recruiting almost exclusively British women.¹⁰²

Spiritually they were always part of the English Benedictine Congregation; [and added to their vows] a further dedication to: “offer myself and all my actions for the Conversion of England, in union with our Fathers’ labour of mission; and as they promise and swear to go and return as they are commanded, so will I live and die, in this my offering, in this Convent”.¹⁰³

On 30 October 1793, the nuns were placed under house arrest in their own building where they continued to observe their choir duties. They were later imprisoned with other English nuns and moved to the Augustinian convent at Fosses St Victor, Paris. They moved willingly to England, following a community vote, in the summer of 1795, which found all but one in favour of return. The nuns managed to recover much of their property but were forced to sell part of it to fund the journey. They settled first at Marnhull, Devon and then moved to Cannington, Somerset. In 1837, they made a permanent home in Colwich, Staffordshire. The community closed in 2000 and the remaining nuns joined Stanbrook Abbey.

¹⁰⁰ Accounts vary from thirty-nine to fifty, although some tallies may include pupils in the school.

¹⁰¹ The petition was made in 1653; however, it was not ratified by General Chapter until 1657. By then the nuns had placed themselves under the protection of the Archbishop of Paris. In 1926 they re-joined the EBC.

¹⁰² This was a deliberate choice, the intention being to retain the exclusively English nature of the community (although it also had Welsh and Scottish members). The house remained a priory (under a prioress) until 1928 when it was elevated to an Abbey.

¹⁰³ Jan Rhodes, ‘English Roots and French Connections: The English Benedictine Nuns in Paris’, *Recusant History* 31 (2013), pp. 535–49.

Charism and Spirituality of the Communities

Laurence Lux-Sterritt's observation that: 'Benedictine Nuns [...] offer an interestingly mottled picture of various strands of spirituality within the same order'¹⁰⁴ illustrates the flexibility of the Rule of St Benedict. It is one of the reasons why Benedictine communities have adapted and flourished over successive generations and cultures. Lux-Sterritt's statement is fully evidenced in the five communities in this study. Each community had developed its own distinctive spirituality, to the extent that while each was in name and law following the Holy Rule and observing similar external practices, the spiritual temper of each house was so different that a member of one might find it hard to adapt to another.¹⁰⁵ The Ghent and Dunkirk communities continued their allegiance to Jesuit confessors and directors until the suppression of the Society of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ Consideration has been given as to whether the Jesuit-Benedictine debate was due to spiritual or political issues. Claire Walker discusses the Brussels troubles and later issues at Cambrai, over the teaching of Augustine Baker and concludes that they were both.¹⁰⁷ James Kelly has observed that: 'the choice of a specific Catholic spirituality was a political choice in itself' and the choice of a particular house amidst their 'competing spiritualities' was a 'hugely politicised exercise'.¹⁰⁸ It is contended here that the nuns were well aware of this interconnectedness of religious and political identity, both in the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries.

¹⁰⁴ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ As illustrated by the incompatibility between the Brussels nuns and the Cambrai novices they were sent to train, who were already wedded to a different tradition.

¹⁰⁶ Final suppression occurred in 1773. Ex-Jesuits continued to minister to these communities.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 130–72 and 'Securing Souls or Telling Tales? The Politics of Cloistered Life in an English Convent', in Cordula van Wyhe (ed.), *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 227–44. See also Jaime Goodrich, 'Authority, Gender and Monastic Piety: Controversies at the English Benedictine Convent in Brussels, 1620–23', *British Catholic History*, 33 (2016), pp. 91–114.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe*, pp. 33 and 45.

Gender and Authority

While religious women were not lacking in political voice, confidence and influence, direct contribution to developments within the Church was inevitably, more limited. All convents were placed under an external, male, authority: in the person of either the local bishop or the superior of the monastic congregation to which they belonged. All the nuns in this study, except for those founded at Cambrai, were answerable to the regional vicar apostolic, many of whom had little knowledge of women's conventual life. The extent to which this external, male figure could intervene in and dictate the governance and even minor details of daily administration of the community was not infrequently a contentious issue. Caroline Bowden has outlined the difficulties this presented on the Continent.¹⁰⁹ As we shall discuss, these tensions continued in the English exile.

Sources

The lack of historiography of contemplative nuns in the nineteenth century means that this current research is substantially dependant on primary sources. Within the archives of the English communities there is a repository of hitherto largely unexplored material.¹¹⁰ It consists of a wealth of information: correspondence, annals, common-place books, journals, chronicles, conferences, ceremonials, book lists and unpublished spiritual writings by nuns. Archive collections for the communities in this study are located in various venues. Material from the Brussels/Winchester community, which closed in 1979, is at both Downside Abbey Archives (DSAA) and Douai Abbey Archives (DAA); the Cambrai/Salford collection is at the community's present location at Stanbrook Abbey, Wass (SBAA). The Paris/Colwich archives

¹⁰⁹ Bowden (gen. ed.), *English Convents in Exile*, 1, p. xiii.

¹¹⁰ Much remains uncatalogued.

(CAA) are currently being moved to Stanbrook Abbey. Both the Ghent/Caverswall and the Dunkirk/Hammersmith archive collections are at Douai Abbey Archives.

It is important in the study of personal records to be alert to possible subjectivism and false memory.¹¹¹ While original manuscripts provide a means of textual analysis of the impact of the new exile on contemplative women in the early nineteenth century, all narratives have their own conventions and perspectives. Within the writings and record-keeping of the monastic houses there are common themes, structures and images which produce an important intertextuality. These should, however, be read with an awareness that while the convent experiences were not identical, the women used familiar forms and modes of expression which tell much about prevailing spirituality and a shared response to external forces.

Terminology

Although technically the nuns' houses are monasteries not convents, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century nuns frequently referred to their homes as convents and historiography has applied that term to monastic, enclosed communities of women. The word 'monastery' is used for enclosed nuns who live a strictly cloistered life, take solemn vows and carry out no external, apostolic work. This study will generally use the term 'monastery' or 'house' as distinct from the 'convents' of apostolic sisters in simple vows which were to develop in the nineteenth century. Most houses within the Benedictine Order are abbeys, presided over by an abbot or abbess. Some, because of size or governance, are priories, ruled by a prior or prioress.¹¹² Confusingly, the office of prior and prioress also exist in an abbey – as second-in-command

¹¹¹ See Christina Howard and Keith Tuffin, 'Repression in Retrospect: constructing history in the "memory debate"', *History of Human Sciences*, 15 (2002), pp. 75–93 and Joseph E. Davis, 'Victim Narratives and Victim Selves: False Memory Syndrome and the Power of Accounts', *Social Problems*, 52 (2005), pp. 529–48.

¹¹² There is no strict definition of an abbey or a priory. Neither is there a set number of members which dictates the appellation. The Paris community was always a priory although it was never dependant on the Cambrai house. On application to the Pope, it was raised 'to the dignity of an abbey' in 1928, see Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, pp. 237–8.

after the abbot/abbess. The Benedictine community of nuns at Paris (later Cannington and Colwich) remained a priory, under a prioress, until 1928; the others were constitutionally abbeys.

Benedictine monasteries until the Second Vatican Council also divided the community into choir and lay members. The former devoted their lives to prayer, in the choir and in private meditation and took solemn vows (for life). The requirement for entrance as a choir nun was generally dependent upon the woman's level of education, social status, and the dowry she could bring to the community. Lay-sisters took simple vows – renewable and more easily terminable – and were distinguished by subtle differences in the habit. Their main work was manual labour, and they were not expected to participate in the Office, although they had their own 'Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary', or to do the reading and study required of choir nuns.

The term 'nun' (*moniale*) refers to choir nuns in solemn vows and that of 'sister' (*soror*) to lay or apostolic sisters in simple vows. The official title for a professed Benedictine choir nun is 'dame' and the correct use of the title 'dame' and 'sister' was strictly observed until the 1960s.¹¹³

¹¹³ Solemnly professed nuns still use the title 'dame' ceremonially but are generally referred to as 'sister'.

Chapter One

Exile and Survival

Survival rather than revival marked the tone of English Benedictine monasticism until the middle of the nineteenth-century.¹

This chapter treats the early years of the nuns' arrival in England as a struggle for survival and identifies the most significant obstacles they faced in their new exile. It begins by positioning them in their new environment and considers the prevailing religious and political issues and the confusion of loyalty they experienced. It surveys the communities' geographical movements and assesses their physical and spiritual state on arrival. It discusses how survival required compromises which affected the central pillars of their life: the wearing of the religious habit, the monastic enclosure and the horarium, and considers how these impacted on the nuns. It also observes that the blueprint for survival in the first exile was continued in the second, in the exigencies of accepting lady boarders and occasionally, postulants, based more on dowry than vocational potential. Conflicting with the struggle to settle was the desire to return to the Continent, so the chapter then considers efforts the nuns made to recover their old homes – or obtain restitution for their losses – efforts which dominated the first twenty-odd years and impeded efforts to rebuild. It concludes with a review of the nuns' financial situation and highlights their income sources and fund-raising efforts. These factors are important in understanding the challenges faced and explain why arrival in England was experienced as a second exile rather than a home-coming.

¹Alban Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival: Continuity and Change in the English Benedictine Congregation 1795–1850* (Farnborough, 2014), pp. 26–8.

Dimensions of the Struggle

The period of this study can be divided into two unequal parts: the fifteen years from 1795, followed by the years from c.1810 to 1838. The first marked the most intense time of upheaval and disorientation. The nuns' energies were centred solely on survival. This required engagement with financial negotiations, business affairs and practical matters of daily living, none of which they had dealt with so directly before. It entailed frequent journeys outside the enclosure, encounters with Protestants and 'seculars' of many persuasions and required a more active life than they had hitherto known. They encountered both hostility and kindness from their hosts; the time was one of psychological and physical displacement. The first years were spent in temporary, far from ideal, accommodation. Some communities were split up (the nuns of both the Dunkirk and Ghent houses spent months separated in different lodgings) and the majority were compelled to undertake uncongenial work and make serious compromises in their religious observance. The shock of daily life in England was intensely felt: 'the absence of inclosure [sic] and the near vicinity of the streets of an English town' were a painful exchange for 'the perfect retirement of the Ghent monastery with its exclusively Catholic surroundings'.² The end of the first decade saw a shift to greater stability. It remained a period of transition, but a less reactive and more self-determining one. The nuns began to exercise agency in the transition process. By 1811, three of the communities had moved to more appropriate premises allowing greater return to monastic observance, although these were still considered what a later commenter described as 'only a station in the tent-life they had led since leaving France'.³

The whole period required a grappling with issues of self-identity and loyalty. In the first exile, the desire to preserve the heritage of English monasticism lay at the heart of the nuns'

² Anon, *Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent* (Oulton, 1894), p. 89.

³ Anon, *Stanbrook Abbey, A Sketch of its History, 1625–1925* (London, 1925), p. 55.

raison d'être.⁴ In England the communities also sought to reclaim their lost heritage, but this time it lay, as they saw it, on the Continent and they experienced a crisis of identity as a result. This chapter will consider how they reconciled their nationality and their religion at a time when English identity was firmly Protestant.⁵ While James Kelly has shown that the nuns first and foremost identified as Catholic,⁶ the Benedictines' loyalty to England had remained undiminished: an example of this is the cut-work coat of arms of England created by two of the Cambrai community in 1793 and smuggled out of France. Preserved with special reverence it was later framed and inscribed: 'May it remain in its present state, in testimony of our allegiance to our King and Country!!! 1818'.⁷

On the Continent, the English convents have sometimes been portrayed as enclosed bastions of English life. At Cambrai, according to a later nun-historian:

Not a single French or Flemish choir nun was admitted [...] and only a very few locally born lay-sisters, maybe one in each generation. The cellarer would doubtless muster enough French to deal with officials and tradespeople; the rest of the community had no contact with their fellow-citizens, felt no obligation even to learn the language. In thought, speech, habits, allegiance the house has ever remained stolidly English.⁸

This somewhat partial statement may reflect more about perceptions of later generations than the living reality.⁹ The enclosure walls were more porous than portrayed here¹⁰ and

⁴ See Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 102–30, for a detailed discussion. Also, Caroline Bowden, 'Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century', *English Studies*, 92 (2011), pp. 483–95.

⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London, 2003).

⁶ See James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe c.1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2020).

⁷ SBAA: see Scholastica Jacob (ed.), *A Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray from the writings of Dame Ann Teresa Partington* (Stanbrook, 2016), pp. 66–8.

⁸ Anon, *In a Great Tradition* (London, 1956), p. 72.

⁹ For a discussion of language and ethnicity in the English convents see Emilie Murphy, 'Exile and Linguistic Encounter: Early English Modern Convents in the Low Countries and France', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 73 (2020), p. 132–64, and 'Language and Power in an English Convent in Exile, c.1621–1631', *The Historical Journal*, 62 (2019), pp. 101–25.

¹⁰ See Caroline Bowden, 'Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century', *English Studies*, 92 (2011), pp. 483–95 and Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, pp. 102–30.

‘Englishness’ was preserved, at least in part, by regulations which forbade the entrance of local women, although these rules were occasionally waived.¹¹ At Ghent, the ‘Abbess deviated from the general rule’ of ‘keeping to English subjects’ and admitted one Flemish sister because the candidate was ‘so pleasing and gentle’.¹² The Benedictine nuns’ deep historic rootedness in the history of England and special bond with the monks on the active mission ensured that they steadfastly maintained their national character, possibly more than the other English nuns:

At the heart of the Benedictine nunneries lay the desire to return to the piety at the heart of the heritage of English monasticism [...] they felt deeply attached to the specific Catholic tradition of their nation, and strove to define for themselves an identity which was specifically English even in their Continental exile.¹³

The England they arrived in however, was not ready for the restoration of the monastic tradition and in 1795, the nuns did not regard it as a permanent home. Many religious feared that revolutionary unrest would spread to England from the Continent¹⁴ and also feared aspects of emerging Catholicism in England, especially as represented by the Cisalpine Club in which they saw an ‘un-catholic spirit then spreading in England’.¹⁵ It was by remaining loyal to both their Catholicity and their Englishness that the nuns believed they were fulfilling the aims of their foundresses: to compromise either of these allegiances would be to betray their heritage. Thus, while juggling life in England with attempts to return to the Continent, they maintained their loyalty to Catholic countries by continuing to invest in overseas funds, by remaining connected to pan-national networks, by reading the same books and sharing the same devotions as their co-religionists in Europe.

¹¹ These varied from region to region.

¹² Anon, *Annals*, p. 77.

¹³ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, pp. 102–3.

¹⁴ This is clear from the efforts to return to the Continent, see pp. 72–77 below and the continued investment in overseas stocks, see pp. 85–8.

¹⁵ Anon, *Annals*, p. 70–1.

Exile Narratives

Heritage preservation is an important part of the exile experience and the Benedictines' engagement in this process reveals much about their perceptions of a new exile. Community record-keeping is never completely neutral or objective and the reader must be aware of the perspective of the chronicler as well subsequent appropriation and reconstruction. The community narratives provide insight not only into the events themselves but also into the nuns' particular version of their exile story. The exile narratives of the last years' of persecution on the Continent and the exile to England are an important starting point for the study of the early years in England.¹⁶

Each community left some first-hand account describing the individual and collective experience of exile. Not all are anonymous, but all describe events experienced by the body rather than just an individual author. The voice in these narratives may be taken as 'subsumed autobiography': an experience articulated by one member for the entire community.¹⁷ The least detailed records come from Brussels where no single voice speaks directly of personal suffering. The main source is the Annals, written sometime after the events recounted but drawing on memories of the survivors.¹⁸ The Visitation Reports from 1794 and various correspondence give additional insight into the sufferings of the community.¹⁹ Two first-hand

¹⁶ For a discussion of pre-Revolution experience of other English communities see Cormac Begadon, 'Responses to Revolution: The Experiences of the English Benedictine Monks in the French Revolution', *British Catholic History*, 34 (2018), pp. 106–28; 'Meandering Towards an Inevitable Death? English Benedictine Monasteries and their Response to Enlightenment and Revolution', in Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly (eds), *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Durham, 2021), pp. 245–65. For a wider treatment of religious life in the period see: Derek Beales *Prosperity and Plunder: European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 2003) and, on women's communities, Gemma Betros, 'Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789–90', *Women's History Review*, 18 (2009), pp. 311–26.

¹⁷ Victoria van Hying, 'Expressing Selfhood in the Convent: Anonymous Chronicling and Subsumed Autobiography', *British Catholic History*, 32 (2014) pp. 219–34.

¹⁸ The published *Chronicles* quote from an account of their 'exodus' written by survivor, Dame Philippa Eccles, WWTN BB069. This is no longer extant except in these extracts. See Anon, *Chronicles* (Bergholt, 1898) p. 232.

¹⁹ DAAA Annals, pp. 213–40. DAAA, Box VI.C correspondence (3111). DAA, 'Visitation Reports' and 'Winchester' Box BO IV BI.

sources survive from Cambrai: Ann Teresa Partington's detailed *Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray*, written immediately on return to England²⁰ and a manuscript collection of family letters, the 'Knight Letters', which span the years 1761 to 1802.²¹ In addition, the Annals, written up in the middle of the nineteenth century, rely heavily on personal memory and witness.²² The Caverswall annals were compiled from a mixture of memory, contemporary letters and documents which survived from Ghent.²³ Copies of the 'Tempest Letters', are preserved at Douai Abbey and give an account of the last days in Ghent and arrival in England. Detailed accounts were left by two Paris nuns: Theresa Joseph Johnson and Mother Teresa Catherine Macdonald.²⁴ They record factual events in sometimes emotive language and have the benefit for historians of confirming each other's memory. The manuscript annals from Dunkirk relied heavily on first-hand accounts culled from the memory of lay-sister Winifred Tobin, who survived the exile, 'a remnant of a piece of good stuff in its time' and lived to ninety, dying in 1846.²⁵

While largely maintaining an objective tone in the official records, personal voices resound through all accounts: a note to the Tempest letters records that Dame Mary Anselm Tempest, 'escaped to England [...] with hardly a rag to her tail'.²⁶ The Hammersmith records celebrate Tobin's life: 'Thanks to her, many particulars are preserved which otherwise would have been forgotten or never known'.²⁷ They interweave national events with personal touches: the Ghent nuns describe how they viewed the battle from their windows as the French advanced into the city. Cannon balls flew over their roof and one landed in the garden narrowly missing the

²⁰ Jacob (ed.), *Brief Narrative*.

²¹ SBAA, Box 328.

²² SBAA, Annals: Vol 1, Part 2.

²³ DAA, BO Box IV and Anon, *Annals*, pp. 70–91.

²⁴ CAA, Johnson's account is reproduced in Caroline Bowden (ed.), *Convents in Exile*, 6 (London, 2012), pp. 297–349. See also Robert Eaton, *The Benedictines of Colwich 1829–1929* (London, 1929), pp. 43–69.

²⁵ WWTN DB174.

²⁶ DAA, BO IV A Box 7 (105956). WWTN GB221.

²⁷ DAA, BT VI 1.

portress.²⁸ The Dunkirk nuns also experienced fighting outside their church, and shots penetrated the windows.²⁹ In October 1793, they witnessed the Siege of Dunkirk, their monastery was occupied, and property sequestered. The community was taken to Gravelines and during the journey by canal, they overheard their captors discuss whether to sink the barge to be ‘saved all further trouble’. In prison the nuns were taken by their gaolers to view the guillotine and believed: ‘Their chance of escaping that terrible death was at one time slight indeed; for after the death of Robespierre it was discovered that he had done them the honour of inscribing all their names in his pocketbook’.³⁰

Dame Ann Teresa Partington in her description of the journey in open carts from Cambrai to Compiègne writes: ‘They thought Death would soon have followed and expected every moment to see the fatal guillotine’.³¹ The Paris accounts too, dwell on the constant fear of death: ‘It is impossible to convey the Idea to those who have not Experienced it [imprisonment], the Victims we saw carried to death and the uncertainty we were in of our own lot made things indifferent to us which in other circumstances would have been more sensible’.³²

Johnson’s recollections speak of the resistance the nuns put up against their oppressors and the steps they took to preserve what was most precious.³³ The church silver was walled up and breviaries hidden so they could continue to say the Office. Maintaining normal routine was a big part of resistance: recreations went on as usual in prison for the Dunkirk nuns and ‘Dame Benedict Sheldon would even play the violin’.³⁴ The shock of having ‘Persons of all Classes from the highest to the lowest Rank, men, women and children’ shut up with them in their own

²⁸ Anon, *History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk* (London, 1957) p. 80.

²⁹ Ibid p. 112.

³⁰ Ibid p. 126.

³¹ Jacob (ed.), *Brief Narrative*, p. 22.

³² *Convents in Exile*, 6, p. 313.

³³ See Carmen Mangion, ‘Avoiding “Rash and Imprudent Measures”’: English Nuns in Revolutionary France 1789–1801’, in Caroline Bowden and James E Kelly (eds.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 247–63.

³⁴ Anon, *History*, p.127.

convent was traumatic for the sheltered Paris community but their defiance continued in the face of guillotine and starvation.³⁵ Even in the reluctant decision to seek refuge in England they showed determination to retain their own agency: ‘Seeing no prospect of an end to the miseries of the unhappy country in which we were confined, and provisions growing so scarce and dear that it became quite out of our power to procure them, we at last resolved to apply to Paris for passports to return to our native country’.³⁶

Tropes of desecration and religious fortitude are held in counter-point:

a terrible trial [came] to our community. Their church, the home of the Most Blessed Sacrament, where they had made their vows to God, where they had spent the greater part of their lives, and where they lay in their last sleep before being borne to the tomb, was taken from them to be used by the Jacobins for their meetings. In the bitter anguish of their hearts might they not have cried out: *Ecce sancta nostra et pulchritudo nostra, et claritas nostra desolata est* (Behold, our sanctuary and beauty and glory is laid waste, I Maccabees, chapter 2 verse 12.) [...] here was destruction, exile and death [...] and there seemed no side on which to turn for comfort [...] neither insult, the want of the necessaries of life, nor even the sight of the ghastly guillotine, still reeking with the blood of its last victims, could shake the courage and confidence in God of the faithful little band. The nuns bore all, not only with unmurmering serenity, but with greatest fortitude, cheerfulness and resignation.³⁷

The sense of repeated exile pervades all the reminiscences. Writing in the published *Chronicles* the anonymous author from Brussels muses:

Two centuries had elapsed, since driven by persecution and penal laws, the first mothers and founders of the Cloister of Our Lady of Brussels had fled from English shores and sought refuge and protection in Catholic Flanders. After having enjoyed during these two hundred years a peaceful home and asylum in Brussels, their successors now found

³⁵ CAA, MS. pp. 44–5 and Bowden (gen. ed.), *Convents in Exile*, 6, p. 318.

³⁶ Bowden (gen. ed.), *Convents in Exile*, 6, p. 329.

³⁷ Anon, *History*, pp. 118, 124–7.

themselves obliged to fly, and seek in their own country the protection and liberty which they could no longer expect on the continent.³⁸

While recognising the hand of 'Providence in this return of monastic life to England' they used the familiar rhetoric of exile to describe the process:

If this task was a glorious one, it was only to be accomplished by the Cross, and the passing through a Red Sea of suffering and combat. As long as it was possible our nuns held back, hoping and praying for peace, and dreading to leave the dear enclosure of the Monastery, which had so long sheltered and protected them.³⁹

The Ghent nuns articulated a similar response:

They soon realised that the breaking up of their old home was only a question of time, and the recent Act of Toleration for Catholics, together with the generous welcome lately given by the English to the French emigrant clergy, determined them once more to seek their native country, as soon as they should be expelled from the home which had sheltered them for 170 years.⁴⁰

The nuns expressed the humiliation of arriving as refugees in their native land, describing their appearance as 'ludicrous in the extreme', 'clothed in garments of various shapes, textures and hue, bed curtains forming the principal feature in the material of which they were made' and concluding, 'No marvel was it that the servants smiled'.⁴¹ The nuns from Ghent were [...] 'disguised in such secular clothes as they could hastily procure, for it would not have been prudent to show themselves in the religious dress either to the French or the English at that time. [They arrived] in a state of utter destitution'.⁴²

³⁸ Anon, *Chronicles of the First Monastery Founded for Benedictine Nuns, 1597* (Bergholt, 1898), p. 229.

³⁹ *Ibid* p. 229–30.

⁴⁰ *Annals* p. 79.

⁴¹ *History* p. 131.

⁴² *Annals* p. 80–1

Movements of the Nuns

The years 1795–1838 were wilderness ones during which the communities experienced geographical instability:

	BRUSSELS	CAMBRAI	GHENT	PARIS	DUNKIRK
1794	Winchester, Wiltshire	1795 Woolton, near Liverpool	1794 Preston, Lancashire	1795 Marnhull, Dorset	1795 Hammersmith, London
		1807 Abbots Salford, Warwickshire	1811 Caverswall, Staffs	1807 Cannington, Somerset	
1856	East Bergholt, Norfolk	1838 Stanbrook Abbey, Worcestershire	1853 Oulton, Staffs	1837 Colwich, Staffs.	1862 Teignmouth, Devon.
1942 1948 1976	Swynnerton Haslemere Closed	2009 Stanbrook, Wass, Yorkshire	2018 Closed. Remaining nun joined Stanbrook, Wass	2020 Closed. Several remaining nuns joined Stanbrook, Wass	1987 Closed

The first forty years saw three of the houses move from totally inappropriate accommodation to more acceptable, interim homes before, in the mid-century, all the communities found long-term settlement where full monastic observance could be restored.

The Position of Catholics in England in 1795

Although the Catholic Emancipation Act was still three decades away, the England to which the nuns returned was more tolerant of Catholics. While Relief Acts of 1778, 1791 and 1793 eased their political and economic situation, anti-Catholicism of the period should not be

played down.⁴³ Catholic worship was legalised by the 1791 Act, and the decade saw many country-house chapels closed and missions moved to towns following demographic changes and industrialisation.⁴⁴ While Catholic churches became increasingly urban, female monastic communities settled in predominantly rural areas.⁴⁵ This required an adjustment on the part of the nuns who under Tridentine Law were required to inhabit monasteries built within city walls.⁴⁶ The Relief legislation revived intolerance to some extent, as seen in the Gordon Riots of 1780, although the outrages committed then and the excesses of the French Revolution, turned public sympathy towards Catholics⁴⁷ and created a more welcoming climate for the refugee communities.⁴⁸ Attitudes reversed after the General Election of 1807, with the formation of a professedly ‘no popery’ ministry under the Duke of Portland, with opposition to the emancipation of Catholics remaining a criteria for holding ministerial office until 1829.⁴⁹ Anti-Catholicism continued to be: ‘the prime ideological stance in eighteenth century Britain around which Britons constructed their identity’.⁵⁰ Linda Colley in her analysis of national

⁴³ See, Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England c.1740–80: a Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993), p. 1–2. For an example of anti-Catholic polemic in the popular press see Edward H. Jacobs, ‘Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33 (1999), pp. 43–64, pp. 47–8.

⁴⁴ The *Laity’s Directory* (London, 1795), pp. 4–5 set out the main terms of the 1791 Act for the benefit of refugees arriving in England. See also Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome* (London, 1978), pp. 22–4.

⁴⁵ The nuns from Dunkirk were an exception and remained at Hammersmith until 1862.

⁴⁶ H. J. Schroeder (ed.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, session 25: 5 (Illinois, 1978), pp. 220–1. The Tridentine decrees on nuns’ enclosure restated Boniface VIII’s constitution, *Periculoso*, 1298. Material details such as the height of wall, grilles and ‘turns’ were not set out in either decree but originated with individual orders, often as defined by Charles Borromeo in ‘Instructions for Convents’ (Milan, 1572). See also Peter Anson, ‘Papal Enclosure for Nuns’, *Cistercian Studies*, 2 (1968), I, pp. 109–23 and II, pp. 189–206. Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: ‘Periculoso’ and its Commentators, 1298–1545* (Washington D.C., 1997). On the Continent the Benedictine convents had been situated in urban areas.

⁴⁷ See John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975); Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984) and J.C.H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976). Bennett Zon, *The English Plainchant Revival* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 48–55. For treatment of anti-Catholicism see Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England c. 1740–80* and, specifically on the Gordon Riots: ‘The Gordon Riots in the English Provinces’, *Historical Research*, 63 (1990), pp. 354–59.

⁴⁸ Tonya Moutray, *Refugee Nuns, the French Revolution and British Literature and Culture* (London, 2016), p. 90–125.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 15. For the latter period see also John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829–1860* (Oxford, 1991).

⁵⁰ Alexander Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics in the Age of Enlightenment: The Life and Career of Sir Thomas Gascoigne, 1745–1810* (Woodbridge, 2016), p. 78.

identity, contends that the perception of Catholics as un-British and potential traitors persisted: ‘Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible’.⁵¹

Until the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, leadership in the Catholic Church in England was vested in the vicars apostolic (missionary bishops). The country was divided into four areas of administration: the London, Midland, Northern and Western Districts.⁵² On arrival in England, the nuns who were not in the English Benedictine Congregation, (all but those from Cambrai), came under the jurisdiction of the vicar apostolic for their region. The latter often had little knowledge of contemplative monastic life. From existence in a Catholic country with ecclesiastic superiors familiar with the religious state and surrounded by a transnational Catholic infrastructure, the transplantation of the nuns to a still politically hostile land in which they were treated with mingled sympathy and distrust, led to an uneasy existence in which they were considered aliens, despite their Englishness.

Alexander Lock has suggested that the growth of an enlightened and liberally educated Catholic gentry helped the increase of toleration: ‘By the eighteenth century [...] English Catholic gentry families [...] began to adapt their faith to this changing society in order to enhance further the informal measure of social freedom they were beginning to enjoy’.⁵³ Joseph P. Chinnici however, paints a rather different picture:

The English Catholic world [...] at the close of the eighteenth century was marked by external calmness. A superficial observer, judging from the romantic period of the 1830s, would look for signs of life and find only shadows. The church continued to be governed by four vicars apostolic [...]. The decrees of Trent were not in force; attendance at the sacraments appeared lax; communication was poor. There existed no definite signs of a strong and healthy organization. The penal laws imposed certain legal

⁵¹ Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, p. 54. See also, Haydon, “‘I love my King and my Country, but a Roman Catholic I hate’”: Anti-Catholicism, Xenophobia and National Identity in Eighteenth-century England’, in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity Britain and Ireland c.1650–1850* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 33–52.

⁵² See Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, p. 418.

⁵³ Alexander Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics*, p. 78.

restrictions. Although seldom applied, they served to remind Catholics of their second-class status.⁵⁴

Both statements reflect perspectives of the nuanced reality of Catholic life at the time of the nuns' arrival. Certainly, the demographic transition, population explosion, expansion of an urban class, growth of ecclesiasticism and a shift from the benevolence of the old Catholic gentry to joint stewardship of clergy and laity, meant that the landscape of Catholic England was very different from that which the women had left some fifty years earlier.⁵⁵ The sense of insecurity which came with exile was exacerbated by the changes they observed in their native land.

The English Benedictines' experiences in Revolutionary France and the Low Countries were varied. As foreigners, they had been left largely unmolested in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution when anti-clerical measures were targeted directly at the native communities. This changed in late 1793, after France declared war on England. For the nuns at Brussels and Ghent, that was the cue to leave. Both departed for England the following year. The Brussels nuns, immediately on arrival in London, were taken under the wing of the vicar apostolic John Douglass. He provided them with a house belonging to the mission in Winchester. They moved there on 14 July 1794.⁵⁶ The Ghent community, through the assistance of various benefactors, acquired a house in Preston, Lancashire, next to a church run by priests from the suppressed Jesuit order.⁵⁷ For both communities, benefactors were the main means of subsistence and also helped with practical arrangements and provision of furnishing, clothing and removal costs.

Even after the onset of war not all the communities were prepared to flee their adopted home. The Benedictines at Cambrai, despite half-hearted plans to move to England, were resigned to

⁵⁴ Joseph Chinnici, OFM, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement 1780–1850* (Shepherdstown, 1980), pp. 11–12.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the position of 'old Catholics' in pre-Emancipation politics see V. A. McClelland, 'School or Cloister? An English Educational Dilemma, 1794–1889', *Paedagogica Historica* 20 (1980), pp. 108–28.

⁵⁶ Anon, *Chronicles*, pp. 238–9.

⁵⁷ Anon, *Annals*, pp. 86–7.

stay for as long as they could: ‘some say we shall remain till June; some say we may remain here. How it will be God only knows’.⁵⁸ Financial considerations demanded that they sit out the storm; the convent had become increasingly impoverished over two hard years: ‘We don’t get our rents’ and ‘Part of our income is in France so we can’t get it’.⁵⁹ By autumn of 1793 they had left it too late and spent the next eighteen months in a ‘common gaol’ in Compiègne, where four of their number died. The survivors arrived destitute in London in May 1795. They were given charge of a fee-paying school for girls in the Benedictine mission of Woolton, Lancashire. The Dunkirk and Paris communities also suffered imprisonment and were unable to escape to England until 1795. The Dunkirk nuns took over the convent and school previously run by the Mary Ward sisters in Hammersmith.⁶⁰ Benefactors procured a property at Marnhull, Somerset for the Paris nuns.⁶¹

News of the improved political situation had reached the nuns while still on the Continent. Margaret Burgess⁶² at Cambrai wrote in 1784, of the ‘hardships of the time’ in England but also that, ‘we have lately had the satisfaction of hearing that Religion begins to flourish in England’.⁶³ There is no evidence that any of the Benedictines proposed moving back to England before 1795. The English population had become used to Catholic neighbours but were hardly ready for the arrival of nuns. Absent from the land for over two hundred years, they were known only through literature in which they were frequently the subjects of satire, or anti-Catholic polemic.⁶⁴ The popular genre of gothic fiction portrayed convents as prisons

⁵⁸ SBAA, ‘Knight Letters’, Letter 34, Dame Anselma Ann[e] of Cambrai, WWTN CB003 to Alexander Knight, 7 January 1793.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Letter 21, 20 November 1791 and Letter 15, 28 December 1789. The community owned properties in Paris and other parts of France as well as in Cambrai. These provided the bulk of the nuns’ income as detailed in: SBAA, Dame Lucy Blyde, ‘Statement and Memorial’ and account books.

⁶⁰ The Institute of the Blessed Virgin (IBVM). Although earlier in the century it had thrived, by the 1790s the community was reduced to three. The surviving nuns continued to live in the convent with the Benedictines.

⁶¹ Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, pp. 61–5.

⁶² WWTN CB020.

⁶³ ADN Lille, 18 H 31 (031).

⁶⁴ Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomie of the English Nunnery at Lisbon in Portugal* (1622); *A Letter to a Virtuous Lady, to Dissuade her from her Resolution of being a Nun* (1686), Anon, *The Cloisters Laid open, or Adventures of Priests and Nuns. With Some Accounts of Confessions, and the lewd Use they make of them* (1780), *The amorous*

or brothels, with wicked priests out to inveigle innocent virgins to get their hands on their fortune or their body or both. Alternatively, nuns were portrayed as romantic figures: shut away by a cruel father or self-incarcerated after a doomed love affair.⁶⁵

After an initial outpouring of public sympathy for the religious exiles, the backlash of following years, fed by fear of the foreign, the on-going war with France and evangelical Protestant zealotry, resulted in a more hostile attitude.⁶⁶ Within months of their arrival, a shift was perceptible; from sympathy to prurient curiosity or outright hostility. Much derived from ignorance: the famous story of the servant dispatched to meet the nuns on arrival who having no idea what nuns were and after consulting with a fellow-servant, concluded that they must be ‘some new kind of potato from France’ is probably apocryphal, but epitomises the ignorance.⁶⁷

The arrival of a French émigré priest as chaplain to the nuns at Marnhull in 1800, sparked fears among the local people that his luggage contained firearms to support a French invasion. The nuns were believed to be implicated in this plot even though they were all English and had lived peacefully with their neighbours for the past five years. So great was the local consternation that a warrant was issued and the convent searched before fears were allayed.⁶⁸ Fascination equalled fear: at Abbots Salford the nuns were ‘much annoyed by the curiosity and

friars, or the intrigues of a convent (1759); all reproduced in Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile 1600–1800*, 6, pp. 5–25, 45–6, 53–84, 85–90.

⁶⁵ Diane Peschier, *Nineteenth Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 1–43.

⁶⁶ The *Laity's Directory*, 1795 recorded: ‘Remarkable Instances of Liberality and Beneficence Towards Catholics which Distinguishes His Majesty's Reign’ (London, 1795), pp. 32–3. While many liberals initially supported the Revolution, attitudes changed as the atrocities of the ‘Terror’ became known and writers and reformers responded to the émigrés’ cause. For example: Fanny Burney, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793); Hannah More *Considerations on Religion and Public Education* (1793) and Edmund Burke, *Case of the Suffering Clergy of France* (1792). Poets, notably William Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith also commemorated the exiles’ state. See Michael Wiley, *Romantic Migrations: Local, National and Transnational Dispositions* (London, 2008), pp. 7–55. Another reason for sympathy may have been the view that the ‘enemy of true religion’ was no longer Catholicism but ‘the atheism of the revolutionaries’, Derek Beales, ‘Edmund Burke and the Monasteries of France’, *The Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 415–36, p. 427.

⁶⁷ Anon, *Annals*, p. 84.

⁶⁸ Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, p. 72.

impertinence of the farm labourers'⁶⁹ and were also the object of much intrusive attention from celebrity sensation-seekers such as the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV). Abbess Agnes Robinson left an account of his first visit:

We had last week a visit from the Duke of Clarence accompanied by Lord and Lady Hammond, Colonel Thornton, and an Italian Count, Le Naldi, who played on the piano and sung for us. You will be diverted when I tell you that the Duke made me take his arm when we walked in the gardens and through the house, and would not accept a refusal. They all behaved in a most affable and polite manner imaginable. Dr Brewer was here and quite pleased with the visitors. We have also received a visit from Lady Throckmorton and Lady Plymouth.⁷⁰

Clarence was to become a regular visitor and the annals relate the insensitivity of his visits during which he insisted on being conducted all over the house and admitted to every room including the nuns' cells, where he examined their books. On another occasion he entered the house while the nuns were at vespers and carried their harpsichord downstairs to entertain them.⁷¹ Such incidents, while politically tolerated, caused major disturbance to monastic stability and were an impediment to enclosure. Aristocratic patrons however, whether Protestant or Catholic, most certainly helped integration into the locality. When the nuns from Paris moved to their new home at Marnhull near Amesbury, in 1795, they: 'were accompanied by Lord and Lady Arundell, who wished to give a good impression of the nuns to the neighbourhood, and openly show that they were under their protection'.⁷²

Gender was also an issue which governed popular response: contemporary sources indicate that there was a difference in attitude towards priests/male religious, and towards nuns. The vicar apostolic, John Douglass, wrote in his journal for 1796:

⁶⁹ SBAA Box 454, Letter 23, November 1807, Dame Agnes Robinson to Mrs Stanford.

⁷⁰ SBAA, Box 456, Letter 33, Dame Agnes Robinson to Dom Anselm Lorymer 20 September 1813.

⁷¹ SBAA, Annals vol. 2, part 1, pp. 552 and 557.

⁷² Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, p. 64.

The gentlemen of Oxford talk much against the opening and establishing of convents and complain of the parade with which Miss Weld was professed at Winchester (in truth there was not any parade on the occasion) but allow that the clergy may have colleges to educate clergymen as our religion is now tolerated and even protected by the laws of the land.⁷³

This attitude was reflected in the introduction of Bills in 1801 and 1814, which sought to legislate for state inspection of convents and the enforcement of secular dress. The Winchester annalist described the nuns' response to the first Bill:

we had many powerful enemies in Parliament, some of whom brought in a bill against Convents under the title of Monastic Institutions, it was also called the "Nun-baiting bill" the import of which was to hinder the receiving of members [...] and likewise to force us to return to Brussels.⁷⁴

Anglican responses to the proposed legislation varied. In a speech opposing the 1801 Bill, Whig M.P. William Windham asked:

I should be glad to know why a society of ancient maids who may unite together, and agree not to go beyond their garden walls, are less respectable or less virtuous than the same number of ladies dispersed abroad, who collect parties at whist, or at any other amusement [...] If a set of nuns chose to make vows of celibacy, it is voluntary on their part, and no restraint should be placed upon them.⁷⁵

For the Bishop of Winchester on the other hand, convents were clearly: 'contrary to our religion, hostile to our laws and destructive of our property and opulence'.⁷⁶ On the defeat of the Bill, 11 July, 'the date of the translation of the Holy Father's relics' the nuns assembled after compline and sang the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving.⁷⁷ Although both Bills failed in their

⁷³ DAA, Hammersmith Annals, Box T IV I, 'Extracts from the Diary of Bishop Douglass' (194248).

⁷⁴ DAAA, Annals, Jan 1801, p. 93 (114219).

⁷⁵ Speech 23 June 1800 on the Monastic Institution Bill. *Speeches in Parliament of the Right Honourable William Windham* (London, 1812).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ DAAA, Annals, Jan 1801, p. 93 (114219).

passage through Parliament, they further undermined the nuns' confidence and sense of security.

The State of the Communities in 1795

The communities which arrived in England were elderly and in poor health. Unable to recruit during the final years on the Continent their age profile was high and the mortality rate among the survivors suggests that weaknesses and suffering during the revolutionary period continued to take its toll. Sixteen Cambrai nuns arrived at Woolton in May 1795. Four were aged over sixty and nine over fifty. The youngest, novice Jane Mary-Josepha Miller, aged twenty-nine, died shortly after profession.⁷⁸ The first to be professed after her was Clare Crilly (aged twenty-seven) in 1799. Poor health due to the hardships endured resulted in a number of deaths in all communities soon after arrival and these were not compensated for immediately by new entrants.

Age Profiles of Communities on Arrival in England

Age	Total across all houses	Brussels	Cambrai	Ghent	Paris	Dunkirk
80s	2	-	1	1	-	-
70s	9	1	1	1	1	5
60s	18	6	2	3	2	5
50s	15	1	5	3	4	2
40s	18	1	2	5	2	8
30s	18	5	4	5	2	2
20s	9	3	1	3	2	-
Unknown	5	4	-	-	1	-
Total		21 ⁷⁹	16	21	14	22

Deaths 1795–1805

Monastery of Origin	Number of Deaths	Date of Death	Age at Death
Brussels	4	1797 (2), 1802, 1803	63, 79, 71, 55
Cambrai	4	1795, 1796, 1799, 1802	70, 29, 81, 50
Ghent	7	1797 (2), 1798 (2), 1799, 1802, 1804.	60, 66, 85, 46, 44, 21, 82.
Paris	2	1785, 1799.	c.50, c.29.
Dunkirk	7	1795, 1798 (2), 1799 (3), 1804.	64, 79, 65, 68, 47, 78, 63.

⁷⁸ WWTN CB130.

⁷⁹ Figure does not include two novices who left shortly after arrival in England.

Causes of death include: ‘life-long grief’, ‘fever: her constitution having been much broken by the anxiety and hardships of the last few years’, ‘lethargy’ and ‘a decline’.⁸⁰

Loss of revered seniors and nuns in leadership roles was particularly devastating. The Brussels nuns had experienced trauma in the mental breakdown of abbess Ursula Pigott who refused to leave with the rest of the community and died in Brussels in 1796.⁸¹ Her successor, Augustine Tancred, who as prioress had brought the community to England, died a year later in 1797.⁸² Ghent also suffered the death of their abbess a year after migration.⁸³ The loss of the young was painful too: the death of Jane Miller was replicated across the communities. At Preston a former pensioner (school-girl) who arrived with the community, professed in 1801, died the following year. The community from Brussels also lost two novices who entered on the Continent and left on arrival in England for health reasons. The journey to England took its toll: Bernard Haggerston from Cambrai was too ill on arrival at Dover to travel to London and died with her family in July 1795.⁸⁴ Although the community from Paris saw only two deaths within the first ten years, they were to lose four between 1807–1809, including the prioress and novice mistress. Their only young sister, a postulant at her arrival, died in 1811.

Community Numbers in 1795 and 1805

Community	1795	1805 (Includes novices who continued to profession)
Winchester (Brussels)	21	22
Woolton (Cambrai)	16	17
Preston (Ghent)	21	18
Marnhull (Paris)	14	16
Hammersmith (Dunkirk)	22	17

⁸⁰ Drawn from: *Chronicles of the First Monastery*, p. 159, *Annals of Ghent*, p. 90, CAA, ‘Excerpts from CRS, vol. IX’.

⁸¹ WWTN BB140.

⁸² WWTN BB173.

⁸³ Magdalena Arden, WWTN GB003.

⁸⁴ WWTN, OBO52.

Three of the communities did see a small increase in numbers in the first ten years in England, but the loss of seniors well versed in the contemplative life, was not always compensated for by the new arrivals.

Responding to the Demands of Exile

Contemporary accounts left by the religious show that repatriation was experienced as a second exile rather than a home-coming. In addition to the sense of being aliens in their own land, they faced the challenges of meeting immediate material needs; integration into the local community and the sometimes demanding, relations with benefactors. Moreover, within each community there was tension between the desire to return to the Continent and desire to settle in England. Physical and mental strain was to be a major factor of the second exile. For the Cambrai community, the eighteen months from October 1793 to May 1795, spent in a Revolutionary prison had taken its toll on the nuns who survived. Although a number were still in their thirties, they were all described as being like ‘old women’. Fifty-four-year-old Anne Josepha Knight described their state thus: ‘thank God [...] our heads are safe but I really think it has ruined our constitutions or at least hurt them very much and I for my part am an old woman but thank God tolerably well, but not strong’.⁸⁵ Similarly, Dame Agnes Robinson, aged thirty-four on release from prison: ‘though so young at the time of expulsion and imprisonment, [...] had the appearance of an aged person and a constant slight trembling of the head, from the effects of the terror’.⁸⁶

The first twelve years in England were years of recuperation – of physical, mental and spiritual recovery.⁸⁷ The house at Woolton was not conducive to rigorous monastic observance,

⁸⁵ SBAA, ‘Knight Letters’: Dame Anne Josepha Knight, to her cousin, Elizabeth Mary Knight, 20 August 1795.

⁸⁶ SBAA, Annals vol. 2, part 1 p. 601.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the enduring effects of post-traumatic stress see: Dan J., Stein, Matthew Friedman and Carlos Blanco, *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Oxford, 2011).

while the demands of running the school and making ends meet were hardly compatible with enclosure and contemplative prayer. The nineteenth-century annalist described the situation:

With its arrival at Woolton, the Conventus of Our Lady of Consolation entered upon a new and very different epoch of its history. Their position was a very painful one, deprived as they were of the monastic life which had once been theirs. Now they could not even wear the religious habit and neither the circumstances nor their state of health would allow them to resume the observance they so ardently desired.⁸⁸

The impoverishment of the new exile was both material and spiritual, each intensifying the other. This is best illustrated by a comparison of property owned by the nuns at Cambrai immediately before the Revolution and that held in 1825. Abbess Lucy Blyde's claim against the French Government for compensation for property lost in France, gives an idea of the community's wealth before repatriation.⁸⁹ Monastery and land were valued at £5,265.12.6, and claims were also made for other houses owned by the community in the town (£13,04.0.0), and a property in Paris (£7,798.0.0), together with arrears of rent and interest for each property. An inventory submitted, provides a description of the monastery at the point of departure: it included a church equipped with 'a handsome altar piece [with] pillars of white, & Gold Gilt capitals etc.' and valued at £16,820.13.2. There was a well-stocked sacristy and vestry and an organ worth £200. The list of rooms and furniture in the Cambrai house contrasts starkly with the meagre provision at Salford. In Cambrai there had been twenty-eight cells, a wainscoted work-room, a chapter room with 'Floor handsomely inlaid, an altar piece with 2 pillars, the room half wainscoted, a good clock', a refectory: 'Elegantly wainscoted, with handsome pictures. The floor black and white marble, 2 glass lamps, a pulpit, handsomely carved, tables and benches. 2 closets containing china tea-pots, coffee-pots, glasses etc.' In addition to a suite of rooms for the abbess and infirmary with twelve beds, there were kitchens, washrooms, a

⁸⁸ SBAA, Annals vol. 2 part 1, p. 1.

⁸⁹ SBAA, Dame Lucy Blyde 'Memorial' and 'Statement of Property' (c.1802).

distillery and bake house. Well-appointed outhouses provided accommodation for guests and there were six rooms for servants, a dormitory for seventeen ‘young ladies’ and, outside, ‘A Cow House. A great number of Hens, Chickens & Ducks. 2 Pigs, 2 Sheep. A quantity of straw in the straw house’.⁹⁰ In contrast, at Salford Hall in 1806 the owner, Mrs Stanford, described the house:

There are nine lodging rooms, a kitchen, small servants’ hall, larder, dairy, butler’s pantry, and a large brew-house. The present chapel was, when I resided there, our dinning parlour. The old chapel and vestry might with little trouble be converted into lodging rooms. The long gallery is in so unfinished a state, that I fear it would be of little use to you.⁹¹

The building needed improvement to make it habitable and even more alteration to turn it into a monastic dwelling. The furniture, listed for the 1825 Visitation, was basic and arguably more in keeping with the evangelical counsels than the gilt, marble and silks of Cambrai. The refectory contained ‘4 tables, 4 benches, 11 pictures, 2 cupboards, Drawers, Clock, A chair stool, Stove, Bell, lamp, 4 salt cellars, 5 or 6 brooms, Pepper pot’.⁹² Lucy Blyde estimated there to have been ‘about 1,000 books’ in the library at Cambrai (in fact there were at least 3,953).⁹³ The list prepared for the Salford Visitation in 1820 amounts to approximately one hundred volumes, many of which were schoolbooks.⁹⁴

A statement made by the nuns of Dunkirk in 1790, reveals a similar situation: it details a long list of *pretsiosa* in the sacristy and considerable property in France for which they too tried, unsuccessfully, to claim compensation.⁹⁵ For the Paris nuns the contrast was also considerable: in 1807, at the new house in Cannington they: ‘worked hard to get each one a

⁹⁰ SBAA, *ibid.*

⁹¹ SBAA, Box 454, letters Mrs Mary Stanford to Agnes Robinson 29 November 1806 and 24 December 1806.

⁹² SBAA, Box 456.

⁹³ The Cambrai Catalogue, which is now in the *Mediatheque de Cambrai*, is believed to have been compiled by the French authorities immediately after the seizure of the monastery in 1793. See Jan T. Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres Provenant des Religieuses Angloises de Cambrai: Book List of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai, c.1793* (Salzburg, 2013).

⁹⁴ SBAA, Box 456. It is difficult to assess the exact number as many entries appear to be duplicates or collections.

⁹⁵ DAA, T I A, ‘A Statement made by the Benedictine ladies on the state of their convent’ (113136 ff.).

place apart to sleep in before winter, but shall not be able to effect as much as we wished this year, we have gone as far as we can in our Expenses for the present, and hope to make some cells next spring out of four garrets now in ruins'.⁹⁶

Inevitably, material poverty affected the spiritual life. Many compromises were required of the nuns, both to integrate themselves with the local people and to allow for their physical rehabilitation. The biggest sacrifice was in the renunciation of the two most precious signs and symbols which went to the very heart of their calling: the habit and the enclosure. The two were tied together: while there was no enclosure, the habit could not be worn.

The Habit

For the nuns the 'holy habit' was integral to their profession. It was the outward sign of their consecration to God, and novices were solemnly vested at the clothing ceremony. Discarding of it had been strictly prohibited by Boniface VIII.⁹⁷ Wearing of a religious habit however, was explicitly prohibited by the 1791 Relief Act and contemporary reports vary on the reception of habited nuns in England. In 1792, when the Cambrai nuns were contemplating escape to England they were told 'above all let me advise you to put on secular clothes as the disposition of the people here is not very quiet at present'.⁹⁸

The Benedictines appear, characteristically, to have adopted a pragmatic and *sui generis* approach to the habit. At Preston, the Ghent nuns being without a chaplain, were obliged to cross the street to attend Mass and did not therefore wear the habit. At some time before 1811, when they left Preston they resumed wearing it, but 'never when they had to appear in public' because: 'it was necessary to avoid attracting the attention of the ever watchful Protestant population, in whose eyes everything in the least Catholic was mysterious and foreign'.⁹⁹ They

⁹⁶ CAA, Letter 1807, Teresa Catherine Macdonald, WWTN PB056, to Bishop Gregory Sharrock, MIM 595.

⁹⁷ The papal decretal, *Periculoso*, 1298; re-stated at Trent and reinforced by the congregation constitutions.

⁹⁸ SBAA, 'Knight Letters', Letter 32, Alexander Knight to D Anne Josepha Knight, 14 December 1792.

⁹⁹ DAA, BO IV A, box 6, typescript of 'A History of the English Benedictines of Ghent' by Louis Fournier (111429).

continued to wear ‘a more secular costume’ in public, as ‘England was as yet far from being ready for the sight of nuns’ veils and habits in the streets’.¹⁰⁰ At Winchester, while within the convent the nuns wore their habits although in 1811, the vicar apostolic John Poynter directed: ‘For certain just and proper reasons which your Ladyship and myself have duly weighed I hereby direct that the Person who attends the door as Portress in your house should not [...] appear at the door in the dress of a Religious of your Community’.¹⁰¹

The nuns from Paris, who were able to attend Mass and celebrate the Divine Office entirely within their own building from as early as September 1795, put on their habits immediately, helped perhaps, by the fact that they were the only community not to run a school and therefore able to limit their contact with outsiders). The Cambrai nuns had not worn the habit since July 1794 when, in the prison at Compiègne, they were ordered to remove the religious dress and to attire themselves in the old work clothes of the Carmelite martyrs. They were still wearing these on arrival in England. At Woolton they adopted a simple outfit of blue flannel and grey linen with purple shawls, and with bonnets rather than veils.¹⁰² Ironically, they had considered resuming the habit in 1814 just before the matter of religious dress came to be discussed in Parliament but refrained despite assurances from EBC president Dom Bede Brewer that:

I [do] not think that Government will meddle with your dress [...] As yet there is no law in England relative to any such matter and were a minister, who can only act according to Law to bring into Parliament any new law about the dress of nuns, the attempt would probably [bring] upon him contempt or laughter.¹⁰³

They did not wear the habit until 1820, although a community tradition maintains that lay-sister, Scholastica Caton, had worn it defiantly *under* her secular clothes.¹⁰⁴ Prudence

¹⁰⁰ Anon, *Annals*, p. 87. The ‘more secular costume’ consisted of ‘dark, simple dresses in the contemporary style’.

¹⁰¹ DAA, Acts of Visitation at Winchester, (170049, 170101, 170108, 170116). See also Peter Phillips (ed.) *The Diaries of Bishop William Poynter, V.A. (1815–1824)* (London, 2006), pp. 41–2.

¹⁰² SBAA, Account Book 1795–1803.

¹⁰³ SBAA, Box 457, Letter 18 December 1814. A printed letter was circulated ‘To the Catholic Ladies living and boarding in Community at –’ by Jesuit, Peter Gandolphy, 7 December 1814, assuring the nuns that ‘no authority in church or state can compel you to lay [your choice of dress] aside.’ Ushaw College Archives, wc/M4/342.

¹⁰⁴ SBA Annals, Vol 1, Part 2, p. 598.

counselled delay: the nuns, touched by the warmth and generosity received from both Catholic and Anglican neighbours at Woolton and Salford, expressed the desire ‘not to hurt the susceptibilities of Protestant authorities’.¹⁰⁵ The desire to appease Protestant sensibilities resulted in Poynter counselling the Hammersmith nuns to leave off their habit in Advent 1815 during the Lulworth crisis when French Trappist monks in Dorset attracted much adverse attention after one of their number absconded and apostatised making scandalous charges against the monastery. Exaggerated reports led to a rise in anti-Catholic demonstrations, especially against religious communities. ‘Much to their grief’ they acquiesced but returned to it the following July.¹⁰⁶

It was not only Protestant sensibilities that inhibited the nuns. The wider Catholic community was divided as to how far they should seek compromise with the British government over the issue of religious dress. Cisalpinist Charles Butler believed that the religious were called to provide educational and social assistance to the Catholic population and should not therefore, in a Protestant country, wear monastic habits which might prevent them from these apostolic activities. The vicar apostolic John Milner, despite his support for the contemplatives, had initially envisaged a degree of compromise on the issue of religious dress. Writing to the Papal Advocate in 1809 he had requested exemptions for the English convents under his care on the basis that a Protestant country was not yet prepared for religious dress.¹⁰⁷

Other inhibiting factors in resuming the habit were cost, unavailability of material and patterns, and lack of practical experience in habit-making. When the Cambrai community was ready to re-adopt it, they had to approach the Cannington nuns for assistance with material and patterns. The cost was not insignificant: ‘black serge about 18 to 20 pence a yard’, while ‘a thinner sort for summer’ was 2.6/- per yard. Serge for cowls from a Mr Hall of Bond Street

¹⁰⁵ SBA Annals, Vol 1, Part 2, p. 560.

¹⁰⁶ DAA, TVII (19432).

¹⁰⁷ DAA, TVII letter reproduced.

was ‘much dearer, but more durable’. The stuff procured for veils could be had at ‘Mr Steward, no. 130 Cheapside, London, at the price of 18 pence per yard’.¹⁰⁸ The Ghent nuns did not resume the cowl¹⁰⁹ until ‘many years after’ they put on the habit as ‘this would have required more material than our sisters at that time could afford to purchase’.¹¹⁰ The Cambrai nuns began by making cowls only for each new sister at her profession. Stories of cowls being shared and recycled continued well into the century.

Enclosure

On the Continent the nuns had lived under the Tridentine rule of enclosure, seen as the outward expression of their vows.¹¹¹ The English nuns were famous for their ‘zeal’ for enclosure on the Continent and this continued after arrival in England.¹¹² Augustine Baker described the Cambrai nuns’ strictness; ‘They are inclosed and never seen by us nor by anie [...] upon no occasion maie they go forth, nor maie anie man or woman get in unto them’.¹¹³ Enclosure long predated Trent and had a dual purpose – to prevent the nuns from ‘wandering’ and to prevent the ‘world’ from coming in.¹¹⁴ The decrees of Trent required that a six-foot wall encircle the monastery, with grilles and curtains between the nuns and seculars in parlours, the church and the confessional. The portress at the front door, the ‘turn’¹¹⁵, monitored all callers who had access only to ‘extern areas’ and nuns generally only interacted with visitors in pairs. The Ghent nuns, describing their expulsion, spoke of the breaching of the ‘sacred inclosure’.¹¹⁶ So

¹⁰⁸ SBAA, Box 456. Letter Dame Clare Knight, Cannington, to Dame Christina Chare, Salford, 16 July 1823. At Cambrai it seems the community spun and wove much of their own material (‘Knight Letters’), there is no evidence that they returned to this practice at Salford, although weaving was revived later at Stanbrook Abbey.

¹⁰⁹ The voluminous mantle worn by choir nuns during services.

¹¹⁰ Anon, *Annals*, p.87.

¹¹¹ See H. J. Schroeder (ed.), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* pp. 220–1. More detailed directions followed in Charles Borromeo’s *Instructions on Ecclesiastical Buildings*, 1599, regulating the grilles, ‘turns’, wall etc.

¹¹² See Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe*, p. 89. See also Hubert van Zeller, *The Benedictine Nun* (Dublin, 1965), p.158–9.

¹¹³ Letter Fr Augustine Baker to Robert Cotton, 1629, see Justin McCann and Hugh Connolly (eds.), *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and other Documents relating to the English Benedictines*, 33 (London, 1933), p. 280.

¹¹⁴ *Rule of St Benedict*, Chapter 66.

¹¹⁵ So called because there was a device in the door allowing the placement of items from outside which would be turned to be received inside, without the need for physical contact.

¹¹⁶ Anon, *Annals*, p.80.

seriously was enclosure taken that it was added to the vow of stability. The Council Book for the nuns from Paris makes it clear that restoration of a physical enclosure was ‘what we wished above all things’.¹¹⁷

The vulnerability of the repatriated nuns deferred restoration of full enclosure for many years. This delay was due as much to structural restraints of their new accommodation and the desire to be accepted by the locality, as to its prohibition by English law.¹¹⁸ For the Winchester community relaxation of the enclosure was essential especially: ‘in regard to admitting seculars inside the Monastery, in order to do away with the prejudice and ignorance in which the people in England had been brought up to regard Religious and monasteries in general’.¹¹⁹ The elderly Teresa Collins¹²⁰ is described as bearing with fortitude, ‘the very many inconveniences of the early times at Winchester’, which included the ‘incommodity’ of having only a thin partition between her cell and the school quarters from where: ‘She willingly endured the noise and disturbances [...] as one truly dead to her self’.¹²¹

At Woolton, where the building opened directly onto the street and adjoined the school, the physical impossibility of any kind of separation led to token attempts at observance being made. Nuns were ordered: ‘not to enter the kitchen store unless absolutely necessary and to keep the back-yard door closed at all times’.¹²² The Brussels nuns at Winchester also had to make compromises, especially regarding social interaction with seculars. The Visitation reports repeatedly stressed that ‘no Stranger’ might see a religious alone but only in pairs. No strangers’ male servants should visit the kitchen and anticipating modern safe-guarding practices, care was to be taken not to admit strange men to the children. Enclosure at Winchester consisted of

¹¹⁷ CAA, Council Book, minutes of meeting 1805 (slide 150339).

¹¹⁸ The Relief Acts had not lifted all sanctions against the establishment of monastic life and, while the convents’ existence was tolerated, external signs such as enclosure walls were still prohibited.

¹¹⁹ DAAA, 3134 VI.C, Book of Bishops’ Visitations from 1794 to 1878.

¹²⁰ WWTN BB045.

¹²¹ DAAA, Winchester Annals, p. 94 (114229).

¹²² SBAA, Box 351, Acts of Visitation.

the building and gardens, and exits were legislated for: ‘Those Religious who may not have heard Mass or may have conscientious difficulties [...] may go over the way to satisfy their obligation. Likewise, the Superior may give leave, at her discretion, to Strangers coming to the House of both sexes’. Socialising was to be kept to a minimum and not all the community were ‘to be called to the Strangers’. Visits were discouraged on Sundays and prohibited in Holy Week.¹²³ Bishops were an exception to the rule on socialising and during the synod of 1803: ‘the bishops dined in our refectory, which was a very memorable day for us, to have all the Catholic Bishops [...] to dine with us [but] the nuns only partook of deserts’.¹²⁴ In 1811, after the election of Benedict MacDonald as abbess and possibly because the nuns had now become accepted by the local community, the ‘indulgence’ made to seculars was tightened up. The very free access given to friends and benefactors, which included sleeping inside the monastery, was gradually stopped:

It was the special work of Lady MacDonald to limit this custom to fixed rules; she proceeded with prudence and discretion to arrange that persons residing in the town, should only be admitted on certain days, and that the house should not be shown to Strangers [...] By which measures she greatly forwarded the regularity of discipline and means of recollection.¹²⁵

Despite this tightening up, when a new chapel was constructed in 1812, the door connecting the convent and the sacristy with the chapel meant the priest had to pass through the choir to the altar: ‘an arrangement’, comments the annalist, ‘which would not be approved of nowadays’.¹²⁶ The discipline of engagement with seculars was to be constantly monitored. In 1825, EBC president Richard Marsh counselled the nuns at Salford: ‘Long visits of seculars are to be discouraged, the Constitutions directing [that] superfluous conversations with them

¹²³ DAA, Winchester Visitations, 1794 (165700ff)).

¹²⁴ DAAA, Winchester Annals, p. 95 (114234). The synod was a meeting of the vicars apostolic in May 1803, part of which was held in Winchester. Minutes at Archdiocese of Birmingham Archives, C1676 Z5/1/2/15.

¹²⁵ DAAA, Winchester Annals, p. 104 (114708).

¹²⁶ Anon, *Annals*, p. 108.

[are] to be avoided, and confined to what is necessary [and] for the same reason to be sparing and brief in writing letters'.¹²⁷

The question of admission of seculars into the enclosure was an enduring one for all the communities struggling to hold in tension conflicting desires for seclusion and acceptance. At Marnhull the arrival of nuns from Paris 'caused considerable stir in the village' but the locals were 'on the whole, favourably impressed' particularly after a village girl, 'pretty Betty', entered as a postulant.¹²⁸ At her clothing the enclosure was: 'thrown open to the curious but respectful neighbours, and the happy novice welcomed them in her cell'.¹²⁹ It was particularly difficult to refuse access to generous benefactors who desired that they or their relatives reside inside as boarders. The acceptance of ladies living inside the enclosure had been an exigency for survival on the Continent; that it was unwillingly continued in England is further evidence of the exile conditions.¹³⁰ In 1799, the Marnhull nuns unwillingly, gave in to pressure from the vicar apostolic Gregory Sharrock, to receive his sister to 'end her days with them'.¹³¹ Another persistent and disruptive boarder was, 'their ancient friend and great benefactor' Mrs Tunstall who had her own apartment fitted up within the enclosure and a lay-sister to wait on her.¹³² Sharrock gave his permission for the move to Cannington in 1807 because 'the community may find it more conducive to the keeping of stricter inclosure and regularity'.¹³³ The move had the added advantage of relieving the nuns of their lady boarders. At Cannington, they began to observe enclosure 'more perfectly' although the satisfaction of their desire for grates, erected in 1809, was short-lived, as the following year Sharrock's successor, Bernard Collingridge, thought it 'more prudent in the present situation of things to dispense with this'.¹³⁴ Despite the

¹²⁷ SBAA, Box 352, Dom Richard Marsh, Act of Visitation, 29 June 1825.

¹²⁸ Sr Mary Ann Sanger, date of birth unknown. She was a servant in the house before becoming a lay-sister.

¹²⁹ Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich* 1829– 1929, p. 71.

¹³⁰ Another survival technique from the Continent was the acceptance of seemingly unsuitable candidates based on the size of dowry or musical ability, this continued in the new exile. See below, pp. 82– 5.

¹³¹ CAA, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation', 1845, p. 203.

¹³² CAA, *ibid*, p. 204.

¹³³ CAA, *ibid*, p. 206–7.

¹³⁴ CAA, *ibid*, p. 217 (160331). Bernard Collingridge, OFM, vicar-apostolic 1809–29.

difficulties of admitting guests, they had been fortunate in their environment at Marnhull where they occupied: ‘A pretty large house [...] the garden was an excellent good one [...] both house and garden was encompassed round with pretty high walls’ which meant they were able to wear the habit and observe enclosure almost immediately.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, the necessity of making a living prevented keeping perfect enclosure. At Paris, they had made a peppermint confection for sale to visitors and they revived this craft for a short while at Marnhull but after the move to Cannington, decided the small income it brought in, about ‘20 or 30£ a year’, did not compensate for the compromises it entailed:

[...] now we do not make or sell anything [...] it seems to me it [the admittance of three girl boarders] will be much more according to our way of life [than] to use the time we spent forming those sort of things that were made to please fancy and serve to entice people to come to the House under the pretence of buying those things and by that means to see the nuns, all which could not be avoided when we did so, by which means we found ourselves under the necessity to appear.¹³⁶

The removal to Cannington helped enclosure:

[...] now since we have been here [...] we have never yet admitted any one soul to see the house or community except Lord and Lady Clifford, Mr and Mrs Weld once each, and twice Mr and Mrs Best and although we have not yet been able to make perfect our much desired Enclosure, yet we have continued from the first to keep fast the front doors, and have made at the back side [...] a Speak House.¹³⁷

Restoration of enclosure was a central motive for all the community moves. For the nuns from Ghent:

The impossibility of observing inclosure in England at that time had rendered residence in town far from pleasant and the nuns while at Preston were necessarily mixed up with their visitors, Catholic or Protestant, in a way which interfered [...] with regular observance. But at Caverswall Castle the situation itself was secluded [...] and the

¹³⁵ Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, pp. 139–40.

¹³⁶ CAA, copy letter Teresa Catherine Macdonald to Gregory Sharrock, 1807.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

community ventured to hope that some kind of partial inclosure might here be possible.¹³⁸

The Visitation Report for 1811 confirmed them in this hope and the enclosure was drawn around all eighteen acres of the property beyond which: ‘no Choir nun is ever to set her feet without an urgent reason and permission of the Bishop’. Incursion by laypeople was made more difficult: ‘With regard to externs, strict inclosure is impracticable but the Rev. Abbess will take the proper measures for preventing them from going into [the enclosure]’.¹³⁹ This rule did not apply to Milner himself who whenever he came to Caverswall, ate in the Refectory with the nuns, the tables being joined together and silence lifted to enable conversation.¹⁴⁰ The enclosure was extended in 1823, by the purchase of additional fields. The rule concerning the confessor conversing with nuns was relaxed for ‘the good of the community and the health and relaxation of the Reverend’. This seems to have been a general practice across all houses and while tolerated, or even appreciated, at the time, is an example of even benign male ecclesiastical authority compromising female religious integrity.¹⁴¹

The main hope for the Cambrai nuns’ too, on removing from Woolton to Salford, was return to strict enclosure.¹⁴² They were fully supported in this aim by EBC president, Bede Brewer, in his visitation report of 1809:

It having long since been our earnest wish that a strict inclosure [sic], so conducive to the happiness and perfection of Religious women be established in this community, we entreat the Lady Abbess and her Religious to use their interest with the very respectable

¹³⁸ Anon, *Annals*, p.103.

¹³⁹ DAA BO IV D Box 1 (114056).

¹⁴⁰ DAA BO IV D Box 1 (115918).

¹⁴¹ Curtailment of female religious authority by male hegemony continued to be a feature of religious life in the nineteenth century. See Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp.210–14; Gloria McAdam, ‘Willing Women and the Rise of Convents in Nineteenth-century England’, *Women’s History Review*, 8, (1999), pp.411–41; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms, Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass, 1998), pp. 600–3. At Cannington a stand-off with the vicar apostolic, Peter Baines in 1832, led to the nuns appealing to Rome for protection (see below, p. 181), while at Stanbrook the nuns were placed under interdict when a crisis with the EBC Chapter came to a head in 1886, again they resorted to appeal to Rome, see Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 104–5.

¹⁴² SBAA, *Annals* vol. 1 part 2, p. 557.

Lady by whose bounty the Community is fixed here, that so desirable an object be compassed as soon as possible; and that for this purpose a suitable apartment or house may be erected for the Confessor, lay brother and strangers, on such part of the premises as may be judged most convenient. In the meantime all the upper part of the house from the bottom of the stair cases is to be considered as forming a strict enclosure; no secular person is allowed to go upstairs without an express leave in writing.¹⁴³

The layout of the buildings at Salford Hall soon proved challenging: ‘bitter was their disappointment when they found it quite impossible to alter the disposition of the apartments as to secure enclosure’.¹⁴⁴ Whether this perceived impossibility was structural or due to the tenancy agreement is not clear, but even the rather pathetic attempt to provide at least a token enclosure as ruled by Brewer, proved unenforceable against more importunate guests the nuns were obliged to entertain as exemplified in the visits of the Duke of Clarence.¹⁴⁵ They were able to set up a wooden grille in the chapel but this was a mere gesture and for the ‘Cambrai Mothers’, who had known full Tridentine enclosure, life at Salford was hard to endure. This was one of the main reasons they clung so long to the hope of returning to the Continent. It was also the reason for Dame Bernard Barnewall’s desire to transfer to the Cistercian Order.¹⁴⁶ For younger ones, life at Salford was not so difficult to bear and here we glimpse the roots of division emerging between old and new observance. The annalist blamed limitations of ‘pecuniary necessities’, the physical layout of Salford Hall and the demands of the school for hampering the restitution of Cambrai ways until well into the century.¹⁴⁷

The Dunkirk nuns’ building at Hammersmith was better suited to monastic purposes. In the early years business required: ‘the abbess and some of the nuns to make fatiguing excursions

¹⁴³ SBAA, Acts of Visitation.

¹⁴⁴ SBAA, Annals Vol. 1 Part 2, p. 557

¹⁴⁵ SBAA, Annals Vol. 2, Part 1, p.552 and 557.

¹⁴⁶ See below p.108.

¹⁴⁷ SBAA, Box 345, ‘History of the Constitutions’, p 10.

outside the convent walls’, but the annals record that once this was accomplished, enclosure was observed.¹⁴⁸

Monastic Horarium and Liturgy

As time progressed, it became clear to the nuns that permanent settlement in England was inevitable, although circumstances meant that there could be no simple resumption of the old life as observed on the Continent. Re-creation rather than restoration was the way forward to maintain spiritual integrity despite physical restrictions. What had been viewed on arrival as temporary adjustments to monastic life, had to be formalised and accounted for in the legal constitutions even though all the communities were keen to assert the transitory nature of this arrangement. At Salford, they were living under a code which was ‘only provisional and experimental and supposed to [be dropped] the moment the Nuns were able to resume their Cambray Rules in full’.¹⁴⁹ The Constitutions of 1820 stated: ‘This was drawn up merely pro tem, by Rev. Father Augustine Lawson, for the Salford Nuns, till they could return to [full] observance’.¹⁵⁰ Adaptations to the monastic timetable were made ‘of necessity’ because ‘neither the circumstances nor their state of health would allow them to resume the observance they so ardently desired’.¹⁵¹ This was so for all the communities. Adaptations which were intended to be temporary, continued for many years. On the Continent the nuns had risen for the night office, but this practice was not revived until well into the nineteenth century. The nuns at Marnhull did celebrate Matins at 3:30 am on arrival in England, but the vicar apostolic, Bernard Collingridge prohibited it in 1807, due to the age and infirmity of the community.

At Woolton the timetable provided a gentler regime than that followed at Cambrai, but was still rigorous given the age and health of the community:

Distribution of Time for the Ladies of Woolton from March 21st to Sept 21st

¹⁴⁸ Anon, *History*, pp.136–7.

¹⁴⁹ SBAA, Box 345, ‘History of the Constitutions’, Dame Benedict Anstey.

¹⁵⁰ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, ‘Preliminary Discourse’.

¹⁵¹ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2.

The Ladies shall rise at 5 o'clock

At 5 and a half they shall apply themselves to meditation during half an hour; then on a sign given by the Abbess, they shall retire from the Oratory and the remainder of the hour may be spent in their particular occasions [sic].

At 6 ½ the Ladies shall repair to the Workroom and apply themselves to Work till 8.

At 8 they shall breakfast in common in the Refectory. At 8 ½ they shall go to Mass¹⁵² or spend half an hour in the Oratory in private prayer [afterwards] they shall apply themselves to Work which they shall continue until 11.

At 11 they shall say Hours in the Oratory. At 11 ½ they shall dine and recreation shall be allowed till 1 ½. Then they shall make a spiritual lecture until 2.

At 2 they shall return to their Work and continue it till 5.

At 5 they shall say Vespers and Compline and after Compline they shall meditate for about ¼ of an hour.

At 6 they shall sup and after supper they shall recreate themselves until 7 ½.

At 7 ½ they shall say Matins and Lauds of the following day.

At 9 they go to bed. Amen!¹⁵³

Stricter observance was needed however, and on 14 May 1802, Dom Bede Brewer warned:

It is strictly enjoined to all the members of this community that the laws of God, the rule of our Holy Father St Benedict, as modified by our Constitutions [...] be carefully observed. But observing with sorrow that many customs, or rather abuses have insensibly, and particularly by the misfortune of the French Revolution, crept into our Monasteries, we strongly exhort the Lady Abbess to exert her authority, and we do seriously entreat all her subjects to concur with her in abrogating all such abuses and to endeavour to live up to the letter of our Constitutions.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² The timing of Mass raises the question of whether they received Holy Communion: they would have been unable to do so after breakfast without breaking the obligation to fast from Midnight. Frequent communion was less common (the nuns from Paris had to obtain special permission allowing them frequent, possibly daily, communion but this was not normal practice). Post-Tridentine practice was divided on frequency of communion. The prevailing, Jansenist led, practice was for infrequent communion although Fenelon and other traditionalists urged more regular reception (it is likely that this influenced the Paris nuns). The growth of the devotion to the Sacred Heart increased frequency in the nineteenth century but convent records suggest that, at this time, the Woolton nuns heard Mass but did not communicate daily.

¹⁵³ SBAA, vol 1, Part 2.

¹⁵⁴ SBAA, Box 351, Dom Bede Brewer, Act of Visitation, 12 July 1801.

In 1826, the first non-Cambrai-formed abbess, Christina Chare, made a number of changes to the 'Distribution of Time' which demonstrate her efforts to increase the time and devotion given to prayer, reflection and *lectio divina*:

After Mass go to the workroom for spiritual reading. A quarter before eleven retire to prepare for the office. At half past eleven those who have no occupation elsewhere must be retired in their cells either working or writing or some other occupation till twelve. After luncheon any of the Religious if wanted in the Parlour may go or they may take a walk in the garden in silence, or if their devotion leads them there pray or visit the Blessed Sacrament. In winter they may go into the workroom to warm themselves. At half past two spiritual reading [in] silence to be observed till a quarter before four, except Tuesday and Thursday, at half past three. Should any of them have to go to company, they may go with Mother Prioress' permission. At half past four those who sing in the choir may practice their singing and a quarter before five retire to prepare for the office. The lay-sisters must attend compline and all the Religious must be retired in their cells at half past nine.¹⁵⁵

Her conferences, exhorting the nuns to interiority, silence, aspirations to perfection and union with God and with a greater preparation for and zeal in prayer and the Divine Office, reflect these concerns. They formed part of her overall campaign to return to a stricter monastic life and to develop a 'more contemplative *modus vivendi*' which was only becoming possible as the pressures of the school eased and the demands of manual labour declined with more, younger, entrants.

The giving of penances was central to monastic discipline. As stricter observance was restored, so too was the intricate scale of faults and penances. The Salford Constitutions for 1820 legislated for the following: Penances for 'small faults' – those committed through, 'human frailty, inattention, too much hurry, forgetfulness, or ignorance' – included kneeling in the middle of choir, refectory or chapter house for 'about a quarter of an hour in the presence

¹⁵⁵ SBAA, Box 455, Conferences.

of the community', or the privation of wine at dinner and supper,¹⁵⁶ keeping to their room for the space of a day, or reading on their knees before the superior a chapter of the Rule or Constitutions which the person had neglected to observe.¹⁵⁷ Great faults were defined as those which, 'are repugnant to good breeding, the monastic institute or our Holy Rule, or which are contrary to those laws, to which is annexed an express precept of Obedience'. Such faults required atonement by the malefactor by:

prostrations, fasting on bread and water every other day, during a week, on her knees, in the middle of the refectory; by depriving her of publick recreation for fifteen days; reciting the seven penitential psalms daily during a week on her knees before the Sacrament.¹⁵⁸

Even more severe were the 'very great faults: such as bear with them a note of infamy or excommunication', penances incurred for these required the delinquent to:

undergo publick censures; such as the privation of her office, dignity and active and passive voice [in Chapter] and the suspension from all privileges and prerogatives of her order; and degrading of her place on antiquity in the habit, and put back in the last place.

While penances for small faults were frequently administered, there is no record of 'very great faults' being committed. Women did, occasionally, leave the monasteries by choice but none were expelled during this period.

Restraints on Living the Horarium

The nuns experienced particular impoverishment in the liturgy – the 'unitive force in Benedictine life'.¹⁵⁹ Space, energy, lack of materials, and awareness of Protestant sensibilities affected the celebration of the Divine Office, Mass and devotional observances such as processions and Benediction. The celebration of Benedictine feasts, as observed on the

¹⁵⁶ This is a surprising penance as elsewhere (SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 5, 'Of the Common Diet') it is clear that wine was only rarely taken on special occasions.

¹⁵⁷ SBAA, Constitutions, Box 345.

¹⁵⁸ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 10, 'Of Faults and Penances'.

¹⁵⁹ Hubert Van Zeller, *The Benedictine Nun*, p. 176.

Continent, also had to be negotiated.¹⁶⁰ Their writings reveal a yearning to return to the solemnity and grandeur of pre-Revolutionary practices. Over the period in first exile, the communities had built ornate chapels in the fashion of the period and locality. The Brussels chapel was: ‘a large and handsome building of the style then so prevalent in the Low Countries: a peculiar kind of architecture [...] best described as a mixture of Mozarabic and Gothic’.¹⁶¹ It was adorned with, ‘marbles and sculptures’ and an oil painting over the High Altar of the Assumption by Gerhard of Antwerp. The choir, separated from the sanctuary by a grille, contained stalls for fifty nuns. Altar plate of precious metal, holy relics and fine vestments all aided devotion. Similarly, at Cambrai, the church contained a ‘handsome altar piece’ and, ‘pillars of white, & Gold Gilt capitals etc. [...] 6 pictures painted in copper’. A well-stocked vestry provided all the necessary accoutrements for a worthy celebration of the liturgy.¹⁶² This style seems to have been replicated across the convents. At Dunkirk, the church was hung with: ‘beautiful and valuable pictures of Our Lady, Sts Benedict, Augustine and Michael, all by the artist Ryekz’.¹⁶³ Statues abounded and the vestments were ‘of exceeding great beauty and richness’. In 1744, the nuns were able to celebrate the visit of the king of France to the town by the burning of ‘above 5,000 candles, besides lamps and other ornaments’ for three nights.¹⁶⁴

In England the situation was very different. At Winchester and Preston, neither community had chapel or chaplain and were obliged to walk to a local mission to hear public Mass. This situation was quickly remedied in Winchester where the building allowed re-ordering to include a small chapel. It was fitted with stalls and made suitable for a monastic choir as early as 1794, when it was blessed by John Douglass. Enlarged in 1798, another blessing was given

¹⁶⁰ Murray-Sinclair, ‘Hammersmith: A Bridge’, records that vicar apostolic Douglass ‘needed persuasion’ to allow the nuns to observe special Benedictine feasts allowed by the bishop of Ypres’, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Anon, *Chronicles*, p. 100–1.

¹⁶² SBAA, Lucy Blyde, *Memorial*.

¹⁶³ Anon, *History*, p. 118–19. The artist cannot be identified. It may, possibly, be Dutch painter Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 72.

by Dr Milner on the Feast of St Scholastica. In 1800, the gift of ‘a pretty little organ’ was made after which the choir began to sing part of the Office: ‘which we could not well do before’.¹⁶⁵ To aid the liturgy the nuns had been able to bring over from Brussels: ‘the crozier, two silver ciboria, a silver chalice and paten, a silver monstrance set with precious stones, a silver thurible, a ship [for incense], a processional cross also set with stones and two altar missals’.¹⁶⁶ They immediately restored Benediction in an ornate monstrance – the host previously having been exposed in the ciborium. With these they were much better equipped than most of their fellow religious. The Paris nuns inherited a ready-made chapel at Marnhull and from 1807, at Cannington. Contemplating a longer stay, they undertook various renovations: ‘Our new Choir windows are just put up and I hope soon to be able to open the wall to fix the grate’ wrote the prioress in 1807.¹⁶⁷ That year she consulted the community about:

The choir which at our first arrival at Cannington we had fitted up and put a grate at the end which looked into the Sanctuary and was very convenient for us to hear Mass and communicate without being overlooked by the Congregation but at the same time was so small that all the community could not kneel in it, but were obliged to let some hear Mass in a little room adjoining, and it was allmost [sic] impossible to perform the divine office with any Solemnity it being so very narrowe [sic], there was not room sufficient for the Official Ceremonies and [was] very difficult to recite or sing [...]¹⁶⁸

With the landlord’s consent the room was enlarged to allow a more spacious liturgy.

Attempts to restore the former architectural style of the Continent are apparent in the nuns’ early chapel renovations. The Ghent community, forced to exit the enclosure to attend public Mass in Preston, on arrival at Caverswall embarked upon re-creating their earlier glory. The Annals reported: ‘The beautiful tabernacle of tortoiseshell and silver, brought from Ghent, was placed on the altar with which it corresponded very well, having little Grecian columns on

¹⁶⁵ DAAA, Annals (601).

¹⁶⁶ DAAA, Annals 1794 (112838). In addition, other valuables were left in Brussels in the charge of the Dominicans and later delivered safely to England.

¹⁶⁷ CAA, Letter Teresa Catherine Macdonald to Bishop Sharrock, 1807.

¹⁶⁸ CAA, Council Book, 10 April 1807 (151147–151153).

either side of the door with silver bases and capitols'.¹⁶⁹ The buildings available for a chapel were small however, and did not allow for the elaborate ceremonies celebrated on the Continent which reflected musical and liturgical fashions of the late eighteenth century, far removed from the traditional monastic plainsong. It was this polyphonic approach that all the communities attempted to restore in the early years, although the Salford nuns, influenced by Solesmes were later to become leaders in the plainchant revival in England.¹⁷⁰

At Woolton, the arrangements were makeshift: the 'tall, narrow, gloomy house [was] without even a private chapel'.¹⁷¹ This was remedied very soon after arrival when benefactor Edward Constable provided: 'a French priest [Abbé Pernez] to say Mass for the community under their own roof'. No description of the arrangements has survived, but they were clearly not conducive to monastic life and the time at Woolton was 'one of discouragement'.¹⁷² At Salford, from 1807, there was a more suitable chapel which the nuns were able to convert into a choir and erect a grille.¹⁷³ Furnishings continued to be minimalist with only an 'Organ, 2 trills [music stands] [and a] music stool' listed in 1825.¹⁷⁴ In 1830, EBC president, John Birdsall, reminded the Salford nuns of the centrality of: 'the solemn offices and choral duties of the Convent, of which music and singing make so large a part'.¹⁷⁵ Adapting to new circumstances and the disruption of their traditional life meant that disciplined observance was not always easy to maintain. The 1820 Constitutions at Salford, gave detailed directions on the conduct of

¹⁶⁹ *Annals of the English Benedictines from Ghent*, pp. 108–9.

¹⁷⁰ Plainchant revival in the nineteenth century centred on Dom Guéranger of Solesmes Abbey in France. Dom Laurence Shepherd carried the movement to the nuns at Stanbrook in the 1860s. See further discussion of this in Chapter 3.

¹⁷¹ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 42–3. Also, Jacob (ed.), *Brief Narrative*, p. 50.

¹⁷² SBAA, Annals, vol.1, part 2.

¹⁷³ Letter Mrs Mary Stanford to Agnes Robinson 24 December 1806, SBA Archives Box 454. There had been a chapel at Salford Hall since 'the earliest times' and served by a Benedictine chaplain from 1727, Norbert Birt, *Obit Book of the English Benedictines from 1600–1912* (Edinburgh, 1913) p. 405. When the nuns moved there a French émigré priest, Père Louvel, was chaplain. He stayed to look after the small parish congregation which was too arduous a duty for the nuns' elderly and infirm chaplain, Dom Maurus Shaw, MIM 152: see SBAA Annals, vol. 1, part 2 and Box 454, various letters.

¹⁷⁴ SBAA, Box 456, Furniture List, 1825.

¹⁷⁵ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents, letter 43.

the Divine Office, specifying gestures and timing of pauses, as well as the mode of singing and speaking. Abbess Christina Chare, in her conferences, frequently admonished the nuns on their conduct in choir:

I am sorry my dear sisters to be obliged to remark that you sometimes say the Office with too much precipitation; you must remember that our holy Father says nothing is to be preferred before the work of God and that our Constitutions require it should be performed with devotion and solemn sanctity. I must therefore request that in future you will endeavour to recite every part of the divine office in a more slow and distinct manner and observe greater pause in the middle of the psalms. I also wish to see the bowing better observed as some of you are very careless in that respect.¹⁷⁶

The following year she made a similar appeal, which may be read as a suggestion to appropriate the exile experience through the hardships in choir:

the few trifling mortifications we have to practice such as rising early in the morning, bowing in the choir and rising at the Glorias, keeping silence and other rules which tho' easy in themselves are yet painful to our weak natures [...] only love God my dear sisters and you will find that love that makes all things easy and that the divine office and other religious exercises will no longer be tedious employment but will become so sweet to you that it will be your greatest delight to be in choir.¹⁷⁷

The chapel was not the only liturgical space in the monastery: the refectory was integrated into daily Office with a strict code of observance. Grace before and after meals was sung either in the refectory or by processing to the chapel after dinner for None. After supper, the nuns sang the psalm *Laudate Dominum Omnes Gentes*, then knelt and recited prayers for their benefactors.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ SBAA, Box 455, Conferences, no. 9, 22 December 1826.

¹⁷⁷ SBAA, Box 355, Conferences, no. 10, May 1827.

¹⁷⁸ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 4 'Of the Common Diet'.

Return or Restitution?

The discomfort experienced in England is emphasised in the on-going efforts to return to the Continent. Writing about the Brussels nuns' experience, Aidan Bellenger observes: 'It is impossible to recreate the dislocation and psychological impact of the forced repatriation'.¹⁷⁹ As much as possible life went on as before, but there were changes. Hanging on to treasured practices is part of the exiles' lot.

The early years of the new exile reveal pendulum-like efforts by the communities, swinging between attempts to return to their old homes on the Continent and efforts to claim back, or obtain compensation, for property there. As exiles, the nuns' looking back may simply have been 'a dalliance with nostalgia'¹⁸⁰ or the only realistic possibility they could see for survival. Obstacles to the restoration of strict enclosure and consequent monastic practices suggest that many believed the latter to be the case. Hood writes that the nuns, 'were much more proactive than the monks, in trying to get political support in England for their claims'.¹⁸¹ Although influential friends of the Cambrai nuns such as the Marquis of Hertford,¹⁸² Lord Castlereagh¹⁸³ and the Duke of Clarence,¹⁸⁴ may have been party to the agreement by the French Government to pay an allowance of one guinea a month to each returnée, there is no evidence that they intervened to advance the cause for the restitution of Cambrai property or a return to France.¹⁸⁵

Efforts to return to the Continent impeded commitment to re-build contemplative life in England in the first decades of the century. The Brussels nuns had 'for some few years entertained the idea of returning to Brussels'.¹⁸⁶ In 1801, the Ghent nuns 'began to hope to see them return to the old monastery' or at least 'to meditate an attempt at recovering the value of

¹⁷⁹ Aidan Bellenger, *The Brussels Nuns at Winchester 1794–1857*, a paper given at the English Benedictine Congregation History Commission Symposium 1999.

¹⁸⁰ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 30.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁸² See below, p. 90.

¹⁸³ Robert, Viscount Castlereagh was foreign secretary, 1812–1822

¹⁸⁴ See also E.A Smith, *George IV* (Yale, 1999), p.119.

¹⁸⁵ SBAA, Annals vol. 1, part 2, pp. 538ff.

¹⁸⁶ DAAA, Annals 1794 (112838).

their property'. Lengthy negotiations ensued through an agent (ex-Jesuit Thomas Barrow in Liège) but they quickly realised that Ghent was 'extremely changed' so that by 1804, 'our sisters had no intention of returning to Ghent, although some of their friends there were still hoping to see them back'.¹⁸⁷ There is no evidence that the Dunkirk nuns tried to return but through Abbess Prujean's barrister nephew John Prujean, they sought to obtain restitution for their property. Despite writing in 1800, 'I fear there is little hopes [sic] of our Recovering anything belonging to us' correspondence shows they continued to pursue this until at least 1817.¹⁸⁸

The Cambrai nuns were also looking back. In 1802, the Treaty of Amiens, which brought a temporary peace in the Napoleonic Wars, encouraged the community to join with other British subjects in claiming indemnities from the French Government for losses sustained during the Revolution.¹⁸⁹ Abbess Lucy Blyde drew up a 'Memorial', outlining the community's history, and a 'Statement of Property', providing a detailed inventory of the property lost.¹⁹⁰ This venture was short-lived as hostilities resumed fourteen months later. Correspondence in the Stanbrook archives reveals on-going efforts to obtain restitution although it was not until the 1814 Peace Treaty that hopes for compensation were revived.¹⁹¹ Indefatigable in her efforts, Abbess Augustina Shepherd wrote to Dom Henry Parker: 'Though I fear there is little hope of regaining our property, yet we must not give up all hope'¹⁹² and to EBC president John Brewer: 'I cannot but feel anxious about our affairs, how are they going on? Are we likely to retrieve our property? Do you think we may look forward with any degree of confidence to our re-

¹⁸⁷ DAA, BO IV C, 'Preston Letters' (171224ff). Anon, *Annals*, pp. 92–6.

¹⁸⁸ DAA, T-VI-1 'Dunkirk Claims for Property'. Correspondence between Lady Abbess Placida Messenger and Dr Rev. Parker (EBC) at Paris between 1800 and 1817 (095320). See also DAA, Hammersmith Annals, chapter VI, pp. 77ff (194218ff).

¹⁸⁹ Article 12 of the Treaty, Preliminaries of Peace, 1802.

¹⁹⁰ SBAA, Abbess Lucy Blyde's 'Statement and Memorial'.

¹⁹¹ SBAA, Box 457, 'President's Letters', various letters 1810–1838, and DAA, 'Parker Letters' correspondence between Augustina Shepherd and Dom Bede Brewer: 1815; 5 February 1816; 23 March 1816 and November 1816.

¹⁹² DAA, 'Parker Letters', letter 178, November 1815 (102725 ff.). Henry Parker, MIM 139, remained in France to negotiate on behalf of the Benedictine communities.

establishment on your side [of the Channel] for many reasons it would be very desirable?’

Parker reported to Brewer in 1815:

I am of great hopes that when Lord Castlereagh returns to London he will exert himself and insist on the articles of the Treaty being complied with. Unless we can recover the alienated or sold property both of Dieulouard and Cambray I am afraid much fatal consequence will ensue [for the nuns], the loss will be very severely felt.¹⁹³

The precariousness of their situation in England meant that the Cambrai nuns continued to hope for return and led Abbess Augustina Shepherd to make a proposal to Parker in 1816:

I must request you to name [this plan] to no one. It is an act of prudence not only to attend to the present but likewise to provide for the future, our present situation is rather precarious, it is probable we may remain in the house we are in as long as Mr Barkley [sic] lives but the moment he departs we must quit it to make room for the next heir who will want it very much, so that our present situation depends entirely on the life of one person. Was it even probable that we should receive our money that was lodged in the French funds we might be enabled to purchase a house in this country, but the convents here are by no means complete for want of inclosure or other conveniences [...] The French Government has many religious houses at their disposal, perhaps they may be willing to give us one in lieu of our houses at Cambray. If such an establishment could be obtained, what benefits should we not reap, we might then hope to revive our drooping community, which will never be done here for want of room or other conveniences and reasons. I flatter myself that the Rev President and Definitors would easily give their consent.¹⁹⁴

The nuns were encouraged by the monks’ success in retrieving/re-entering former establishments, St Edmund’s in Paris in 1817 and St Gregory’s in Douai soon thereafter.¹⁹⁵

When it became clear however, that the old buildings at Cambrai could never be regained, the nuns diverted their efforts towards obtaining a replacement.¹⁹⁶ Strenuous enquiries through

¹⁹³ DAA, ‘Parker Letters’, 25 January 1815.

¹⁹⁴ DAA, ‘Parker Letters’, 23 March 1816.

¹⁹⁵ DAA, ‘Parker Letters’, letter 6, 1816: correspondence with Fr Henry Parker revealed that the old monastery at Cambrai had been sold unlike the monk’s properties. SBAA Annals, vol. 1, part 2, p. 454.

¹⁹⁶ Parker dampened all hopes from the outset informing them, in correspondence between 1816 and 1817, that an acquaintance who ‘last year, made all possible inquiries, and ran about the country, to discover some ruined

friends in France continued taking up much community time and energy but were to no avail. While occasional references appear in letters throughout the 1820s, it seems the quest to return to the Continent was finally, if reluctantly, abandoned. A draft, undated, letter from Dame Agnes Robinson to the mayor of Cambrai (probably written before 1826) reveals resignation at staying in England but also fear of future expulsion:

It seems the will of God that we should be fixed here in England. We even have in view a good sized house where we hope to establish ourselves as the English Government tolerates, at least for the present, these religious communities [...] Nevertheless, if any change should ensue [...] and we had to leave England, we should certainly prefer Cambrai to any other part of France.¹⁹⁷

The only Benedictine house to have made a considered decision to leave France had been the Paris community.¹⁹⁸ In the summer of 1795, facing poverty and starvation, they held a vote on whether to move to England.¹⁹⁹ Whether the nuns saw this as a permanent arrangement is not clear but they were advised in 1796 to: ‘Sit down at Marnhull, as if you were never to stir [...] the essential, whether you be at Marnhull or at Paris, is to be constantly in that situation of heart and mind in which you would desire to be found when the Divine Spouse will come to knock at your door’.²⁰⁰

These are not the voices of women eagerly embracing new life but of exiles striving to return to their home. Even while negotiating the conflicting demands of return and rebuild however, the nuns were stumbling towards a realisation of their new role in the restoration of the Catholic Church in England. The situation has been summed up by Aidan Bellenger:

The French Revolution, while destroying the fabric of the old Gallican church, was to usher in a new age with an increased emphasis on Catholic evangelicalism, an

Convent or Abbey: all had been sold and [none were] to be had without re-purchasing, or had even been quite demolished’. SBAA Annals vol. 1, part 2, p. 540.

¹⁹⁷ SBAA Box 454 and Annals vol. 1, part 2, p. 523.

¹⁹⁸ Mangion, “Avoiding “Rash and Imprudent Measures””, p. 262.

¹⁹⁹ CCA, Account of Mother Theresa Johnson, p. 88.

²⁰⁰ Letter to Abbess Teresa Johnson from Abbé Edgeworth, 30 November 1796, quoted by Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, p. 68.

awareness of social needs created by the new urban problems, the need for popular education and a new role for women in the public life of the Church. The nuns were to share in all these initiatives.²⁰¹

The Brussels nuns, after hearing of the destruction of their old monastery, abandoned plans to return and concluded that: ‘God had other designs in bringing over to England our own and so many conventual establishments, for by this He opened a way for the conversion of our dear country to the true Faith and to obedience to the See of Peter’.²⁰² The Ghent annalist also reflected that they:

Had met with kind benefactors in England, and their school – a great acquisition to English Catholics at that period – was prosperous [...] Still they were not satisfied to give up their old monastery without receiving a penny for it, and they continued to correspond [...] on that subject.²⁰³

They considered that: ‘good had been brought out of evil’ and ‘thus it was to be said that Almighty God [...] was destining England to reap this great benefit from the errors of other nations’.²⁰⁴ The annalist described the state of the English convents as suffering in the mid-eighteenth century from ‘a decline in fervour’ amongst English Catholics. The latter she blames on apostasy, mixed marriages, liberal enlightenment and an:

un-catholic spirit then spreading in England, as shown by the histories of the “Catholic Committee” and the “Cisalpine Club”. We see plainly the finger of God in the results of the French Revolution which brought over [...] so many religious communities [...] that the tone of English Catholics was at last gradually and insensibly raised [and enabled] their children to be brought up in sound religious principles.²⁰⁵

While this statement suggests the nuns (or at least the annalist whose views must not be taken to represent the whole community) believed there was an absolute decline of Catholicism

²⁰¹ Aidan Bellenger, ‘France and England: The English Female Religious from Reformation to World War’ in F. Tallett and N. Atkin (eds.) *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 3–11, p. 6.

²⁰² Anon, *Chronicles*, p. 247.

²⁰³ Anon, *Annals*, p. 95–6.

²⁰⁴ Anon, *Annals*, p.70.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p.70–1.

through Enlightenment, this was not the case. Evidence from the book lists and writings of the nuns reveals a more nuanced perception of the situation (see below, Chapter Four). By 1811, they began to see their ‘destiny’ as being in England and by degrees, efforts to return were overtaken by an awareness of a new role in the mission for the conversion of England.²⁰⁶ Full acceptance however, is not apparent until the 1820s.

Poverty

While physical impoverishment was real, the need to observe religious poverty was vital. The 1820 ‘interim’ Constitutions drawn up at Salford stipulated: ‘Propriety [sic], which our holy father, Saint Benedict, calls the worst of vices, must be intirely [sic] abolished [in] the monasteries’. It went on to decree that:

nobody, not even the Superior [is] to have any valuable or superfluous furniture: but all must be reduced to a simplicity or plainness becoming ye religious state. The Superior shall take care that the present constitutional law be observed to a tittle by their subjects.²⁰⁷

The nuns were largely dependent on the food they received from benefactors or were able to grow themselves, and there was emphasis on simplicity in diet. The Constitutions gave detailed directions as to what may and may not be eaten, and when. All were to eat – or fast – at the same time and in the same place and of the same food, so that ‘the least mark of singularity may not be noticed’. The list of fast and feast days was long, with more fasts than feasts, and a ‘regular’ fast was held from Epiphany to Septuagesima (the pre-Lent season), and from the end of the Easter Octave to Pentecost. More rigorous fasting was observed in Advent and Lent. ‘Flesh’ was permitted at dinner and supper on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and at supper on Mondays, in Ordinary time. On meat days, the nuns also had a pottage plus vegetables. On

²⁰⁶ Anon, *Chronicles*, p. 229.

²⁰⁷ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 2, ‘Of Religious Poverty’.

non-meat days, pottage and two vegetables, fish and peas, greens depending on season and if no fish was to be had, at least two eggs each or frumenty (a sort of porridge), barley or rice. During Lent, when meat was forbidden and eggs restricted, lentils, legumes and fish formed the main diet. Dinner on Fridays in Lent consisted of legumes and fruit. Wine, when allowed, was to be diluted with water.²⁰⁸

Financial Matters

Despite financial hardships on the Continent, especially when the political situation prevented sending monies or the reception of novices from England, all the surviving communities had built up considerable reserves and acquired property.²⁰⁹ Arriving in England largely destitute, a different and more proactive approach to financial survival was required. Income was largely sourced from dowries, bequests and fees from scholars and lady boarders. Donations from family and friends constituted much of the income (£254 was received at Woolton between 1795–1808) and while most benefactors were Catholics, various account books record gifts from local Protestant neighbours and well-wishers.²¹⁰ All the surviving nuns received pensions from the Committee for the Relief of the Suffering of the Clergy and Laity of France Exiled in England, which was established in 1794, under auspices of the British government.²¹¹ Despite this help, penury was a major concern for all and economies were constantly being demanded. In 1813, the nuns at Salford were counselled: ‘The income of this house being very inconsiderable and very precarious, all useless expenses are to be carefully avoided, the greatest

²⁰⁸ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 5, ‘Of the Common Diet’.

²⁰⁹ This was not without much effort: the house at Pontoise which had been ‘a very flourishing community’ closed in 1786 due to insolvency, see Anon, *Annals*, p.70.

²¹⁰ SBAA, Account Books. Local squire and Anglican, Nicholas Ashton and family were regular donors of cash and food.

²¹¹ Established following initiatives by Anglican dioceses who raised funds to relieve émigré priests in 1790.

economy is to be observed in every department of it and more particularly by the Procuratrix and the Cook in the kitchen'.²¹² Again in 1820:

The income of the house being very inconsiderable and very precarious on the one hand and on the other very heavy debts having been contracted, it is a justice the Community owes to their Creditors not only to avoid all useless expenses and use the greatest economy, but to make all retrenchments they possibly can. A list of some we have recommended in writing to the Lady Abbess and Procuratrix; and enjoined the sisters in the kitchen to pay proper attention to their orders.²¹³

St Benedict's injunction that all the goods of the monastery should be treated as sacred vessels of the altar, was always kept before the nuns' eyes.²¹⁴ In 1825, not only the procuratrix and kitcheners, but every member of the community was urged to take personal responsibility and to consider: 'the waste of goods [in the monastery] as a profanation of things consecrated to Religion'.²¹⁵

The nuns from Ghent spent £2 to £3 a week on food in 1796.²¹⁶ Their income that year was £674.7.7 which included monies brought from Ghent, gold and silver, 'Flemish pieces' and donations. The total expenditure was £442.9.7, including baggage, travel and waggon hire to Preston, sundry bills and postage. Their account-keeping was rudimentary and only the food expenditure was itemised; the largest amount per week was spent on meat.²¹⁷ Later more detailed records show they were paying £16.8.2d on window tax while other domestic costs were increasing: mending the pumps, chimney sweeping, carpeting the workhouse, shoemaker's, glazier's and plumber's bills all appear regularly. Material for 'habit stuff' was also purchased. They gave alms: 'given in charity; £1.7/ and 'given at Xmas, 12/- 6d'.²¹⁸ Before

²¹² SBAA, Box 351 Dom Bede Brewer, Act of Visitation, 8 July 1817.

²¹³ SBAA, Box 351, Dom Bede Brewer, Act of Visitation 14 May 1820.

²¹⁴ *Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 31, v.10.

²¹⁵ SBAA, Box 351, Dom Bede Brewer, Act of Visitation, 29 June 1825.

²¹⁶ DAA, BO IV C (165330–165745).

²¹⁷ Financial management practices varied. Most communities did their own day-to-day book-keeping, while agents managed claims and investments on the Continent and a man-of-business or the EBC procurator handled larger scale investments.

²¹⁸ DAA, BO IV C, accounts for 1802 (165745).

a chaplain was appointed, they also had the expense of renting seats in the local church for Mass, at the cost of twelve guineas a year. From at least 1823, the community had Dutch pensions which were bringing in a reasonable income. It is not clear whether these were compensation or investments.²¹⁹

The community from Brussels was in a more fortunate position than the others. The nuns had access to property in that city which they were able to sell through agents. Interest on capital and rents continued to produce an income in England, although their first accounts at Winchester, record that sundry small bills remained unpaid in Brussels amounting to around £50, which included expenses involved in the preparation for the journey to England.²²⁰ They were able to instruct their Belgian gardener to sell various pieces of furniture to pay these off and to support the abbess and sister who remained in Brussels. The full amount disbursed on the journey from Brussels to London was £97.12.6d. Receipts for that year record interest on money held with the Bank of Vienna (770 German florins), although it is not clear whether they actually received this money or whether it stood as an outstanding debt owed to them. The entry: ‘Received a year’s interest of ye Bank of Vienna of 770 Ger[man] flo[rins] due ye 24 March, which was spent at Brussels, since we have not received any interest of our capitals in the Bank of Vienna’ is unclear. A second entry, entitled ‘Receipt of Capitals’ reveals that they: ‘Reimbursed 500 flo. [...] part of a capital of 3500 flo. [...] in the hands of Mon. S.L. Lancher de Aquilar of the City of Brussels, 300 flo. ex. remains in his hands for which he is to pay annually 4% current interest one year due February 14 1795 English money’.²²¹ In 1795, they received £229.10 in interest on what appear to be various annuities. From that year the school provided a growing source of income: £257.12.3d in 1795, which had doubled to £555.8.11d

²¹⁹ DAA, BO IV A, Box 7 (105654).

²²⁰ DAAA, Account Book for Winchester (940, 949, 002, 006).

²²¹ DAAA, Account Book for Winchester (016, 142).

in 1797.²²² It is not clear from the books how much of this was ploughed back into the school and how much was clear profit to the nuns.

The Cambrai community was less fortunate: ‘by bad luck our money was placed in France and therefore lost’.²²³ This was not insubstantial as a statement for 1793, reveals the convent and lands, together with houses in the town of Cambray, were valued at £5,265 with: ‘money in the Town House in Paris, one thousand, three hundred and four pounds’ and ‘with the congregation of St Maur, seven thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight pounds’.²²⁴ This meant the nuns had a total investment in property of over £14,000. The statement calculated ‘arrears of interest due up to 1793’ amounting to ‘three thousand six hundred and forty pounds, sixteen shillings, and arrears of rent due to the same date; eight hundred pounds’. None was ever recovered. Account books at Woolton, reveal that the community relied entirely on donations from benefactors, both monetary and in-kind.²²⁵ The only regular income the communities were guaranteed was the ‘Committee Allowance’. The Salford chronicler reports:

From the day of their arrival in England, the Community enjoyed the benefit of the liberal allowances granted by the British Government to the Refugee Nuns [...] it amounted to one guinea per month to each nun. At first the entries are invariably £16.16.0, till death gradually diminishes their number; and all ‘Committee allowance’ ends with Sister Scholastica Caton’s death in February 1830.²²⁶

Although grateful for this grant the nuns were cautious. The chronicler continues:

Dom T. Bennett [warned] the nuns “not to draw on the Committee for New-Comers” nor “let it be known that they do receive members”. In January 1798, he informs them of an extra offer for a ‘clothes allowance’, and enquires if they need any, from the Government Committee. By the accounts it seems that he handed them in consequence £15.15.0, and the next December £14.14.0, i.e. an extra guinea each for flannel etc. [...] In 1803 the allowance was raised to £1.10.0 per month, and continues at that rate up to

²²² DAAA, Downside 4 accounts (154442 and 164353).

²²³ SBAA, Knight Letters, Dame Anne Josepha Knight to her cousin 20 August 1795.

²²⁴ SBAA, Box 457.

²²⁵ SBAA, Account books 1795–1810 and Partington’s ‘Little Book’.

²²⁶ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, p. 50.

1830. During the latter part of this term, it is paid by the *Trimestre*. The total of 'Committee money' from 1795 to 1830 amounts to no less than £5,356.19.7. May God reward our country!

In addition to the one guinea per head, which was received by all the houses, the Dunkirk accounts also record a one-off payment of 24 guineas towards furniture.²²⁷

Dowries

Dowries, essential for survival varied in amount. Some women brought a lump sum, while others received a regular annuity which contributed to the running costs of the communities for their lifetime.²²⁸ Half-yearly payments for the Misses Shepherds at Woolton show up in the account books: '1805, Received for the two Dame Shepherds – £31; 1806, Ditto £50'.²²⁹ Wealthy entrants sometimes funded specific items such as heiress Scholastica Gregson whose large dowry significantly swelled the annual income at Salford and also bought enough material to make each nun a cowl. Later, her inheritance of £80,000 provided almost all the entire purchase price of the community's new home at Stanbrook Hall.²³⁰

Concern to provide a dowry could inhibit vocations. Monk and mission priest at Liverpool, Dom Tartleton, wrote to abbess Augustina Shepherd in 1817:

Miss Spencer's father has requested me to inform you that in case his daughter should embrace a religious life he could not with any degree of precedence give more than one hundred pounds with her at present, but that at his death she should have an equal share with the rest of his children. What that may be, it is impossible to say, the times are so very precarious. I should suppose it may amount to £500 or £600. If she be admitted on these terms he would wish to know what additional expense he might be called to until she made her profession. She seems very anxious to join you [...] I told her it was

²²⁷ DAA, T IV 1, 'History of Hammersmith' (193159).

²²⁸ SBAA, Box, 345, wills and dowries folder.

²²⁹ SBAA, account books.

²³⁰ SBAA, Box 456.

necessary to weigh a matter of this importance well and that she ought to recommend it to God in her daily prayers.²³¹

While there is no record of any aspirant being refused entry because of the size of her dowry at Woolton/Salford, that was not the case elsewhere. At Hammersmith a full dowry of £1,000 was required for choir nuns and was generally enforced. ‘Some difficulty’ was felt at the possibility of receiving Victoria Whitehall due to ‘the smallness of her annuity’ of £12.18s which was ‘all she possessed’. Abbess Magdalen Prujean wrote: ‘we should not receive anyone on these terms’ and goes on to explain ‘the dearness of things and our losses makes us now dependent upon our Friends, and therefore we cannot take anyone into our family without a full maintenance, which obliges me to decline many offers’.²³² Victoria’s dowry was supplemented by a ‘generous friend’, and she was subsequently professed. Similarly, the profession of Mary Thaise English in 1836 was postponed because she was considered: ‘too poor to profess’.²³³ The rule was applied flexibly however, the need for income being balanced against the need for new members and Harriet (Placida) Selby, professed in 1818, was ‘almost the first of those professed among us [in] England who was able to bring her full portion of £1,000’.²³⁴ Other gifts were considered in lieu of money, and this was a continuation of the practice on the Continent.²³⁵ In 1817, Mary Ann Smith entered as a lay-sister: ‘because of the goods of the world she had nothing to bring to the house’, but on account of ‘the infinitely greater riches’ of her beautiful voice, she was professed as a choir nun despite ‘being penniless’.²³⁶ At Cannington, in July 1808, a Miss Foothead, previously denied entry because of ‘not having any fortune’, was accepted after receiving a settlement of £25 per annum from

²³¹ SBAA, Box 456, letter 12, Dunstan (William) Tarleton, 1772–1816, monk of St Laurence’s and mission priest in Liverpool to Augustina Shepherd 25 May 1816.

²³² DAA, Annals, T VI I, p. 43 (193224).

²³³ DAA, Annals, T VI I, p.160 (195121).

²³⁴ DAA, Annals, T VI I, p. 104 (194606).

²³⁵ See Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe*, p. 109–10.

²³⁶ DAA, Annals T VI I (194606).

a benefactor.²³⁷ The Council Book indicates that the vicar apostolic was the final arbiter on whether dowry-less women should be accepted. In 1820, an applicant was refused for having no dowry but told to apply to the bishop who gave his consent for her to enter.²³⁸ On occasion a healthy dowry could recommend a not-altogether-suitable candidate. In 1822, Miss Sarah Bettington was proposed by Bernard Collingridge as ‘a person likely to promote the temporal interests of the community having a large fortune entirely at her own disposal’. As an afterthought he added that she also had a ‘charitable, pious disposition and a great desire to become a religious’.²³⁹ She was given the habit but under rather unusual conditions: she ‘desires of building herself two rooms near the refectory and to put up at her own expense an extension at the east end of the house [...] up to the cost of £600’. Although the extension was completed Bettington did not persevere.

Spiritual Services

Requests for prayers and novenas also provided some income as well as furthering the spiritual outreach of the communities. These were sometimes for a special intention: ‘By an unknown person for prayers for herself and the conversion of her brother – £10’, or unspecified: ‘By Mrs Turnstall for prayers – £10’.²⁴⁰ Such payments were in addition to Mass stipends which were paid directly to the priest and are documented separately. There does not seem to have been a standard rate for prayers; presumably the donors gave what they could afford. The Hammersmith account books have many entries for prayers, but the practice seems less widespread among the other houses, although possibly transactions were on a more informal basis. A letter to the Salford convent asks: ‘what is generally expected in the way of contribution for your pious performance of the Novena’, suggesting this was a regular service there too.²⁴¹

²³⁷ CAA Council Book (152720, 152737). She did not persevere.

²³⁸ CAA Council Book (154552).

²³⁹ CAA, Council Book (160316, 160325).

²⁴⁰ DAA, BT VI 1 (103436).

²⁴¹ SBAA, Box 457, letter 38.

Investments

As soon as the communities were able, they set money aside to invest. At Salford, as early as the 1802 Visitation, the nuns were being urged to build reserves and try to invest what little they had: ‘as it appears from the accounts that the income of the house is improved, we order that some money be annually put out to interest’.²⁴² At the next Visitation, the nuns were advised to ‘pay the greatest attention to economy’ in order to save for the purchase of a more suitable monastic building. The Visitor stipulated: ‘We expressly order that two-thirds of the Government allowance be regularly laid aside and put out to interest by the House’s agent in London from the 1st of July this present year’.²⁴³ Significantly, the community had the office of cellarer and procuratrix, but did not manage their own finances. The EBC provincial procurator, Anselm Lorymer sent out and paid accounts on their behalf.²⁴⁴ He also sold their stock and re-invested monies, sometimes without consulting the nuns.²⁴⁵ In a letter of 1807, attached to the year’s accounts, Dom Lorymer wrote: ‘the balance is in your favour’ and gives a detailed financial analysis: ‘I have purchased different sums in Bank Stock which I think will turn much to your advantage. You may form some judgment of the advantage by the Dividends’.²⁴⁶ On other occasions, the abbess was asked to advise before investments were made:

[...] please to direct me in what funds you would like it to be invested, our funds here yield now very low interest. The French are much higher but I do not like to recommend anything in this way for fear things should turn out later unfavourable. The appearances in France seem to be daily getting more stable.²⁴⁷

²⁴² SBAA, Box 351, Dom Bede Brewer, Act of Visitation, 12 July 1801.

²⁴³ SBAA, Box 351, Act of Visitation, 26 July 1805.

²⁴⁴ MIM 527.

²⁴⁵ SBAA, Box 457, note at the bottom of accounts for 1818.

²⁴⁶ SBAA, Box 454, letter 1807.

²⁴⁷ SBAA, Box 457, accounts 1822.

Abbess Christina Chare was in favour of the French investments, and she directed Lorymer to place £100 in France in 1822. Again, he stressed:

I conceive it to be the interest of all our establishments to consider the security in such cases before the profit of interest. Though I am not much apprehensive myself of danger in the security of France, yet most people here would blame us exceedingly for so doing on the eve of war and would upbraid us as deserving to lose our property.²⁴⁸

Entries for 1820, show that the community already had interests in France, with payments being received in francs for ‘rentes’ [sic].²⁴⁹ By 1827, most of their property was in French funds, ‘by far the best security’.²⁵⁰ Continued investment in France may suggest that hope of returning there had not been entirely extinguished: possibly the nuns still feared persecution in England and wished to have an overseas fund, although it is surprising that they perceived France to be friendlier to Catholic institutions.

Although even some quite small transactions were managed by Lorymer – in 1816, he promised ‘your candles and breads will go off this afternoon’²⁵¹ – correspondence between him and various equally astute abbesses, show the nuns were by no means passive in managing their financial affairs and were quick to pursue claims when necessary.²⁵² In 1815, Abbess Augustina Shepherd directed Lorymer:

I must observe to you that it appears very extraordinary to me that Messrs Keating & Co charge 5 years for the advertisement in the Directory. They had always done it gratis before, and these and other such insertions, made them sell a prodigious number of Directories and favoured the sale of their Books etc. If they had given notice to those who were concerned, all would have been fair, but to make a demand for so many years

²⁴⁸ SBAA, Box 457, accounts 1822.

²⁴⁹ SBAA, Box 457, a second letter in 1827 again refers to ‘the dividend on the 2000 French ‘rentes’ is also due – about £39 but the particulars are not received from Paris’.

²⁵⁰ SBAA, Box 457, letter Dunstan Scott to Christina Chare, 1827.

²⁵¹ SBAA Box 457.

²⁵² SBAA Box 457.

back is, I think, no better than barefaced imposition and I would recommend you to write to them to that effect, but don't say that I suggested it.²⁵³

By 1826, the Salford nuns' capital had increased to £5,364.12.0.²⁵⁴ A Financial Statement for that year included a projection of 'property belonging to Salford and what it would produce at present, 5 April 1826'. Legacies continued to be received, some dating back to Cambrai days, and ranged from £500 a year to £5.²⁵⁵ In the 1820s, income came from a mixture of bonds, investments, pensions and dowries. In 1838, 'Principal Monies' showed £1,000 in Portuguese bonds and a total investment of £14,220.²⁵⁶

As the community settled, they appear to have become more confident in directing their own finances, as correspondence between the cellarer, Placida Le Clerc and a later EBC treasurer, Dunstan Scott, reveals. The following letter suggests a more informal relationship with less of the reserve of earlier exchanges:

Here is your account. Peep at it. Look at it again and again and then cogitate and compare with former hopes and later fears, and then tell me if you have lost money by the Spanish 3pfts? [investments]. You will see that you have already sold out to the value of £380. More than the whole of their cost and that there are yet remaining almost £420, which if sold at the present low price will yield more than £1200. Is that a loss, Madame Placid? There is also the £1,000 which was sent to seek its fortune in Madrid, it has again shewn its face at home, or at least good bills for its amount. It has also bettered itself to the sum of more than £350 and you have been receiving 10pft interest on these. Does this betoken a loss Mistress Proc?

Oh but there is the subscription money which at the Chapter was worth £1,200 and now is no more than £880. Quite true Madame, and if you had taken the advice of Billy Scott you would have bought a home of your own and it would still have been worth

²⁵³ SBAA, Box 457, letter Lorymer to Abbess Augustina Shepherd, 1815.

²⁵⁴ SBAA, Box 8. Account Book 5, cash accounts and financial statements for 1826.

²⁵⁵ SBAA, Box 36, List of Benefactors.

²⁵⁶ SBAA, Box 457.

£1,200 but you are like a wheel caught in a rut, you get into the rut and cannot make up your mind to get out of it.²⁵⁷

The nuns at Winchester, having abandoned the hope of returning to Brussels, did begin to invest in England and in their own property and ‘by degrees added [...] considerably to the value of the property [at Winchester] by buildings and repairs: £3,000; by purchase of adjoining gardens: £770’.²⁵⁸

Benefactors

In the new exile, gifts of money and material from benefactors were the primary means of support for all the communities. A notebook kept by cellarer Ann Teresa Partington lists gifts from May 1795 to March 1796, which included coffee, tea, cheese and garden stuff, chocolate, pork and black pudding, snuff,²⁵⁹ china, counterpanes and fabric material. A benefactors list at Hammersmith reveals similar donations: ‘Beside ye Benedictions in cash we received sundry provisions as tea, sugar, rice, fish, wine etc’.²⁶⁰ Specific gratuities were also paid at Woolton:

We had not been long settled at Woolton before Edw^d. Constable of Burton & Fran. Sheldon of Wycliffe Esq^{re} honour’d us with a visit [...] To help the Community in general, Mr Constable also gave an allowance of 60£ an. It is paid quarterly, and we have reason to hope it will not be withdrawn till something falls out to inable [sic] the Community to live without it.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ SBAA, Box 457, 1834, Correspondence with South Provincial of EBC.

²⁵⁸ DAAA, Annals 1794 (1128380).

²⁵⁹ Four pounds of snuff was given to the nuns ‘from different people’ in 1795 suggesting it was a popular gift. There is no other reference to the habit among Benedictines, but snuff featured in gifts to the Bruges Augustinians in 1794 (my thanks to Caroline Bowden for this information). Account books for the Irish Dominican nuns at Cabra also show purchases of snuff for the community as well as spittoons (my thanks to Sr Nancy Corcoran, CSJ). In 1836, French sisters from the Congregation of St Joseph of Carondelet are reported to have thrown their snuff containers overboard as they sailed to the USA, see Marie Kealy, OP, *From Channel Row to Cabra* (Dublin, 2010), p. 61. It is conceivable the Cambrai nuns were snuff-takers; possibly taken to obscure the unpleasant smells on their travels or for medicinal purposes, or possibly even for pleasure as the habit was fashionable among ladies as well as gentlemen. An article in *The Lady's monthly museum, or Polite repository of amusement and instruction: being an assemblage of whatever can tend to please the fancy, interest the mind, or exalt the character of the British fair. By a society of ladies*, 18 (London, 1823), p. 319 discusses the time spent on the ‘agreeable ceremony’. I am grateful to Sr Maris Stella McKeown OP and Dr Helen Kilburn, Notre Dame University, for further insights into women’s snuff-taking habits.

²⁶⁰ Extracts reproduced in Jacob (ed.), *Brief Narrative* pp. 77–82.

²⁶¹ Jacob (ed.), *Brief Narrative*, p. 50.

In addition to the annual sum of £60, Constable also supported a French émigré priest as acting chaplain for nuns to the sum of £40 p.a. Benefactor Mary Stanford (a former pupil at Cambrai), enabled the nuns to move from Woolton to Salford in 1807. She offered a building, which she held for her lifetime, rent-free but subject to window tax which the nuns were to pay. In addition, she proposed that ‘with respect to repairs the House shall be kept dry at my own expense, but any alterations you think necessary must be at yours’.²⁶² She went on to lend £100 interest free to enable them to do this. Moreover, she undertook to pay twenty-five guineas per annum for a chaplain. All she asked in return was that she might be accommodated occasionally inside the enclosure when she visited the area.

Some benefactors believed their donations gave them a right to dictate terms to the nuns. Francis Constable of Burton Constable, a generous supporter, expressed concerns about the move to Salford and warned of ‘the precarious tenure of the premises’,²⁶³ and observed dryly that ‘Mr Berkley is as liable to die as well as any of us’.²⁶⁴ Others were unimpressed with the building, described by one friend as ‘the old ruin’.²⁶⁵ Constable’s objections were ignored but this did not prevent his continuing generosity. In September 1808, his man of business informed the abbess that he had ordered his bank to pay their bills up to the amount of one hundred guineas per annum.²⁶⁶ The subscription list of donors in Dame Ann Teresa Partington’s account book includes: Sir Thomas Gascoigne of Parlington Hall,²⁶⁷ Mr Middleton of Stockeld Hall, Mrs Weld of Lullworth Castle, Mrs Rouby (superior of the Bar

²⁶² SBAA, Box 454.

²⁶³ SBAA, Box 454, it was entailed. Concerns regarding the security of the tenancy were such that Bede Brewer, as EBC President, refused to give permission for the nuns to proceed without a written undertaking from Robert Berkley (the heir) that he would continue the arrangement for his lifetime.

²⁶⁴ SBAA, Box 454, Francis Constable to Agnes Robinson, 31 January 1807.

²⁶⁵ SBAA, Box 456, letter 3, Lady Catherine Smythe to Dame Agnes Robinson (no date).

²⁶⁶ SBAA, Box 454, Thomas Wright to Agnes Robinson, 26 September 1808.

²⁶⁷ The presence of Thomas Gascoigne’s name at the top of this list is of particular interest. Despite being from an old recusant family whose members included the first abbess and other nuns at Cambrai as well as an abbot at Lamspringe Abbey, Sir Thomas apostatised in 1780 and became an Anglican. His apostasy may have been motivated by political ambition rather than religious conviction and this entry supports Alexander Lock’s contention that he ‘remained covertly sympathetic to Catholicism until his death’, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics*, p. 5

Convent, York), Francis Constable (Burton Constable), Maxwell Constable (Everingham), and the Earl of Shrewsbury as among those who helped fund the move.²⁶⁸ In all, almost £400 was donated and a further £142.8.2 was raised from the sale of goods at Woolton.²⁶⁹

On arrival at Salford, benefactors included the third Marquis of Hertford and his wife, Lady Isabella, who lived at nearby Ragley Hall. They sent: ‘carts laden with vegetables, fruit and flowers, besides gifts of coffee, chocolate etc. etc.’.²⁷⁰ Bede Brewer had great hopes of this relationship:

The nuns have a great friend in the Marquis of Hertford whose noble seat (Ragley) is only 3 miles from them. He is a great friend to them. He was so polite as to come to their house while I was there last August [and witnessed their signatures on their statement of claim]. I shall desire them to ingage [sic] the Marquis who is a great ministerial man, and I think Lord Chamberlain, to write to or avail Lord Castlereagh in their behalf.²⁷¹

Fund-raising

While gifts and bequests continued to be received, the nuns began to take a more proactive approach to fund-raising. Money to buy a new organ at Salford was raised ‘almost entirely’ through the energies of Magdalen Le Clerc. Altogether £134 was raised, with the monks at Downside Abbey among the most generous donors.²⁷² In 1812, the nuns at Caverswall launched a campaign to raise funds to build a new chapel. Promotional material emphasised the wider public benefit of the project, stating that the smallness of the present chapel prevents ‘many well-disposed people [...] from attending the service and [receiving the] instructions of our holy Religion’.²⁷³ The collection of the funds was administered by John Millner who also managed the building programme and £590 was raised towards the total cost of £724. In 1822,

²⁶⁸ SBAA, Dame Ann Teresa Partington’s ‘Little Book’.

²⁶⁹ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 562–3, and relevant account books.

²⁷⁰ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, p. 562.

²⁷¹ DAA, Parker Letters, Letter Bede Brewer to Henry Parker, 12 March 1816.

²⁷² SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 562–7.

²⁷³ DAA, BO IV D, Box 1 (114401).

donors were again approached for the cost of repairs to the monastery.²⁷⁴ An organ appeal at Caverswall in 1839, raised £165 for the purchase of a new instrument and the old one was sold for £10.²⁷⁵ Abbé Prémord, chaplain at Marnhull, financed the community's move to Cannington through proceeds from his translation of the *Life of Madame Louise, A Carmelite Nun and Daughter of Louis XV, King of France* in 1807.²⁷⁶ He undertook the work especially for this cause and the book earned over £300, all of which Prémord donated to their removal costs.

Self-Sufficiency

The communities attempted self-sufficiency as far as possible, with those based in rural settings having more opportunity for this. Although they had no direct experience of farming at Cambrai, the nuns had kept 'a great number of Hens, Chickens & Ducks. 2 Pigs, 2 Sheep' in the enclosure²⁷⁷ and, on moving to Salford, requested as much land as was available for the keeping of livestock.²⁷⁸ An orchard provided apples for eating and cider-making.²⁷⁹ Dripping was collected and sold, producing a regular income. The nuns were not Cistercians and did not carry out the farm work or animal husbandry themselves. After the transfer many of the tenants remained and the farm-hands continued to work for the nuns. Relations with the local community must have suffered a set-back when the nuns having expressed a desire for more land, Mrs Stanford gave some of her tenants notice to quit. The abbess wrote that: 'we would be exceedingly sorry to deprive, or put any of the tenants to any inconvenience on our account' but they still took the land. The impact of this on relations with the local population is not mentioned. Later, when some 'unruly' tenants were evicted, the nuns gained a further acreage

²⁷⁴ DAA, BO IV D Box 2, General (143927, 143934).

²⁷⁵ DAA, BO IV A Box 7, 'Early Letters'.

²⁷⁶ *Vie de Madame Louise de France* by Abbé Proyart (Bruxelles, 1793). Prémord's translation, entitled: *Life of Princess Louisa of France, a Carmelite Nun, and Daughter of Louis XV, King of France* (Salisbury, 1807).

²⁷⁷ SBAA, Lucy Blyde 'Memorial and Statement'.

²⁷⁸ SBAA, Box 454, letters 26 April 1807 and 8 February 1808.

²⁷⁹ SBAA, Annals Vol 1, Part 2, p. 553.

and by 1825, their land extended to over forty-eight acres and the community was reasonably self-sufficient. The inventory for the Visitation that year includes: ‘A horse, 2 cows and a calf, 4 sheep and 2 lambs, 14 pigs and 6 hives of bees’.²⁸⁰ Presumably, this kept them in milk, butter, cheese, honey and meat for much of the year. There is no mention of hens or other poultry.

The community at Cannington kept seven cows after Lord Clifford gave fields and helped fit up a dairy. This became profitable and they sold butter and cheese.²⁸¹ The nuns had little spare time or energy to devote to arts and craft work, although some did try to earn an income this way. At his 1811 Visitation, Dr Milner dispensed the Caverswall community ‘as to the making and selling of works of whatever nature’.²⁸² On the Continent the Salford nuns had acquired: ‘a great reputation for their performances in fine needle-work and artificial flowers, and for cutting out upon vellum various ornaments and devices with the most exquisite taste and execution’ and they revived the art in England. Apparently, ‘their proficiency was much admired by their contemporaries for it brought them many orders and provided a much needed source of income when they were in dire distress upon their return to England’.²⁸³ As described above, the Marnhull community revived the craft of hand-made sweets which had been so popular in Paris but abandoned it after the move to Cannington, in favour of taking in schoolgirls.²⁸⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that for the nuns, while the early nineteenth century was a struggle for survival, it was also generative: a time in which they underwent an engagement with contemplative life which to borrow Hood’s distinction, resulted in re-creation rather than a

²⁸⁰ SBAA, Box 456.

²⁸¹ CAA, ‘A Short History of the House’, p. 216 (160326).

²⁸² DAA, BO IV D, Box 1 (153401).

²⁸³ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p. 33.

²⁸⁴ CAA, (copy) letter Teresa Catherine Macdonald to Bishop Sharrock, 1807.

simple return to life as lived prior to the second exile.²⁸⁵ It has demonstrated that while self-identifying as victims, they did not remain powerless in their new exile. They had to confront their own sense of identity and nationhood. Through engaging with benefactors and local enterprises they were able to negotiate the terms of their settlement and collaborate with wider support networks, including Protestants, for survival. This enabled them to identify more appropriate premises and restore monastic practices incrementally, while restrictions on the use of the habit, enclosure or monastic horarium were engaged with creatively. Growth in the early years was hampered by nostalgia for their old homes, but from the second decade, as they recovered physical and mental health and increased in number, they began to recognise that their future lay in England and to concentrate all their energies on restoration. In overcoming financial constraints, the nuns drew on survival techniques learnt in the previous exile and grew in confidence and business acumen. Re-creation involves beginning again at the source; cutting out much that has accumulated on the journey.²⁸⁶ As this chapter has shown, difficult lessons were learned in the early years and these were vital in preparing the way for regeneration. The next chapter examines the slow road to growth.

²⁸⁵ Hood, *Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 26–7.

²⁸⁶ See Hubert van Zeller, *The Benedictine Nun*, p. 158.

Chapter Two

Exile and Growth

This chapter examines the Benedictine nuns' journey to recovery and expansion in their new exile. It first considers the composition of the communities in terms of regional origins, social status, family connections and age of members. Factors inhibiting growth are then treated with particular reference to the nature of new vocations. A major sign of recovery in a community is the establishment of a novitiate and within ten years of migration all the houses had begun to receive vocations. The chapter goes on to identify new challenges these brought. Political instability and wider social, religious and geographical mobility created unstable vocations, while transfers and 'community-surfing' became more common in this period. Mental ill-health among both survivors and new entrants contributed to disruption within and gave cause for scandal outside the convents. The status of members also became more fluid with servants metamorphosing into lay-sisters as practical needs dictated admissions and the *quasi*-vocations of lady boarders developed. The number of converts and those from other religious traditions contributed to an often uneasy growth and kinship networks within communities created similar problems to the first exile although the family dynasties were different.¹ New vocations provoked tensions between the generations leading to re-examination of monastic purpose and expression, and brought into question the nature of restoration. At the root of much internal conflict were the schools the nuns were obliged to run. A source for growth, in terms of vocations and income, they were also an impediment to re-establishing contemplative life and thus increased the pressures of exile. Precursors to the schools run by apostolic sisterhoods, these monastic establishments have been

¹ See Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 57–64.

neglected by historians to date.² A school was one of the main means by which the nuns' attempted both integration into the local community and self-sufficiency. Ultimately, they were to prove inimical to contemplative life.

Composition of the Communities

New Vocations

The period 1795–1838 saw an increase in vocations to all five communities and a gradual return to pre-Revolutionary numbers. Behind the apparent numerical growth however, new inter-generational and intra-community dynamics emerged. All the houses in this study reveal disconnections between members who were formed and professed on the Continent and those who entered in England. Issues of exile and identity continued to underlie the path to revival. Women who entered in England, came from more varied socio-economic backgrounds with greater life experience. They did not bring the weight of suffering and loss with them that the exiles carried but neither did they, necessarily, bring an understanding of monastic tradition and discipline. The anonymous Benedictine author of *In a Great Tradition* makes this clear:

The extant work of Dame Barbara Constable and Dame Agnes More proves that Cambrai had been in the full steam of ancient monastic learning and culture, but the life had been rudely shattered by the Revolution, and when the community resumed its full observance under Dame Gertrude Dubois [1872–1897] at Stanbrook, many of the older nuns had had very little education and knew no language beyond their native tongue.³

Exigencies of survival meant that all the communities compromised their discernment and formation processes. As observed in Chapter One, it seemed an imperative of survival in the first exile that unsuitable vocations were accepted for the size of the dowry or other gifts and

² Preliminary work has been done by Marie Rowlands in an unpublished paper, 'The Fortress Church: Forming the English Catholic Community in a Changing Society 1791–1840'.

³ Anon, *In a Great Tradition* (London, 1956), p. 116.

this practice continued in England.⁴ While unsuitable candidates with dowries were accepted, those with a ‘good character but no money’ were sometimes denied entry.⁵ The Hammersmith abbess noted in her diary: ‘the excessive dearness of things and our losses makes us now dependent on our Friends, and therefore we cannot take anyone into our family without a full maintenance, which obliges me to decline many offers’.⁶ New entrants in England tended to be more mature and some had previous ‘careers’. Clare Crilly at Woolton had been school mistress there prior to entering the monastery, aged twenty-seven, and Juliana Horsman⁷ had experience of life in the more active teaching order at the Bar Convent in York, before transferring to Woolton at the age of thirty-five. Francis Gabrielli, at Winchester, had ‘exerted herself with great charity while living in the world for the relief of the exiled French clergy’,⁸ while Dame Bernard Lucas worked as a teacher in the school at Preston until she was old enough to enter the novitiate⁹ and Miss Carrington, who began her life as a lay-teacher with the Dunkirk nuns at Hammersmith, subsequently entered as a choir nun. Likewise, Agnes Whelan, a pupil at the Winchester school and:

A very superior person [...] who, due to her widowed mother’s reduced circumstances, took a post as governess in the family of Dr Gabell at William of Wykeham’s “Protestant” school where she found many advantages for her own improvement and access to the valuable library. Although allowed perfect liberty as to the practice of her Religious duties, she nevertheless felt the dangers of her position.¹⁰

⁴ Caroline Bowden discusses issues around discernment and vocation on the Continent in ‘Missing Members: Selection and Governance in English Convents in Exile’, in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham, 2013).

⁵ CAA, Council Book (152720, 152737, 154552). This also happened on the Continent, see James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe, c. 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 109.

⁶ DAA, T.IV.1, ‘History of Hammersmith’, p. 43 (193224).

⁷ WWTN MW088.

⁸ DSAA, ‘Annals of the Winchester Nuns’, p. 93. Teresa (Francis) Gabrielli was the daughter of Vincent Gabrielli, originally from Leghorn, Italy but later settled in London. She entered in 1801, aged twenty-six.

⁹ Anon, *Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent*, pp. 88–9. Born in 1780, Miss Lucas (Sr Bernard) had entered at Ghent at the age of fourteen. She professed in 1801 but died the following year from tuberculosis.

¹⁰ DSAA, Brussels, Annals (300).

Agnes moved on to teach at Winchester and later entered the novitiate. She took only simple vows because her health was considered too poor for choir duties – but not to take over the school which she duly did and, having learnt from her previous experience, ‘greatly advanced the system of education’.¹¹ Widows had always entered religious life and this practice continued in England. Austin Le Dily (née de Noble) was professed in 1820 at Hammersmith. She had been widowed at the age of twenty with a young son. Her mother and son were alive at time of her profession nine years later, but both died soon after.¹²

Class was also an issue. Women entering in England tended to come from more varied and modest backgrounds than the choir nuns on the Continent. Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair makes this distinction calling the Dunkirk nuns: ‘a community which, on arrival in England, [was] still predominantly Stuart in sympathy’ hailing from ‘old Catholic families’.¹³ She goes on to contrast this with the growth of entry of ‘converts and applicants from a wider cross-section of society’. Adjustment to the maturity and wider experience of entrants in England was a further challenge in second exile for the nuns.

Regional Origins

A comparison with the data given on the ‘Who were the Nuns?’ website for the Benedictines on the Continent, reveals a change in the regional origins of the nuns who entered in England. This is clear from the three houses with sufficient data for examination.¹⁴ The changes may reflect shifts in the Catholic population of the country, but do not suggest that the communities were necessarily attracting girls in their neighbourhoods.¹⁵ Choice of monastery in England continued to be made through family connections; education in the school; recommendation

¹¹ DSAA, Annals (645).

¹² DAA, Box T VI 1, manuscript, ‘History of Hammersmith’ (194829).

¹³ Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair, ‘Hammersmith: A Bridge’, paper given at the EBC History Symposium, in 1994.

¹⁴ There is little information on birthplace for the Cannington and Hammersmith nuns.

¹⁵ There are exceptions to this observation: the convent from Paris seems to have attracted more local girls: a lay-sister, Mary Anne Sanger, was one of the first to enter at Marnhull while the Knight sisters who entered at Cannington were from a neighbouring family. This may be because Dorset and Somerset were particularly isolated areas with a smaller Catholic population and fewer connections outside the region.

by a priest or confessor (usually a Benedictine) or increasingly, a particular practice of the community – vocations grew at Cannington, for example, after the introduction of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (see Chapter Three).

Place of birth 1600–1800 of convent membership while on Continent (by number and percentage) ¹⁶

	Brussels	Cambrai	Ghent	Paris	Dunkirk
North-East	12 (8.2)	44 (20.4)	17 (8.3)	6 (9.4)	1 (16.7)
North-West	8 (5.5)	26 (12)	23 (11.2)	4 (6.3)	0
East Anglia	18 (12.3)	11 (5.1)	9 (4.4)	26 (40.6)	0
West Midlands	7 (4.8)	4 (1.9)	8 (3.9)	2 (3.1)	0
Ireland	3 (2.05)	5 (2.3)	11 (5.3)	1 (1.6)	1 (16.7)
Other ¹⁷	98 (67.1)	126 (58.3)	138 (70)	25 (39)	4 (66.7)

Place of birth of those who entered 1795–1840¹⁸

	Winchester	Salford	Caverswall	Cannington	Hammersmith
North-East	0	5	4	1	1
North-West	3	14	12*	1	0
East Anglia	0	1	2	0	0
Midlands	3	6	7	0	2
London & South-East	9	6	0	1	0
South-West	1	0	0	5	0
Ireland	5	1	1	0	0

These numbers serve to illustrate shifts in regional association from Continental times. At both Woolton/Salford and Preston/Caverswall, the North-West region overtook the North-East for vocations.¹⁹ As both communities were based in the North-West for the first years in England, this may have been affected the choice of community, but the decline in North-East-based

¹⁶ Figures taken from the WWTN Website. These represent the number of women whose place of birth is given in the records. The percentage figures (in brackets) are not therefore reflective of the whole community. For an analysis of ethnic make-up of English Convents see also Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 38–42.

¹⁷ The figure here is the number given on WWTN minus the number of Irish members who were included under ‘other’ in the analysis.

¹⁸ From a database compiled from archival sources (entry books, necrologies, council books, annals, obituaries) at SBAA, DAA, DSAA and CAA. Again, this only reflects the numbers where a place of origin is given. The much smaller sample of nuns has made it unfeasible to provide a percentage break-down for the later period.

¹⁹ Scholastica Jacob, “... of a good family in Yorkshire”: A History of Stanbrook Abbey through its Yorkshire Connections’, given at York History Day, June 2016. This also reflects the national distribution of Catholics, see John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975), pp. 404–9.

gentry families whose daughters had entered on the Continent, must also be a factor. Undoubtedly, the presence of a convent in a region could influence vocations: the area with the smallest Catholic population (the South-West) produced six vocations in the two communities based there – Winchester and Marnhull (Dorset)/Cannington (Somerset).²⁰ The Midlands, with growing urban centres, also began to provide more entrants, while vocations from East Anglia declined significantly, most notably at Winchester where there were none, although it had been the most represented region at Brussels.²¹ Suffolk had been the largest contributor of vocations but the expiration of the Mannock family affected this.²² While demographic movements may explain some of the regional changes in communities, changing socio-economic factors within the Catholic community also contributed. In the period 1600–1800, seventeen women entered the communities from Ireland and a further four from England with Irish parentage.²³ For the later period, apart from Winchester, where three members from one family entered from Ireland, there is no evidence of a rise in either first- or second-generation Irish vocations, although the number of Irish immigrants to England was increasing at this time.²⁴

Social Status

According to J.C.H. Aveling, the period 1714–1830 saw a decline of the Catholic aristocracy and rise of the middle class: ‘the school lists of fashionable Catholic convents and academies

²⁰ See Robert Eaton, *The Benedictines of Colwich, 1829–1929, England’s First House of Perpetual Adoration* (London, 1929), p. 71 and pp. 83–6.

²¹ A closer examination of the constituents of the region shows that a significant percentage were from Essex which dried up as a source of vocations in Brussels by the mid-seventeenth century. See James E. Kelly, ‘Essex Girls Abroad: Family Patronage and Politicization of Convent Recruitment in the Seventeenth Century’, in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile*, pp. 33–51.

²² See below, p. 102.

²³ See Marie-Louise Coolahan, ‘Archipelagic Identities in Europe: Irish Nuns in English Convents’, in Bowden and Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile*, pp. 211–28.

²⁴ The 1851 census revealed that two-thirds of Catholics in England had been born in Ireland. New Irish immigrants tended to be poorer and less able to afford the cost of education in the convent schools. They were to benefit from the rise of the elementary schools run by the apostolic orders. See, Susan O’Brien, ‘French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), pp. 142–80, especially p. 148 and Susan O’Brien, ‘“Terra Incognita”: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 21 (1988), pp. 110–40, p. 123. Carmen Mangion shows that forty-one per cent of women entering the new apostolic orders were Irish-born. See *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Manchester, 2014), p. 183 and 191.

contain only a thin sprinkling of the old, familiar Catholic gentry names. Most surnames [...] are unfamiliar English ones, Irish or foreign'.²⁵ This is clearly reflected in the entrants to English Benedictine houses and their schools.

Entrants by Family Social Status, 1600–1800²⁶ (by percentage of the community)

	Brussels	Cambrai	Ghent	Paris	Dunkirk
Peer	2.4	4	4.5	0	1.4
Baronet/Knight	13.6	14.1	13	1.1	7.5
Esquire	32	18.7	13	3.4	18.4
Other	51.9	63	69.6	95.4	72

A brief examination of the family details of choir nuns given in the entrance books at Stanbrook Abbey for this period reveals that a range of middle class and professional backgrounds dominate. Occupations given include: solicitor, architect, ‘surgeon-dentist’, ‘Irish officer in Austrian army’, land steward, agent for the Duke of Norfolk and assay-master. More humble backgrounds can be discerned, including craftsmen and tenant farmers. Other connections include the daughter of the captain of the ‘Goshawk’, working a section of Liverpool-Leeds canal; families of shipbrokers and sailors. Another family owned ‘extensive cotton mills’ and one father had been a champion heavyweight professional boxer. ‘Trade’ was beginning to create new monastic dynasties: the Hardman family from Birmingham who ran the firm of ecclesiastical metalworkers sent generations of women to Salford/Stanbrook Abbey. Only one titled family appears in this period.²⁷ In this gradual change of social background, the monastic communities began the process of opening up which was accelerated by the apostolic congregations in ‘removing some of the class barriers that restricted some women’s entry into religious congregations’.²⁸

²⁵ J. C. H. Aveling, *Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976), p. 262.

²⁶ Taken from the WWTN website.

²⁷ For a discussion of social profiles on the Continent see Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017), pp. 64–76.

²⁸ Mangion, *Contested Identities*, p.183.

Family Connections

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the English Catholic community was small and closely-connected. Unsurprisingly, family connections played a large part in attracting vocations on the Continent. Although this tradition continued after resettlement in England, it was based around new networks. Changes in community composition, the fortunes of family dynasties and social and demographic changes are all linked.

There was a natural continuation of family loyalties and more importantly, this practice provided a sense of security and identity in the new exile. Dangers of family dominance in communities had long been recognised. The Brussels Statutes stated that ‘Widowes, sisters, or such as are neere of bloode, may not be received without great Cause’.²⁹ Despite this prohibition, all the convents received women connected through family ties. Historians have identified dynastic tendencies in the English Convents but what has not been recognised hitherto is the significant rupture of family dynasties in the Benedictine convents after 1800.³⁰ Old families died off or did not continue to provide daughters for religious life. The ‘decline of the Catholic aristocracy’ as described by Aveling, can be seen to have a direct impact on the Benedictine convents.³¹ Apostasy, bankruptcy, a lack of male heirs and declining religious fervour all contributed. Among the most prominent of Benedictine families in the Continental convents were the Poultons, Knatchbulls, Sheldons, Tempests and Carys – names which recur through generations but abruptly cease after the removal to England. Apostasy ended the Gage line (which had provided five vocations at Brussels and Dunkirk); the Swinburnes (five vocations at Dunkirk); the Gascoignes (six at Cambrai); Lawsons (three at Ghent) and Tempests (five at Ghent and one at Cambrai). The Constables and Tancreds (Brussels and

²⁹ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 57. The Brussels’ statutes re-affirmed guidelines set out by the Council of Trent.

³⁰ See WWTN database and K.S.B Keats-Rohan (ed.), *English Catholic Nuns in Exile 1600–1800: a Biographical Register* (Oxford: 2017).

³¹ See Aveling, *Handle and the Axe*, pp. 253–83.

Cambrai) also apostatised and the names no longer appear in the English communities although both Gascoigne and Constable family members remained benefactors. It is significant that many of these families (the Gascoignes, Constables, Tempests, Tancreds and Swinburnes) were from the North-East and their decline impacted on the regional distribution of community membership.

Some families simply died out: the Mannock family of Gifford's Hall, Suffolk, who had sent five daughters to Brussels, expired in 1787. At Cambrai at the time of migration, there were Shepherds, Sheldons, and Knights-Anns-Plumptions in community: all the last in their monastic lines. The last nun from the Gascoigne family died at Cambrai in 1774 and the last Sheldon at Salford in 1808. The pattern was repeated in the other communities: the Tempest connection ceased in 1799, at Preston.³² Some families did 'revive'. At Cambrai the last of the Cary family to be professed died there in 1693, but after a break of nearly two hundred years, a new Cary dynasty appeared in the later nineteenth century.³³ The Conquest family also disappeared from the convent rolls although Mary Ann Rayment at Winchester and Maura Rayment (through marriage) at Salford, were connected with the family.

The extended Plumpton-Ann-Knight family provides a case study. The Knights were an 'old' Catholic family, stewards rather than landowners originally, who advanced socially through marriage into recusant gentry families. They sent three generations of daughters to be educated at Cambrai in the second half of the eighteenth century, with each generation producing at least one vocation to the monastery. Correspondence reveals tensions and resentments centred on two sisters and their aunt in the 1780s, all of whom held key roles in the convent.³⁴ In the 1780s and 90s, as travel across the Channel became more difficult, the

³² With the death of Mary Anselm Tempest, WWTN GB221.

³³ The last to die on the Continent was Mary Cary, WWTN CB030. The new Cary connection began at Stanbrook Abbey with the entrance of Margarita Cary in 1885.

³⁴ ADN, Lille 1, Letters to EBC Abbot President Augustine Walker from Mary Burgess, WTN CB022.

fourth generation of this family sent their daughters to the Bar Convent School.³⁵ Of the three Knight family members at Cambrai in 1790, only one survived to take refuge in England. On the Continent, Ghent had had the largest number of entries with familial connections. But this is in line with them having the highest number of recruits in the seventeenth century.³⁶ Seventy-three percent of Benedictines who had relatives in the Order, had one or more in the same house as themselves.³⁷ Family adherence to community continued in England and new kinship patterns emerged.

A survey of the nuns who entered the Woolton/Salford community reveals a complicated web of familial connections. At least twenty of the thirty-two women who entered between 1795 and 1838 had one or more relative in the monastery or school. Connections can also be traced in other religious communities and in the priesthood. Many of the nuns began their monastic career in the school and pupil rolls reveal recurring family names. The situation was replicated across the convents. At Cannington, six sets of biological sisters entered in the period with one family, the Knights, almost saving the community from extinction: they produced four vocations including a long-serving prioress.³⁸ The tradition did cause alarm in some quarters. EBC president, Richard Marsh, expressed concern regarding the admittance of Miss Day as a postulant at Salford in 1834 because she was ‘niece to the sisters Le Clerc, already nuns in the house, as it may give too great a preponderance to family connections within the community’.³⁹ The matter was referred to the definitors but eventually Justina Day was granted entry and was followed into the novitiate by two of her sisters.⁴⁰

³⁵ One, Catherine, Stanislaus, Knight, 1781–1851, subsequently professed there, see SBAA, Knight Letters, see also Sr Gregory Kirkus CJ (ed.), *IBVM/CJ Biographical Dictionary of the English Members and Major Benefactors (1667–2000)* (York, 2007).

³⁶ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 59.

³⁷ WWTN.

³⁸ They were no connection with the Knight family at Cambrai. See Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, p. 104.

³⁹ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents, Letter 45.

⁴⁰ She was the only one to profess.

Concern was justified: familial relationships could contribute to status in the community, for example, Dame Frances de Sayles who entered Salford in 1817, was the niece of Dame Clare Crilly: ‘Her relationship with that venerable old religious gave Dame Frances during her whole life a marked position in the esteem of the community’ and caused discord.⁴¹ Dame Frances was also at school with Dame Maura Rayment and study of the correspondence indicates that cliques emerged.⁴² Other sets of biological sisters at Salford were the Weetmans, who were cousins of Teresa Sumner. Placida and Evangelista Le Clerc, cousins of Edith de Saul and Justina Day, one of five sisters in the school. Family networks were present at all levels in the community. Two lay-sisters, Monica and Catherine Crookall, were biological sisters, and the name Bridge occurs several times in relation to maids as well as servant-cum-lay-sister, Louisa Bridge[s]. All three of the lay-sisters at Woolton were from Lytham in Lancashire suggesting that geographical location could also play a part in connecting vocations.⁴³ There were fourteen entries at Winchester with connections but in a reversal of Continental figures, only four at Caverswall and none at Hammersmith.

Age Profile

A comparison of ages at entry/profession before and after arrival in England for the Cambrai community, reveals that a trend towards later entry/profession was already developing prior to the migration.

⁴¹ SBAA Annals 1:2, p. 29

⁴² SBAA Box 455, loose letter, Frances de Sayles to Kitty Nock, 10 May 1838.

⁴³ Lytham was a Benedictine mission. The missions often provided links for vocations.

Median Age at Entry for Cambrai/Salford⁴⁴

PLACE	AGE AT ENTRY	DATES	AVERAGE AGE	SOURCE
Cambrai	Age at Entry	1700–19	20	From WWTN website
Cambrai	Age at Entry	1720–39	14	From WWTN website
Cambrai	Age at Profession	1740–96	22 (21) ⁴⁵	Entry and profession books, obits.
Woolton	Age at Profession	1796–1807	25	Entry and profession books, obits.
Salford	Age at Profession	1807–37	25	Entry and profession books, obits

Age at entry had been decreasing in the first half of the eighteenth century. The median age dropped from twenty in the period 1700–19 to fourteen, 1720–39, although the age here must refer to entry into the school rather than the novitiate, as canon law did not allow professions before the age of sixteen.⁴⁶ The final figures at Cambrai are distorted by one sister who entered at Cambrai but was not professed until arrival at Woolton, as her profession date was delayed due to the Revolution. There is no record of her date of entry, if she is removed from the calculation, the average falls to twenty-one. The only woman over the age of thirty to be professed at Cambrai from 1740 to 1796 was Lucy Blyde.⁴⁷ There is no evidence as to why she delayed entry. The next oldest was twenty-five and the youngest seventeen. At Woolton the seven professed ranged in age from thirty-six to twenty-two. The oldest were both women who had previous vocations; Juliana Horsman (thirty-six) had been at the Bar Convent and Clare Crilly (twenty-seven) a school mistress. The impossibility of travel to the Continent during 1789–95 may have been a factor in postponed entries. At Salford two nuns were over thirty on profession: Louisa Bridge (thirty-three) had been a servant at Woolton and Maura Rayment (thirty-one) was a widow (she had been a pupil in the school). Ignatia Power, who was

⁴⁴ Information gathered from archival sources (entry books, necrologies, council books, annals) at SBAA, DAA, DSAA and CAA.

⁴⁵ This median age does not represent all professions at Cambrai in this period, but only those who survived the migration to England.

⁴⁶ See: H.J. Schroeder (ed.), *The Canons and Decrees of the council of Trent*, session 25: 15 (Illinois, 1978), p. 226.

⁴⁷ WWTN CB013.

professed at twenty-six, had first done a postulancy with the Augustinian Canonesses at New Hall.⁴⁸ The entry books frequently draw attention to the age of novices, for example, at Hammersmith, lay-sister Augustine Hurley, is described as being professed at ‘the mature age’ of thirty-five.⁴⁹ At Cannington Austen Welch was described as being ‘midway [sic] in life ere she was able to commence her religious course’⁵⁰, she ‘was recommended by Fr Scott OSB’.⁵¹

Disruption of Vocations

It was not unknown for women to move between communities on the Continent,⁵² but this became more common after migration to England amongst aspirants, novices and even after profession. This may be due simply to greater freedom of movement but it also suggests a greater level of on-going discernment, less willingness to accept an uncongenial rule or superior and more opportunities to change. It is symptomatic of the unease within the new exile period and the difficulty older nuns found in adjusting to very different patterns of monastic life. Unprecedented movement of displaced nuns in and out of communities had a considerable impact on stability, a key component of Benedictine life, while the addition of nuns from different nationalities and backgrounds, particularly from very different spiritual traditions, further hindered conventual cohesion and the replanting of monastic roots.

An example of inability to accept life in second exile can be seen in Dame Bernard Barnewall.⁵³ She was a survivor of Cambrai and the Compiègne prison who, in 1825 at the age

⁴⁸ After leaving New Hall, Power moved with her mother and younger sister to Worcester. They participated in local Catholic activities and Power taught in a school, partly for pecuniary reasons. She was introduced to the Salford nuns by Revd Father Joseph Tristram, a Jesuit in Worcester.

⁴⁹ DAA, ‘History of Hammersmith’, p. 100 (194545).

⁵⁰ CAA, Necrology p. 428 (120327).

⁵¹ Dunstan Scott, MIM 854.

⁵² See Bowden, ‘Missing Members’, p. 54.

⁵³ WWTN CB008. ‘Trappist Fever’ took over the Benedictine monks as well as the nuns in this period, see Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival, Continuity and Change in the English Benedictine Congregation 1795–1850* (Farnborough, 2016), pp. 41–2.

of seventy-six, transferred her stability from Salford to the Cistercian community at Stapehill, Dorset 'in search of a more perfect life of religion'.⁵⁴ The Annals suggest that this move was due to the tension experienced by all the 'Cambrai Mothers' at that time:

She felt intensely, as indeed did all her Cambrai sisters, the strange manner of life which circumstances forced upon them for so long. As years only seemed to establish more firmly this unbearable 'status quo' imposed at Woolton and still continued at Salford, she felt called to look only to her own spiritual profit, and ceaselessly petitioned her superiors to allow her to join the Trappistines at Stapehill.⁵⁵

Barnewall seems to have prevaricated for some time regarding this move. In 1824 EBC President, Richard Marsh, wrote to Abbess Christina Chare saying he was 'happy to find that Mother Prioress is changing her mind about the Trappists. I think she does well. When a person has made profession in a house and promised stability in it, I think that person had much better think of nothing else but of finishing her course in the same house'.⁵⁶ This was the year before she transferred. The move certainly came as a surprise to former chaplain, Dom Ambrose Feraud,⁵⁷ who wrote: 'I was no less surprised at [Dame Bernard] attempting a second novitiate in so austere an institute at her period of life'.⁵⁸ She did persevere at Stapehill, but an obituary note from that community after her death, suggests that she did not find the Cistercian alternative as easy to live as she had imagined. It records that 'she was very charitable and edifying only she never could be made to keep silence'.⁵⁹ This desertion of a 'Cambrai mother' and fellow-survivor had a demoralising impact on the community.⁶⁰ The attraction of the Cistercians may have been in part due to the perceived greater strictness of the Order.

⁵⁴ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, p. 581. The Cistercian Abbey at Stapehill was founded in 1802 by French refugees from St Antoine, Paris. There is no information about how Barnewall made contact with the Cistercians, but the communication suggests the existence of informal conventual networks.

⁵⁵ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 581–2.

⁵⁶ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents, Letter 17. Richard Marsh, MIM 288.

⁵⁷ Monk of St Gregory's, 1786–1847, he was, briefly, chaplain at Salford in 1812.

⁵⁸ SBAA, Box 456, Letter 22. Dame Bernard was obliged by Canon Law to undergo another novitiate at Stapehill.

⁵⁹ SBA, Box 456, loose letter.

⁶⁰ SBAA, Annals 1825.

Dissatisfied with the enforced 'laxities' at Salford, Barnewall may have hoped life at Stapehill would have been closer to the rigours of Cambrai. It was certainly strict: in the 1820s so many young sisters died that an enquiry was set up and Pope Leo XII decreed that the austerity of the Rule should be mitigated and the community come under the jurisdiction of the local bishop.⁶¹ There is also the simpler explanation that in times of difficulty, the grass always seems greener elsewhere.

Were other of her contemporaries tempted to 'look only to their own spiritual profit' and move elsewhere? At least one, who had never experienced Cambrai life, was so inspired. In 1831, lay-sister Sr Louisa (Aloysia) Bridge[s] also applied to transfer to Stapehill. In his letter giving permission for her to try with the Trappistines, EBC President John Birdsall remarked that 'as this good sister has so long entertained and so repeatedly expressed this anxious wish of hers [...] it will be as well to allow her to do it, at her own peril of disappointment.'⁶² Nothing is known of Sr Louisa's history or motivation, but the transfer was clearly not a whim of the moment. She had worked at Woolton as a servant before entering Salford in 1815, at the age of 32. For a lay-sister of mature age the move is a surprising one. She did not persevere at Stapehill and returned the following year to Salford where 'she lived for many years as a good obedient lay-sister, just as though she had never travelled!'⁶³

For Juliana [Jane] Horsman, the return of the monasteries from the Continent may have helped her realise her true vocation. Born and educated in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, a Benedictine mission, her brother had gone on scholarship to the EBC monastery at Lamspringe where he subsequently entered.⁶⁴ The family were not wealthy and unlikely to have been able to afford the cost of sending a daughter abroad.⁶⁵ The nearby Bar Convent was the only option

⁶¹ See <https://www.hcawhitland.co.uk>.

⁶² SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents, Letter 44, from John Birdsall, MIM 723, to Abbess Gertrude Westhead, 25 April 1831.

⁶³ SBAA, Annals, vol. 1, part 2, p. 589

⁶⁴ James (Adrian) Horsman, MIM 790.

⁶⁵ The name Horsman occurs in Knaresborough records in connection with weavers and master craftsmen.

for religious life for Jane at the time she entered there in 1790. If she had internalised the Benedictine spirituality of the mission the Ignatian-influenced Bar would have offered a very different form of religious life, one which, her transfer suggests, did not appeal to her. Thus, circumstances both dictated her original vocation and enabled her later one.⁶⁶

The upheaval in Continental conventual life broke up communities and resulted in movement of individuals between borders. Many English women originally professed in French houses were displaced. Two of these, from the French Poor Clare convent at St Omer, moved to England as refugees, and applied to transfer their vows to the Hammersmith Benedictines. The first, Victoria Whitehall, having lived with the community for five years, was accepted for new profession in 1796.⁶⁷ The process was not so straightforward for the other applicant, Frances Agnes More. After a trial at Hammersmith she was accepted for transfer and profession, but her inability to keep ‘the fasts and abstinences of the Rule’ due to ill-health meant she was eventually refused profession although she continued to live for a number of years with the community as a boarder.⁶⁸ At Marnhull in 1801 a young English woman professed in a French Benedictine convent ‘now turned out and hoping to settle back in England’ was admitted.⁶⁹ Not only English religious sought refuge: Sr Ann Roy, a French nun professed at Beauvais, had come over with the French Benedictines from Montargis and then

⁶⁶An alternative view of Juliana’s motivation is given by Susan O’Brien who suggests that reforms at the Bar Convent imposing stricter observances, were the reason for Horsman’s transfer. I am grateful to Susan O’Brien for sharing an extract from the Bar Convent Annals with me (Annals 15 3F/1/15), which states that ‘it was reported [...] later that Horsman had said ‘she could not live here for the Nuns were so austere to themselves’. That this was the cause for Horsman’s departure is unconvincing, although it appears that she was one of the laxer among the new intake at Woolton/Salford (SBAA, Anselm Brennall, ‘History of the Constitutions’). Perhaps the reason ‘because the level of austerity practised at the Bar Convent was too extreme’, was recorded by the Bar sisters who subsequently saw this austerity as an aberration in their history and inconsistent with the Mary Ward charism. See Susan O’Brien, ‘An Overview of English Benedictine Nuns in the Nineteenth Century’, paper given at the English Benedictine Congregation History Symposium (1994), p. 5 and Gregory Kirkus, CJ (ed.), *IBVM/CJ Biographical Dictionary of the English Members and Major Benefactors (1667–2000)*, p. 9.

⁶⁷ DAA, T.VI.1, ‘History of Hammersmith’ (193224). Although not clear from the annals she must have taken refuge at Dunkirk in 1790, presumably after the suppression of the French convents, to have lived with the nuns for five years prior to 1796.

⁶⁸ DAA, T.VI.1, Annals, and ‘History of Hammersmith’ (193233, 193245).

⁶⁹ CAA, Council Book (145410, 145440). Her name is given as ‘Toaffe’ or ‘Joaffe’. Although the transfer was ‘unanimously accepted’ no such name appears in subsequent community records.

‘travelled back and forth to France’.⁷⁰ Although she spent time with the Marnhull community she had what the annalist described as (unspecified) ‘scruples’ about ‘making the offering in the vows in which we do of all our actions for the Conversion of England’ and did not transfer.⁷¹ In 1807 a French Benedictine, Madame de Boisson, who had taken refuge with the English Sepulchrines from Liege (at New Hall), asked to enter Marnhull. Being: ‘a person of great talent and having an extraordinary good Choir voice, both for singing and reciting the divine office’ and as they were at that time, ‘very low in numbers’, they agreed to give her a trial. She transferred later that year.⁷² Madame Cinq-Mars, a French Ursuline, who had also been briefly at New Hall, was admitted to help with the community’s short-lived undertaking of a school. Although she remained with the community and her name appears in many books in their library, she never transferred her vows.

In 1816 Teresa Howard, a Bridgettine from part of the English community in Lisbon which had settled in Peckham but was threatened with dispersal, applied to transfer to Winchester.⁷³ She was accepted and in due course professed. A novice from the same community, Etheldreda No[w]lan, also transferred to Winchester in 1817.⁷⁴ The greater accessibility of the convents once established in England, meant that the habit of ‘community-surfing’ began among aspirants.⁷⁵ Novice Maria Fagan had entered the Presentation convent but ‘God has given her a decided preference [...] for the Perpetual Adoration’. She transferred to Cannington and was professed there in 1832.⁷⁶ Mary Angela Selby a niece of the abbess, Placida Selby, was accepted for profession at Hammersmith in 1832, but four months later, requested transfer to

⁷⁰ The Montargis community arrived in England in 1792 and settled first at Bodney Hall, Norfolk and then at Princethorpe, Warwickshire.

⁷¹ DAA, T VI 1, ‘History of Hammersmith’ (160259). No reason is given for this scruple, which seems unusual.

⁷² CAA, Council Book (151346, 152005).

⁷³ The main cohort of the English Bridgettines remained in Lisbon until 1861 however, during the Napoleonic wars, ten of their number travelled to England. Conditions there proved difficult although they took in recruits. Some returned to Portugal, others ‘drifted away’, see, Nicky Hallett (ed.) *English Convents in Exile*, 3, p. 259.

⁷⁴ DSAA, Winchester Annals, pp. 107–8 (114736, 114749).

⁷⁵ This happened to a lesser extent on the Continent, see: Bowden, ‘Missing Members’.

⁷⁶ CAA, Council Book (162442).

Cannington. She was received for profession there too, but again left just before the date. The Annals record that she ‘tried some other Orders but died at last a secular’.⁷⁷

Already displaced and depleted, these movements with unprecedented addition of women from other traditions and nationalities further contributed to the unsettled experience of monastic life in England.

Mental Health

Mental breakdown was not unknown in the convents on the Continent and pressures of life in England also took their toll on the mental health of community members. Recent interest in women’s mental health considers correlations between nineteenth-century gender roles and female nervous illnesses.⁷⁸ These studies provide insight into the condition of many of the nuns not fully appreciated at the time. The stress of the Revolution was too much for some: we have already seen the case of Ursula Pigott.⁷⁹ Mary Sales Eldridge⁸⁰ at Ghent, was ‘so completely unhinged by the scenes she had witnessed’ that when about to embark for England ‘her reason quite forsook her’ and she refused to board the ship.⁸¹ Committed to an asylum run by French nuns at Velsique, she never regained her sanity nor returned to England. Mental instability in the period reflects the stresses of adapting to life in the new exile. As well as being an impediment to the growth of the communities, cases of imbalance also endangered the

⁷⁷ DAA, T IV1, Annals, and ‘History of Hammersmith’ (194829).

⁷⁸ Recent works include Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present Day* (London, 2009) and Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (London, 1987).

⁷⁹ See above, p. 50.

⁸⁰ WWTN GB061.

⁸¹ Anon, *Annals*, p. 81.

precarious reputation of the nuns and could fuel false rumours of women locked away or otherwise abused.⁸²

Lack of screening of candidates, the disruptions of the exile for older members and the demand for novices, on occasion over-ruling concerns about their suitability, can be identified as the main causes for incidences of mental illness in both new and more established vocations.⁸³ Leadership at this time took a particular toll and two superiors had to resign because of mental ill-health. In 1817 the Caverswall abbess, Aloysia Jefferson, was forced to resign after she ‘lost her reason’ due, the Annalist records, to ‘oppression by the continual poverty and difficulties of the community’.⁸⁴ She was removed from office and placed ‘under proper care’. Oral tradition at Colwich recalls many refugees ‘going mad’ after arrival in England.⁸⁵ One well-recorded case is that of Mother Teresa Catherine Macdonald elected prioress in 1807, who suffered a breakdown two years later due to the strain.⁸⁶ Again, pressure of life in England was blamed for her illness and, after removal from office and a return to a true contemplative life ‘spending most of her time in Prayer which had always been her element’, she made a full recovery and was: ‘useful to the community in building their library, writing and translating from French and Italian’.⁸⁷

Dame Ignatia Power from Salford spent the last years of her life at a *maison de santé* kept by Benedictines at Menin, Belgium.⁸⁸ These nuns advertised annually in the *Catholic Directory*

⁸² The example in Antwerp of a nun fleeing the enclosure is reflected in experiences in England. In both places fear of ‘giving scandal’ to the locality added to the nuns’ concern about insanity in the communities. See Kelly *English Convents in Catholic Europe*, p. 63.

⁸³ There is evidence for this in the Council Book (CAA), Annals (DAA) and correspondence in SBA box 455.

⁸⁴ Jefferson was removed to ‘a place where she could have the care and treatment which her state required’. This was Springvale, near Trentham ‘where a respectable family kept a private home for mental patients’. She never returned to the community and died in 1824: ‘she was sufficiently sensible to receive the sacraments but it would not be true to say that her mind ever really recovered’, Anon, *Annals* p. 113 and p. 118.

⁸⁵ From a conversation with Dame Benedict Rowell, archivist at Colwich Abbey.

⁸⁶ Teresa Catherine Macdonald, WWTN, PB059.

⁸⁷ Joseph S. Hansom (ed.), ‘Our Blessed Lady of Good Hope. Notes and Obituaries 1625–1861’, *Publications of the CRS IX* (London, 1911), p. 402.

⁸⁸ The *Couvent des Dames de Paix Bénédictines*, Menin, Belgium was founded ‘pour les aliénées d’esprit (Catholiques) soignées pas les religieuses’ [for insane Catholics, cared for by religious women].

in the 1830s and 1840s, suggesting there was demand for their services amongst the convents in England. Power's acute depression was blamed, at least partially, on: 'over-exertion of her fine mental powers, especially in the school, of which she had been Mistress'.⁸⁹ Martha Dyson and Frances Hutchinson at Hammersmith, both ended their days at Menin due to 'Mental Derangement'.⁹⁰ At Winchester, lay-sister Barbara Eaton was removed from the monastery when 'her maladies took the unhappy turn of affecting her mental powers'.⁹¹ Inadequate testing of aspirants may have contributed to the admittance of unsuitable candidates: the case of Sr Teresa Styles is a study of how unsuitable vocations were managed. Described as a 'most promising novice' when clothed in 1823,⁹² Sr Teresa, correspondence suggests, may have already been suffering from some emotional imbalance and this deteriorated into an extreme breakdown soon after her profession:

In 1826 the community had a severe shock in the sudden attack of insanity which afflicted Dame Teresa Styles, one of their most promising and edifying young members. Under pressure of the malady she ran out of the house some distance, but was brought safely back; the same happening a second time, and the danger of scandal being great, she was removed to Menin, here she died as late as 1885, quite insane. Her mother, Lady Styles, and her family behaved throughout with the most delicate feeling and generosity towards the community.⁹³

Was she mad or simply unhappy? The correspondence relating to the affair suggests a young woman deeply disturbed, and understandably so, at finding herself in the wrong place. The unsympathetic treatment she initially received in response to her 'demands' – which seem to have been considered attention-seeking ploys – was remedied when it became apparent that her descent into 'insanity' was real and permanent. The correspondence reveals that

⁸⁹ SBAA Annals, part 1, vol. 2, p. 589 and Box 457, letters.

⁹⁰ DAA, T V1 3, Scholastica Dean's Journal (112616) and T V1 1, Annals, p. 160 (195140).

⁹¹ DSAA, Haslemere Collection, Annals, p. 113.

⁹² While her illness caused surprise and alarm in the community there is evidence that she had experienced mental health breakdowns for some years before entry. SBA, Box 457, various correspondence with EBC president Augustine Birdsall.

⁹³ SBAA, Annals, part 1, vol. 2, p. 589.

considerable effort went into finding suitable care for her.⁹⁴ In some instances, mental instability was spotted early enough: at Cannington the ‘unsettled state of mind’ of Sr Austen Board ‘made it impossible’ for them to vote for her profession and the Bishop would allow no further period of trial’.⁹⁵ Other cases, reported in the annals of various communities,⁹⁶ were not restricted to the choir nuns: lay-sister Monica Crookall’s ‘mental faculties had been impaired for many years, but she was faithfully attended to the last by her charitable and pious sister, Sr Catherine’.⁹⁷ The cases of mental instability are indicative of various obstacles to recovery of monastic life. Today, many of the survivors from the Revolution would be identified as suffering from levels of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹⁸ This was neither recognised nor treated at the time and no space was given for rehabilitation or mourning. The conditions of life, far removed from those on the Continent, and fears for their future safety and sustainability added to the mental stress. New entrants, with untested vocations, were entering precarious and distressed communities creating strain on both sides and leading to further problems, to be discussed below. These factors created psychologically unstable communities and further inhibited revival.

Lay-sisters

The day-to-day demands of running the monastery placed a physical and mental strain on the nuns. The majority in each community were choir nuns, unused to household chores.

⁹⁴ SBAA, Box 457, various, unnumbered.

⁹⁵ CAA, Council Book, 14 September 1825 (161047).

⁹⁶ DAA, BT VII, Hammersmith Annals, pp. 151–4 (195140, 195150), for further examples of mental breakdowns. The sufferers were sent to Menin.

⁹⁷ SBAA, Annals, part 1, vol. 2, p. 602.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of symptoms and treatments see: Dan J. Stein, Matthew Friedman and Carlos Blanco, *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Oxford, 2011), and Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princetown, 1996).

Conditions in England made the need for lay-sisters more acute and this is reflected in numbers entering.

Breakdown of community composition on arrival in England

	Brussels		Cambrai		Ghent		Paris		Dunkirk	
Arrived in 1795	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay
	14 + 4 novices	5	12 + 1 novice	4	12	9	11	3	16	9

Breakdown of entrants 1795–1838

	Winchester		Woolton/Salford		Preston/Caverswall		Marnhull/Cannington		Hammersmith	
1795–1838	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay	Choir	Lay
	21	7	23	7	24	6	25	8	21(2)	7

In all the communities except Hammersmith the number of lay-sisters increased. This may reflect a rise in lay vocations or that more women were applying with insufficient dowries for the choir. The Salford community recognised that poorer women might have had mixed motives for joining the monastery and the Constitutions warned: ‘Superiors must not be too forward in receiving lay-sisters and they shall only admit those who may be useful to the convent’. Lay-sisters’ religious duties were less demanding and religious observance had to be fitted around manual work. They were expected to attend Mass and meditation at the same time and place as the choir nuns but, if the pressure of work prevented this, the Mistress of lay-sisters and Superior were to make other ‘suitable arrangements’. It was stated: ‘The disposition of their time depends intirely [sic] on the Superior to regulate, yet they [the sisters] must not be so overpowered with work that, fatigued, they may perform their spiritual duties with remissness and negligence’.⁹⁹ Segregation of responsibilities was clearly defined; the choir nuns’ job was to pray, the lay-sisters’ to concern themselves with domestic work. They did not say the Divine Office but: ‘They who can read shall say the Little Office of Our Lady, but they

⁹⁹ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 9; ‘Of the Lay Sisters’.

who cannot shall say the rosary’, although they did attend choir on significant feast days. Segregation was observed in all areas of the monastery: ‘They shall dine in the refectory at the second table with the reader and waiter: they must observe silence and attend to the reading of some book appointed by the Superior’.¹⁰⁰ The lay-sisters had a separate novitiate and there was no limit on the period of their postulancy which could be extended almost indefinitely. They made their profession in English rather than Latin, in private during a low Mass. The vow chart was to be written out on behalf of those who could not write. The standard of education of most lay-sisters was low and the explicit provisions for those who could not read or write suggests that illiteracy was not uncommon amongst them. At Marnhull Mary Ann Sanger, who was professed after working for two years as a servant in the house, put her mark rather than signature on the profession chart.¹⁰¹ Despite the warnings to admit with care, the need for lay-sisters led to a trend in servants making simple vows: a number are recorded at Marnhull and Woolton. There is little evidence as to how ‘real’ some of these vocations were although, in the case of Louisa Bridges (outlined above), there appears to have been a genuine searching. Helen Smith, a teenager who had lived as a servant with the community at Preston, was professed as a lay-sister, at age seventeen, after the community’s move to Caverswall. She had accepted a yearly Mass in lieu of her wages while a servant and was described as ‘a cleanly, active and very laborious member’.¹⁰²

Converts

Many entrants in the English communities were converts to Catholicism and, while conversion demonstrated commitment and strength of character, many entered with little knowledge of the

¹⁰⁰ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 9; ‘Of the Lay Sisters’.

¹⁰¹ CAA. Mary-Ann (Elizabeth) Sanger, professed 1798, aged ‘about twenty-six’.

¹⁰² Her other duties included accompanying nuns required to leave the enclosure, Anon, *Annals*, p. 102.

faith or religious life. The narratives of these conversions are often told with quasi-hagiographic reverence: the story of Agatha (Frances) Philips, of Winchester, is an example.

The Annals relate that Frances was born in 1790 in Nancy, France to a Protestant family:

By a wonderful interposition of Divine Providence a pious French Catholic lady with whom they had become acquainted obtained the consent of the parents to stand God-Mother to this child. At the Revolution in 1793 this lady was guillotined – and Dame Agatha always attributed to her prayers the grace of conversion. She was educated a Protestant, although she had been baptised as a Catholic through the intervention of this God-mother and was placed at several Protestant schools in England where the family returned [...] When she was eighteen years old she was on a visit with her Mother to her married sister [who] had sent two of her daughters to the Convent at Bodney in Norfolk¹⁰³ [...] in order to learn French. [Frances was sent there too and] It was there that God was waiting for her with the light of Faith, for she had scarcely entered the house when her heart opened to the Truth and she asked to be instructed.¹⁰⁴

Frances' parents reacted 'with anger' and she was immediately taken home where: 'She was constantly watched and her letters intercepted'. Her mother 'on her death bed told Frances that she was the cause of her death and that if she ever was to become a nun she was to forfeit her share in the property'. It was only after her mother's death that Frances was introduced to the Winchester community, where she entered in 1819. Such conversion stories are not unusual in the records of the Benedictine communities.¹⁰⁵

Boarders

Receiving parlour or lady boarders within the enclosure as an expediency of exile has been discussed in Chapter One. As the practice continued in England, at Winchester, Cannington

¹⁰³ The French Benedictine community from Montargis.

¹⁰⁴ DSAA, Annals, pp. 108–109 (114749, 114755).

¹⁰⁵ See below, pp. 118 and 120.

and Hammersmith, it had an impact on re-settlement. It is not always clear from the entrance books whether women entered as postulants, schoolgirls or boarders. Many appear to be *quasi*-vocations: women who for a variety of reasons could not live the full monastic life but were able to share in an easier alternative as boarders. At Winchester a Miss Powell had been a novice at Brussels but, unable to persevere, became a boarder. She returned with the community to England and worked in the school where she ‘continu[ed] to render them all the services in her power till her death which happened in 1819’.¹⁰⁶ Some women saw boarding as a stepping-stone towards full entry into the community: an unofficial pre-postulancy. Miss Ann Trail is an example of this. She was a convert from a ‘fervent Scots Presbyterian’ background who became a parlour boarder at Hammersmith in around 1835.¹⁰⁷ She did not enter there however, but moved on to become an Ursuline at St Margaret’s Convent in Edinburgh. This gentler alternative to full monastic life often involved women bringing their own maid-servants, and occupying a whole suite of rooms, generally within the enclosure.

In 1812 the Hammersmith Annals record the entry of several ladies with their maids as boarders. The most famous of these was Lady Charlotte Bedingfeld (Bedingfield) who arrived in 1830, after being widowed. A ‘Woman of the Bedchamber’ to Queen Adelaide, she continued in this role while a boarder.¹⁰⁸ Although Lady Bedingfeld never intended to enter consecrated life, she did live a semi-monastic existence in as far as her royal duties allowed. The many books in the library inscribed with her name show her devotion to reading and study. The Annals record that:

From the time of the appointment of Lady Bedingfeld at the court in 1830 until the death of Queen Adelaide in 1849, she lived at our Convent except when in attendance

¹⁰⁶ DSAA, Haslemere Collection, Annals 1794, p. 78 (112850).

¹⁰⁷ Anon, *A History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk* (London, 1957), p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, 1792–1849, wife of William IV. According to Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair, Queen Adelaide maintained an interest in the nuns through Lady Bedingfeld. Her planned visits to the convent never happened due to illness, bad weather and ‘Protestant objections’, ‘Hammersmith: A Bridge’, p. 2.

to Her Majesty, from whom she procured gifts from time to time for the community, notably a large game pie at Christmas besides being herself an occasional benefactor.¹⁰⁹

Bedingfeld brought a manservant and contributed towards the cost of building him a lodge in the ‘front court’. The royal connection most certainly helped raise the status and respectability of the exiled nuns.¹¹⁰ The annals suggest an harmonious relationship: ‘She [Bedingfeld] writes in the warmest terms of her affection and admiration of Lady Abbess Selby, to whose daily visit she looked forward as her comfort and refreshment for the day’,¹¹¹ but the letters and journals left by Lady Bedingfeld reveal a rather different dynamic. Charlotte was a prodigious writer and her journal reveals a tense, co-dependency in the relationship with the abbess; she expressed hurt and insecurity when Selby, whom she hero-worshipped, did not visit: ‘The abbess is for me a superior being, and in her black habit and gold cross a pattern of graceful holiness’ she recorded.¹¹² She also revealed the abbess as suffering from various ailments and what sounds like nervous exhaustion. The two exchanged confidences and Selby shared concerns about prospective novices. Bedingfeld describes her own mood-swings and anxiety, as well as frictions and tensions among the lady boarders, who expressed rivalry for the attention of the nuns.¹¹³ She also reveals that some boarders had troubled pasts and brought trouble to the community. Many were wealthy widows and tolerated as such.¹¹⁴ Others had emotional problems and caused concern.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Anon, *History*, p. 144.

¹¹⁰ In 1825 the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV), who had been a great supporter of the Benedictines at Salford, sent the community a haunch and neck of venison and, in 1826, a game pie. This latter gift was particularly appreciated because, as the annalist records ‘Lady Bedingfeld was not then at Court, and therefore it was not sent out of complement to her’. DAA, T IV I ‘History of Hammersmith’, p. 155 (195055).

¹¹¹ DAA, T IV I, ‘History of Hammersmith’ (194829).

¹¹² CRL, Jerningham Letters UB, JER/1770, Letter 13 March 1830, p. 18.

¹¹³ CRL, UB, JER/1770.

¹¹⁴ Mrs Charles Waterton, who contributed to considerable repairs and building work is mentioned in the Journals and in DAA, T IV 1, ‘History of Hammersmith’, p. 98 (194531).

¹¹⁵ Lady Charlotte Bedingfeld’s Journal, February 1830. Cadbury Research Library (CRL), Special Collections, University of Birmingham, ‘Jerningham Letters’, JER/1770 p. 3 (UB, JER).

The Hammersmith Annals tell the story of Harriet Lethbridge who lived with the community for a few months. She was first attracted to the Catholic Church by reading Challoner's *Garden of the Soul*. After a clandestine conversion brought about through friendship with the Welds¹¹⁶ at Lulworth, Lethbridge faced great opposition from her family, was incarcerated in her room for a time and declared insane by her father. She was finally released and the abbess was persuaded to take her as a parlour boarder. Miss Lethbridge only remained a few months before being asked to leave as she 'had caused much trouble' – perhaps the original diagnosis was correct.¹¹⁷

It was not only single women who boarded; sometimes an entire family came. In 1838 at Hammersmith: 'The parlour boarders received a curious addition [...] Mrs Baboon, a young widow came here with a little Chinese girl as her maid, and a little Spanish boy nine years old, the adopted son of her late husband. She was a very interesting person, aged only 22: the little boy went to a local school'.¹¹⁸ While the Hammersmith nuns seem to have been active in the encouragement of boarders, other convents had them imposed under duress. As already discussed, the nuns at Marnhull were obliged to accept the sister of their ecclesiastic superior, Gregory Sharrock¹¹⁹ as a lady boarder in the enclosure in 1799: 'The nuns were very unwilling to take seculars to live with them, but the Bishop being so extremely desirous that she should end her days among them that they felt they could not refuse'.¹²⁰ This set a precedent for further entries. The necessity of admitting secular boarders, especially in cramped accommodation without any formal enclosure, was another disruption forced upon the nuns by their new exile conditions. Financial and political considerations made it a necessity and fear of offending

¹¹⁶ The Welds of Lulworth Castle, Dorset were an old recusant family with daughters in convents in exile. They supported Catholic philanthropic endeavours and aided French refugees.

¹¹⁷ DAA, T VI 1, 'History of Hammersmith', pp. 153–4 (195055).

¹¹⁸ DAA, T VI 1, 'History of Hammersmith', pp. 164–5 (195205).

¹¹⁹ See above p. 60.

¹²⁰ Miss Sharrock is another example of a 'failed' vocation; she entered the community while still in Paris and left before taking vows. CAA, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation', p. 202 (155542).

influential or rich benefactors by refusing applicants is made clear in various places.¹²¹ The communities ceased receiving boarders as soon as possible.¹²² The practice continued longest in Hammersmith whose location made it a particularly popular choice. While entertaining boarders fulfilled the Benedictine duty of hospitality, they caused disruption, breached enclosure, led to a blurring of roles and obstructed the clear path of vocation. As monastic observances were restored and more permanent premises acquired, boarders were replaced by guests accommodated in separate quarters outside the enclosure.

Novitiates

Perhaps the single most significant measure of return to ‘normal’ life and the harbinger of recovery in monasteries is the re-establishment of the noviceship. In France revolutionary law had prevented the entrance or profession of religious since 1789, although this seems to have affected the communities to different degrees. At Cambrai in December of that year, Clare Knight wrote to her brother in England: ‘we have received orders not to profess anymore’.¹²³ Paris had their final profession in 1789 and at Dunkirk the last ceremony was celebrated illegally in 1791 in a shuttered church while: ‘hard fighting was going on outside the church walls, and shots penetrated through the windows’.¹²⁴ Brussels¹²⁵ and Ghent, on the other hand, benefitted from being geographically removed from the immediate revolutionary ambit and

¹²¹ CCA, ‘A Short History’, pp. 202 and 207 (160228).

¹²² References to boarders disappear by the mid-nineteenth century.

¹²³ SBAA, Knight Letters, Letter 15, Clare Knight, WWTN CB111, 28 December 1789. See also: AND, Lille 18 H 39 (*Bénédictins Anglais de Douai*), correspondence between Christina Hooke (abbess at Cambrai), WWTN CB096, and Augustine Walker (President of the EBC), MIM 175, 9 November 1789 and 2 July 1790, discussing concerns about whether the prohibition on professions extended to clothings, Eventually novice Jane Miller, CB130, was clothed as lay-sister but her profession was delayed until after arrival in England.

¹²⁴ Anon, *History*, pp. 111–2.

¹²⁵ Being outside the jurisdiction of France, the Brussels nuns assisted the Benedictine monks by providing their abbey church for the secret profession of George Turner, MIM 632, in 1790. See *Chronicles of the First Monastery Founded for Benedictine Nuns 1597*, pp. 212–3.

professions continued: at the former until 1793; at the latter until 1790.¹²⁶ The continuation of undercover professions also testifies to acts of defiance and refusal to be suppressed that Carmen Mangion and Cormac Begadon have identified among the English religious in exile.¹²⁷

Due to these restrictions, several of the communities arrived with pensioners waiting to enter (Ghent and Dunkirk) or novices well past their profession date and only awaiting the opportunity for the ceremony to take place.¹²⁸ In 1796, back in England, the Brussels and the Cambrai communities celebrated profession ceremonies of novices who had survived the Terror.¹²⁹ Practical concerns for re-settlement precluded the immediate establishment of novitiates. Cambrai received their first novice, Clare Crilly previously a teacher in the Woolton school, in 1796. The Ghent nuns re-opened their novitiate at Preston in 1799, with two postulants, one of whom was a convert.¹³⁰ At this point the community had been reduced to seven, but the two persevered and were followed by a third in 1800. The first novice did not enter at Winchester until 1801.¹³¹ At Hammersmith too, the novitiate was slow to revive and by 1800, after several deaths, only one postulant had entered who persevered; she was a secular teacher from the school.¹³² By the second decade, all the communities had small but expanding novitiates.

¹²⁶ Professions also continued in other English convents beyond 1789, for example with the Sepulchrines at Liège.

¹²⁷ Carmen Mangion, 'Avoiding 'Rash and Imprudent Measures': English Nuns in Revolutionary France 1789–1801', in Bowden and Kelly (eds.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, pp. 247–63. Cormac Begadon, 'Responses to Revolution: The experiences of the English Benedictine monks in the French Revolution', *British Catholic History*, 34 (2018), pp. 106–28.

¹²⁸ Four pensioners came over with the nuns from Ghent and one, Bernard Lucas, professed in 1801 (Annon, *Annals*, pp. 79 & 81–4). The two Misses Kirwans, pupils at Dunkirk, accompanied the nuns to prison in Gravelines. Both joined the school in Hammersmith but neither entered the convent. At Cambrai, novice Jane Miller, had waited nearly seven years for her profession and Benedict Macdonald two years.

¹²⁹ Both houses claim to have celebrated the first profession of a Benedictine nun in England since the Reformation. Cambrai takes the honour by six months: Jane Miller was professed at Woolton in March 1796, followed by Mary Benedict Macdonald in September.

¹³⁰ Anon, *Annals*, p. 92.

¹³¹ DSAA, *Annals*, p. 93 (114219).

¹³² An entrance in 1795 was that of a Poor Clare who had transferred from St Omer: *History*, p. 138.

Lack or unreliability of entry books for most of the communities, makes tracking attrition rates difficult.¹³³ All the archives contain details of some who entered and left, but these were generally spectacular in some way. While the exploration of movements in and out of novitiates at an early stage of religious life might be instructive in terms of recruitment issues sufficiently reliable data does not appear to exist. It is however, possible to track those who entered and persevered.

Number of Profession 1700–1789¹³⁴

	1700s	1710s	1720s	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s
Brussels (B)	3	10	6	10	7	10	1	3	9
Cambrai (C)	10	6	6	3	4	6	4	4	4
Ghent (G)	11	15	16	14	5	5	4	6	7
Paris (P)	1	2	1	1	2	3	6	3	6
Dunkirk (D)	7	5	12	9	11	8	3	6	2

Number of professions 1790–1840¹³⁵

	1790s		1800s	1810s	1820s	1830s	Total
	On Continent.	In England					
Winchester (B)	4	2	11	5	6	10	38
Woolton, Salford (C)	1	3	5	5	7	13	34
Preston, Caverswall (G)	2	0	7	13	6	4	32
Marnhull, Cannington, Colwich (P)	1	3	4	1	15	9	33
Hammersmith (D)	1	2	6	8	8	3	28

These figures reveal a consistency across all the communities and when compared with figures for the previous one hundred years on the Continent, show similar patterns of profession rates – after the blip of 1790–1800. Moreover, the changes in figures correlates with specific events in the communities’ histories. The early entrances at Marnhull are attributed to the patronage

¹³³ Entry details were recorded differently between the communities; data is often contradictory, inadequate or duplicated. Not all communities had an Entrance Book; the Cannington nuns recorded entrances in the Council Book; and others supply conflicting information in multiple places which do not always confirm each other. The appellation ‘went away’, regularly used in the Continental period appears less regularly although some names that appear as entrants never reappear as professed nuns.

¹³⁴ Data from Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 1, p. xx.

¹³⁵ Data from Annals, Entry/Council Books, at CAA, DAA, DSAA, SBAA.

of the Arundells who, community tradition records, ‘rounded up’ novices.¹³⁶ The lack of vocations in the 1810s can be linked to geographical isolation of the community¹³⁷ and its lack of a school while the spike of entries later, in the 1820s and 1830s, follows the appointment of the charismatic prioress Clare Knight and the institution of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.¹³⁸ The particular rise at Caverswall in the 1810s may be due to the move there from Preston in 1811. Considerably larger than the cramped town quarters in Preston, Caverswall was a medieval castle with a moat, drawbridge and octagonal turrets, secluded in the Staffordshire countryside. The presence of Dr John Milner as vicar apostolic and Lady Benedicta Bedingfeld as abbess may also have attracted vocations.¹³⁹ Numbers alone do not show the whole picture, and the figure of thirty-four professions in fifty years at Woolton/Salford is misleading in terms of sustainable community growth. Two of these were deathbed professions, Editha Breen in 1831 and Dame Augustina Sinnott in 1837, with the subsequent deaths immediately cancelling out the acquisition. Additionally, Jane Miller died within two months of taking her final vows and Augustina Spencer within two years. Both Teresa Styles and Ignatia Power, as described above, left after profession due to mental health problems.¹⁴⁰ Thus, while on paper the numbers indicate an increase, this does not necessarily reflect real growth. To assess the true state of a community at this time of transition and reformation it is necessary to delve beneath the surface figures and to examine the spiritual, cultural, educational and psychological profile of its members. The spiritual and cultural elements will be considered in the next chapter but it is appropriate here to note that as the

¹³⁶ CAA, conversation with archivist, Dame Benedict Rowell.

¹³⁷ Catholics formed only 1.5% of the population of Somerset in 1767, Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, p. 408.

¹³⁸ Many of those entering after the devotion was adopted gave this as the reason for choosing the house. The practice attracted so many vocations that a foundation was made at Atherstone, Warwickshire in 1859 to accommodate the growth. CAA, Council Book (162442 ff.).

¹³⁹ Dr John Milner, vicar apostolic of the Midland District. As high-profile and controversial proponent of the Ultramontane position, his involvement attracted traditionalists. Benedicta Bedingfeld a member of the influential Bedingfeld-Jerningham family, WWTN GB014.

¹⁴⁰ The experience is similar in all communities: at Winchester Bernard Lucas professed in 1801 but died the following year.

number of professions increased across the communities so too did inter-generational tensions; a common feature of all refugee communities.

Inter-generational Issues

As vocations increased and space allowed, measures were put in place to restore the strict rules of formation observed on the Continent. The 1820 Constitutions for Salford directed that: ‘The place of recreation for novices and scholars must be different from that of the professed, neither must they talk with seculars without the leave of the Superior, and in the presence of her [novice] mistress or some other appointed by the Superior, neither must they write or receive letters without showing them to their mistress’.¹⁴¹ For choir novices there was no distinction between simple and solemn vows; the vows taken after the year’s novitiate were solemn and for life. The nun was termed a ‘junior’ however, subject to a junior mistress for seven years. The mistress of juniors was to be ‘a discreet and virtuous person, able to teach and instruct them in their duty’. At the end of seven years, ‘the years of juniority being finished, the junior shall in the conventual chapter prostrate, asking pardon for her negligences, defects and the bad example she may have given during the time of her juniority. And henceforth she is to be held as an ancient’. Discipline was administered by the novice and junior mistresses who were not to ‘reprimand or penance them in the presence of Lady Abbess or Prioress’ and penances ‘may be enjoined in any regular place, but not in their cells, or any private place, as kneelings, prostrations and other such like, as are enjoined for ordinary faults’.¹⁴²

The discipline of formation at Salford was only revived from 1820 and this may explain the disconnect noted in the first twenty years between the generations. A tension developed

¹⁴¹ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 8; ‘Of Novices and Juniors’.

¹⁴² SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 8; ‘Of Novices and Juniors’.

between the seniors, or ‘ancients’, who had directly experienced loss and still looked back to the ‘golden days’ of full Tridentine enclosure, and the younger women who entered in England with no personal experience of exile except as a heritage they were taught to revere but sometimes found burdensome: who even dared to whisper, ‘Cambray, Cambray! A good thing for us we were never there’.¹⁴³ Although the latter could not share the experience of exile, they were, nevertheless affected by the conditions of it: while numerical growth occurred over the decades, a corresponding polarity of ages and backgrounds can also be discerned. The community at Woolton/Salford illustrates this: the majority of the ‘Cambrai Mothers’ were in late middle-age or older by the time they settled at Salford in 1808 – the oldest was seventy-seven,¹⁴⁴ and the youngest was forty-three.¹⁴⁵ Of the seven professed at Woolton, the oldest¹⁴⁶ was thirty-eight and the rest between twenty and twenty-seven. The vast majority of those who entered at Salford were in their late teens or early twenties. By the 1820s, a widening gap is apparent: there were many increasingly old and frail sisters needing care and an encouraging number of young ones, but very few middle-aged members with wisdom and experience to pass on to a new generation. The newcomers at this stage differed from the Cambrai seniors in terms of background, education and expectations. Only one, Gertrude Westhead, may have been in the school and therefore had some prior Benedictine experience.¹⁴⁷ The formation they received is unlikely to have been of the quality provided at Cambrai, due both to the physical circumstances and the psychological state of the survivors. The new entrants had never experienced the strict monastic observance of Cambrai. Dame Christina Chare was indeed described as ‘being in all respects just like a Cambrai nun, though she only joined them at

¹⁴³ SBAA, Annals, part 1, vol. 2, and Box 345: ‘History of the Convent of Our Lady of Consolation, as regards Monastic Observance: From its formation at Cambray 1623 to the Restoration Period of 1869’ by Dame Benedict Anstey.

¹⁴⁴ Frances Sheldon, WWTN CB168.

¹⁴⁵ Augustina Shepherd, WWTN CB171.

¹⁴⁶ Juliana Horsman, WWTN MW088.

¹⁴⁷ Although there is some uncertainty about this.

Woolton [...]'.¹⁴⁸ In her conferences, she frequently urged the sisters to greater charity among themselves and concord between the generations:

I am sorry my dear sisters to be obliged to remark that there is a very great want of politeness and attention to each other, you well know that it is the duty of the younger religious to show deference and respect to the ancients, upon all occasions, and there is no doubt but the seniors would on their part treat them with all kindness and cordiality.¹⁴⁹

The survivors from before the French Revolution, wounded as many were, continued to form the backbone of the community in England. On them lay the responsibility of transmitting the traditions and observance of the house, and the task of rebuilding along pre-Revolutionary lines. This was a physical and mental struggle for the majority, debilitated by the exile, even as their power and influence declined as the years progressed. At Salford by 1822, the values of the older generation were being challenged by the new recruits.¹⁵⁰ From arrival at Woolton, the exiles' aim had been to restore full Cambrai observance as soon as possible. This met however, with more than just physical barriers. Even after the death of the last of the pre-Revolutionary survivors in the early 1830s, tensions between old and new continued to reverberate in the communities. A long manuscript account in the annals, written towards the end of the nineteenth-century, records this enduring conflict.¹⁵¹ The annalist, Benedict Anstey, had entered in 1866 and professed in 1868, the year 'strict observance' was formally adopted. Her observations suggest that the conflict became apparent from the early days at Salford. The document is quoted at length because despite being written some years after the problems

¹⁴⁸ SBAA, Annals part 1, vol. 2, p. 598, the description is credited to Mary Ann McArdle (1802–1888). Christina Chare was professed in 1801 and served as abbess 1822–1830. It suggests that, unlike her fellow English recruits, Chare respected and learned to embody the 'Cambrai-ways' and came to be held up as a contrast to them in the tradition of the house – see also Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ SBAA, Box 455, Conferences, Advent, 3 December 1827.

¹⁵⁰ In 1822 only five of the Cambrai nuns were still alive, the oldest aged eighty and the youngest sixty-one.

¹⁵¹ SBAA, Annals, part 1, vol. 2, and Box 345, The annalist, Anstey, was archivist from 1872–1932. She compiled the Annals and was responsible for ordering the entry books, house chronicles and other records. Her obituary records: 'She left our archives in the most orderly fashion', SBAA, Box 345.

emerged, the legacy continued to be experienced and provides however partially, a personal experience of the reverberations. The title is particularly significant: ‘A History [of the community] from its formation at Cambray 1623 to the Restoration Period of 1869’, revealing that ‘restoration’ – full recovery from exile – was not considered to have been achieved until 1869. Anstey wrote:

Added to the more or less external difficulties experienced by the Cambrai Refugees, the restoring of the regular Monastic discipline was yet more seriously baffled (just when, years advanced, the improved state of temporal circumstances could favour design) – by the fact that several of the recruits received in the days of their [the community’s] distress, dating even from Woolton, had been admitted rather with respect to attainments for the furthering of the school than to vocation so pronouncedly monastic as would have been required at Cambray [...] even at that early period the seeds of division on the question of observance were sown in the Community. Eyes were only opened to this when too late. Thus whilst, on the one side, the Abbess, Counsellors and ancients were striving to begin Cambray life with as little delay as possible, and in the meanwhile to re-adopt, one by one, its various observances suitable to present circumstances, the main staff of the Community in the long run, i.e. the younger members, were almost unconsciously forming to themselves a totally different spirit: and the external employments in the school and enclosure, conducted on more or less secular principles, which the Cambray Mothers tolerated as necessary exceptions for a short time were in reality the very status quo, which being the only idea these younger members had ever practically received of the religious life, would naturally, in no distant future, be that to be respected and transmitted to posterity.¹⁵²

Christina Chare was one of the few imbued with ‘the true Cambray spirit’ but her efforts were hampered by an increasingly disruptive presence in the community. At the time of her election

¹⁵² SBAA, Box 345. In 1868, after considerable debate within the community, the constitutions of the Solesmes (Benedictine) Congregation were adopted (as opposed to restoring the original Cambrai document). The Solesmes rules were considered a radical return to Benedictine monastic sources. Although only a young nun at the time Benedict Anstey was caught up in the debate and observed both the laxities of one element within the monastery and the rigour of the traditionalists.

as abbess in 1822, when ‘almost all the Cambray Mothers [were] disabled or dead’, she faced a difficult task in imposing monastic discipline:

It was not that these ‘juniors’ were disobedient, but there was a certain ‘levity’ or off-handedness amounting to levity about one or two of them that painfully contrasted with the recollected mien, the humble, gentle, mortified aspect of the ‘ancients’. This by no means applied to each one in equal degree – but, on the whole, the tone was not religious, attributable in part, as has already been said, to the exclusive employment of some in the school, to the degree of entailing almost isolation from the community and conventual duties.¹⁵³

By 1822 a number of these ‘rebels’ had ‘full ten or fifteen years of profession and were necessarily filling responsible offices in the house: other juniors were now looking up to them, as the successors of the Cambray Mothers now all dead!’ Indeed by 1830, ‘Cambray was a forbidden subject: no one dared scarcely to whisper it, for fear of giving cause of ‘suspicion’ [...] or being considered ‘a zealot’. The disconnect between first and second generations in refugee communities is common and can be seen as part of the growing pains of the second exilic experience, a problem encountered by all refugee communities as they adapt and become fruitful.¹⁵⁴

By Anstey’s account, life at Salford in the 1820s had descended into near internecine warfare: this does not chime with other contemporary accounts which although charitable, are also dismissive: ‘My dear child this is hardly a religious house; - but more a pious, happy little family!’ chaplain Dom Bernard Barber¹⁵⁵ reportedly told a new entrant.¹⁵⁶ This may be an

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ The growing field of research in refugee studies has hitherto been unaware of the experiences of the nuns. On this topic see: Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Kroeker, Charles H Parker and Jonathan Ray (eds.), *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe: Strategies of Exile* (London, 2014); Alice Bloch, and Shirin Hirsch, ‘Intergenerational transnationalism: the impact of refugee backgrounds on the second generation’, *Comparative Migration Studies*, 6 (2018), Milena Chimienti, Alice Bloch, Alice and others, ‘Second generations from refugee backgrounds in Europe’, *Comparative Migration Studies* (2019) and Sewite Solomon Kebede, ‘The struggle for belonging: Forming and reforming identities among 1.5- generation asylum seekers and refugees’ (2010), Refugee Studies Centre, Working Paper Series No. 70.).

¹⁵⁵ Dom (Luke) Bernard Barber, monk of St Gregory’s, chaplain to the nuns 1830–1850.

¹⁵⁶ SBAA, Box 345, ‘History of the Convent of Our Lady of Consolation’, p. 5.

exaggeration, but it is clear that the conflict over observance was not fully resolved until well into the 1860s, although the growing desire for stricter observance, led to the move to Stanbrook in Worcester in 1838. A contrast between regimes was provided by Bernard Ullathorne in 1878: 'I have now known the community ever since the year 1830, a period of 48 years and remember how amazed I was at the laxity of its discipline when I was in my deaconship'. On his first visit, he was lodged and treated as a member of the community, spent much of day walking with sisters in the grounds, given rum punch in the community room and invited to sing for the entertainment of the community (he declined). He commented:

what struck me as most strange was that we were awakened in the morning by a sister coming into the room and lighting a candle close by our beds. All was meant in the most kind and sisterly way, but it completely destroyed my ideal of a community of Benedictine religious [...] It is the recollection of that old state of things in the first convent in which I ever found myself, and of the whole tone of things at that time, compared with the same community in its actual discipline and spirit, that leads me to be thankful for that great reform which has been worked out at Stanbrook during my episcopate.¹⁵⁷

Monastic Schools

One of the main obstacles to restoration was the forced necessity of running schools. In the second exile, it formed a dominant part of four of the five communities' activities. It was a dominance that none of them desired or were fitted for and serves to emphasise the experience of dislocation:

they obediently bent themselves to the highly uncongenial task of educating young ladies [...] the period at Woolton was one of discouragement. The nuns struggled on, making a heroic and pathetic attempt to uphold their religious observance and choral

¹⁵⁷ SBAA, Box 8a, letter 2 August 1878, William Bernard Ullathorne to Abbess Gertrude d'Aurillac Dubois.

celebration of the Divine Office, and striving, unattractive as the work was, to maintain a school.¹⁵⁸

While some examination of nuns' education and conduct of schools on the Continent has begun, there has been no substantial exploration of the subject after settlement in England.¹⁵⁹ The study of Catholic education for women has been largely neglected from 1795 until the rise of the teaching orders in the mid-nineteenth century. This, however, is a crucial period in which the continuity and expansion of schooling for Catholic girls in England developed and the convent curricula reveal contemporary attitudes to, and aims of, schooling for girls. A study of the schools helps our understanding of monastic vocation, exile and growth, and provides a context for the emerging apostolic women's orders. It responds to the call by Susan O'Brien in 1994 for a 'revisionist history of the early nineteenth century which pays greater attention to the monastic schools'.¹⁶⁰ Although this section of the present study focuses on the impact of

¹⁵⁸ Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 42–3.

¹⁵⁹ See Caroline Bowden, 'Convent Schooling for English Girls in the Exile Period, 1600–1800', *Studies in Church History*, 55 (2019), pp. 177–204; 'We Must Educate our Daughters: Choices and Catholic Schooling in Early Modern England' (unpublished) and 'English Reading Communities in Exile: Introducing Cloistered Nuns to Their Books', in Leah Knight, Micheline White, and Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Women's Bookscapes in Early Modern Britain* (Michigan, 2018), pp. 171–191. Claire Walker has examined the nature of education provision in Early Modern English convents from the perspective of religious, social and political imperatives of the period, emphasising the role of the schools in the survival of English Catholic life, 'Exiled Children: Care in English Convents in the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Children Australia*, 41 (2016), pp. 168–77. Also, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 92–5 and pp. 119–21. Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, pp. 86–8. Focus on scholarly contributions by individual nuns has been provided, *inter alia* Jaime Goodrich in 'Common Libraries: Book Circulation and Identity in English Benedictine Convents, 1600–1700', in *Women's Bookscapes*, pp. 153–70 and "'Attend to Me": Julian of Norwich, Margaret Gascoigne, and Textual Circulation among the Cambrai Benedictines', in James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds.) *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 105–21. All the above provide invaluable information particularly for the examination of changing trends in, and attitudes towards, the schools. This profusion, however, draws attention to the dearth of any comparable attention being given to the convent schools after arrival in England.

¹⁶⁰ Susan O'Brien highlighted the contribution of the contemplative schools in England as precursors to the apostolic educators in 'An Overview of English Benedictine Nuns in the Nineteenth Century', EBC History Symposium, 1994. Janet Hollinshead touched on the subject in 'From Cambrai to Woolton: Lancashire's First Female Religious House', *Recusant History*, 25 (2001), pp. 461–86, as part of a wider study of that community's settlement at Woolton. Hood in *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 161–2 gives a brief account of the Woolton/Salford schools within a wider discussion of the monks' educational work in England and Aidan Bellenger briefly reviews the schools in 'France and England: The English Female Religious from Reformation to World War', in Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (eds.), *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 3–11 and 'The Community of the Glorious Assumption: the English Benedictine Nuns of Brussels transferred to Winchester 1794–1850', EBC History Symposium paper, 1999. Tonya Moutray, *Refugee Nuns, The French Revolution and British Literature and Culture* (London, 2016), pp. 146–52, also discusses the contribution of the Continental schools.

the running of schools on the Benedictines' second exile experience, it also draws attention to the contribution of these schools in developing a greater understanding of the provision of Catholic women's education in the period before the emergence of the apostolic schools and the changing nature of the Catholic community, networks and kinship ties.

Prior to the Catholic Relief Act 1791, Catholic Schools in England were illegal. Most English convents on the Continent in the pre-Revolutionary period ran schools for young Catholic women. The scope and standard of education provided varied considerably from the fashionable 'finishing' school of the Blue Nuns in Paris, to the dynamic educational programme initiated by Christina Dennett of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre in Liège¹⁶¹ and the smaller, more homely establishments, within the enclosure of some of the Benedictine and Carmelite houses. Four of the five Benedictine communities ran small *pensions*. The only native alternative for English girls until the late eighteenth-century, was at the Mary Ward schools in York and Hammersmith. These were run under the cover of providing a secular education. Their standards were high and followed a strictly Jesuit model of teaching. Bowden cites an anonymous source from the Hammersmith convent which suggests that the school was seen partly as a 'feeder school' for the convents abroad.¹⁶² Aidan Bellenger has commented, 'The education provided by these [schools] was on a more proficient level than that provided by similar establishments (of a non-Catholic persuasion) in England but probably lacked the rigour of the Catholic academies for boys and was always on a small scale'.¹⁶³ The new convent schools in England filled an important gap:

¹⁶¹ Christina Dennett, WWTN LS061, initiated a significant reform of the curriculum at Liège to include double-entry book-keeping, letter-writing for all styles of life, heraldry and natural history. Dennett's educational programme was so exceptional that it also influenced the first president of the *Academie Anglaise*, ex-Jesuit John Howard. See: Maurice Whitehead, 'Jesuit Secondary Education Revolutionized: the *Academie Anglaise*, Liège, 1773–1794', *Paedagogica Historica*, 40 (2004), pp. 33–44.

¹⁶² Bowden, 'Convent Schooling for English Girls', p. 187.

¹⁶³ Bellenger, 'France and England', p. 4. While education (Catholic or not), especially for girls, was patchy and of a poor standard generally one exception to this was in the small school run by Alice Harrison who provided a Roman Catholic education for both boys and girls and escaped closure by opening her classes to children from all faiths. See Maurice Whitehead, 'Dame Alice Harrison', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

The nature of girls' Protestant schooling in England [ranged] from instruction at home, or in small cohorts under the direction of a governess [...] to residential programs in variously sized boarding schools which were often criticised as being at once too regimented and too unregulated [...] Nuns' schools thus filled several niches in English education, providing education to Catholics at an affordable price and without the travel expenses [and danger] of sending children abroad.¹⁶⁴

Pupils being taught in the English Catholic schools established in the decade following the Relief Acts came predominantly from the emerging 'middling sort': merchant and skilled craftsmen's backgrounds.¹⁶⁵ When existing schools were taken over by the nuns, these girls generally stayed on. During the period, as contemporary literature shows, running a school was hardly a prestigious vocation¹⁶⁶ and the educational level of women teachers was unlikely to have been as high as that of many of the nuns, although Carole Percy suggests that the traditional understanding of the Georgian governess being driven by 'necessity' rather than by 'education' or 'inclination', should be revised.¹⁶⁷

The main motive in England for schoolkeeping was 'of necessity': as a means of financial support. But schools fulfilled other important functions: to attract much needed vocations; as a channel for the dissemination of Catholic thought and teaching and thus to fulfil the nuns' mission for the Conversion of England; and to help widen their social network and integrate them into the Protestant community. Despite these benefits the running of a school was 'highly uncongenial' to the nuns; taking its toll particularly on their mental and physical health and the incompatibility with enclosure and the monastic horarium.

¹⁶⁴ Moutray, *Refugee Nuns*, p. 147. See also: Jane McDermid, 'The Education of Young Ladies' in *The Schooling of Girls in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1900*, (London, 2012), pp. 69–104.

¹⁶⁵ See Craig Muldrew, "'The Middling sort': an Emergent Cultural Identity", in Keith Wrightson (ed.), *A Social History of England 1500–1750* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 290–309.

¹⁶⁶ See Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) where Mrs Goddard's school is 'a real, honest, old-fashioned Boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might be sent to be out of the way and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies' (London, 1996), p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ Carole Percy, 'Learning and Virtue: English Grammar and the 18th Century Girls School', in M. Hilton and J. Shefrin (eds.), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* (Farnham, 2009), p. 78.

Source of Income

The schools provided little in the way of income-generation on the Continent: ‘the cloisters did not earn much from their educational enterprises’ observes Claire Walker.¹⁶⁸ On arrival in England however, schools became a vital source of income although as account books show, the profit margin was frequently small. The Ghent nuns, who paid an annual sum of £42 rent for their house in Preston, ‘felt they must depend chiefly on their school,’ as almost their only means of subsistence.¹⁶⁹ For the Cambrai nuns, while recognising it was a necessity, the school was ‘uncongenial to their tastes and sacred profession’ and while: ‘It was judged advisable that the nuns should take the management of a school for the education of young ladies’, the employment of lay teachers was essential as ‘the poor fugitives were too broken to do much in the way of teaching etc.’.¹⁷⁰ The Dunkirk nuns settled at Hammersmith also found it essential to employ lay staff despite the ‘great expenditure’.¹⁷¹ The Preston nuns employed a Miss Lucas (waiting to enter the community) and ‘one or two other young ladies, the nuns being at that time very few in number’.¹⁷² They recognised that ‘a day-school is not suitable for Benedictines as being incompatible with the rules of inclosure [but] as any attempt at inclosure was an impossibility, so this little help to their empty purse was permitted’.¹⁷³ Teachers’ salaries reduced the small returns still further. Not all communities found the task of teaching too distasteful; the Dunkirk Annals commented that the offer of the Mary Ward school in

¹⁶⁸ Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁹ Anon, *Annals*, pp. 86–97

¹⁷⁰ SBAA, *Annals* vol. 2, part 1, p. 106.

¹⁷¹ Anon, *History*, p. 137.

¹⁷² Anon, *Annals*, pp. 88–9. Miss Lucas did enter but died almost immediately after profession in 1802.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 87.

Hammersmith ‘was particularly suitable to our sisters who had always occupied themselves with education at Dunkirk’.¹⁷⁴

In the case of the Cambrai nuns at Woolton, efforts to take control of the school and conduct it as a business-like operation were frequently frustrated and undermined. As a letter of Dom Bede Brewer (president of the EBC) to Gregory Sharrock (vicar apostolic of the Western District) on 24 March 1797 demonstrates:

I do not wonder that Mr Woollet [or Woolet, a parent] was hurt at the amount of the last year's half-year bill. It is very high. I have often told the nuns they should endeavour to make the bills as low as possible and be firm in retrenching every useless expense. When I had the management of the school, the average amount of the half-year's bills to such as had no masters was £12. But the nuns, contrary to my advice, have raised the pension [from] 16 to 20 guineas. Some advance I am sensible was necessary on account of the great rise of provisions, but considering the allowance they have from the Committee, perhaps it would have been more prudent and equally advantageous to have been more moderate.¹⁷⁵

The cost does not seem exorbitant: the Bar Convent charged £13 per annum plus extras, back in 1776.¹⁷⁶ Brewer in fact, was doing rather well out of the nuns: they paid him £220 a year for ‘existing equipment’ in the house and school plus yearly rent and taxes.¹⁷⁷ The real issue for Brewer was perhaps, that the nuns had ignored his advice and acted independently. This situation would not have occurred when the school was truly a monastic school, established within the enclosure, completely under the control of the nuns. Such interference and restrictions on the nuns’ autonomy was part of the situation in which they found themselves in England. All the communities experienced some lack of agency in the running of their schools: local bishops, chaplains or benefactors needed to help in their establishment, continued to hold

¹⁷⁴ Anon, *History*, p. 136. This suggests that teaching had been more central to the Dunkirk community.

¹⁷⁵ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents. The school was charging eighteen guineas in 1795.

¹⁷⁶ Bowden, “‘We Must Educate our Daughters’”, pp. 11–12.

¹⁷⁷ Janet Hollinshead, ‘John Bede Brewer: Priest and Property’, *Recusant History*, 2 (2006), p. 278.

a stake. Thus, while Winchester had thirty pupils by 1800, this was largely down to John Milner's efforts to recruit girls and he continued to maintain a supervisory role.¹⁷⁸

Running a school, however unwillingly undertaken, was essential for survival. A good business approach was needed. Moral or financial pressure exerted externally was one of the main stimuli for opening a school. Marnhull was the only community to resist doing so, although even they had to yield to emotional pressure for a short while. In 1807 they were persuaded by benefactors to take four girl-scholars who lived inside the enclosure and were taught by an Ursuline nun who moved in with the community.¹⁷⁹ This was a short-lived venture and the girls left in 1811.¹⁸⁰ The episode illustrates the vulnerability of the nuns whose reliance on good will and patronage required many compromises of monastic ideals. The commitment with which the nuns undertook their new role, however reluctantly, may be indicated by the presence in the library of *An Essay on the Government of Children*.¹⁸¹ Both the finances and the vocations of the community suffered from their lack of a school. In 1818 they were reduced to nine choir nuns with no novitiate and their regular income, dependant on the pensions of the Paris nuns, dried up on the death of the last survivor.

Source of Vocations

The Cambrai nuns inherited a ready-made school at Woolton,¹⁸² together with ten or eleven (records vary) young ladies and two or three school mistresses – an apparently high teacher-pupil ratio, especially as male masters were also employed for special subjects such as dancing and art. If the girls were all boarders, the mistresses would also have had duties in other caring roles and of course, the number of pupils would have fluctuated. It is not entirely clear whether

¹⁷⁸ DAAA, Annals 1794 (838).

¹⁷⁹ CAA, letter Teresa Catherine Macdonald to Bishop Sharrock, 1807.

¹⁸⁰ CAA, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation until 1845', pp. 215–6 (160313, 160317).

¹⁸¹ By James Nelson, apothecary. This popular work on child-rearing and education, was first published in 1755, the nuns owned the 3rd edition, 1763. ESTC T138956.

¹⁸² Brewer's first school was for boys (1781). It is not clear when the girls' school opened, but it was running by 1791, see Hollinshead, *From Cambrai to Woolton*, p. 476. See also Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 175–6.

all three of the teachers referred to were in the school at the same time. Ann Teresa Partington mentions two: Misses Crilly and Formby.¹⁸³ In response to a letter dated 9 August 1799 from the Committee for the Relief of the French Emigrant Clergy and Laity enquiring into any new additions to the community the Abbess explained that, on taking over the school, they immediately discharged two teachers – a third had already left – and all the servants, and attempted to run the school themselves: ‘but we soon found we could not give satisfaction to the public without a teacher and an additional servant. We, in consequence, took into our family one of the former teachers and a servant, primarily to attend on [...] the young ladies’.¹⁸⁴ Three appears to have been a standard number: the Dunkirk nuns at Hammersmith employed three secular mistresses in 1796 and Carol Percy refers to three women running a girls’ school in Birmingham in 1797.¹⁸⁵ As Tonya Moutray has pointed out the profession had been overcrowded since the 1780s so it is possible that single Catholic women were glad to take a job with accommodation at a small salary.¹⁸⁶

The schools, for the four houses which ran them, did prove a source of new vocations, despite a comment by Bede Brewer to Henry Parker in 1812: ‘They have about fifteen Children in the school, but no prospect of novices’.¹⁸⁷

Vocations through the Woolton/Salford school 1795–1838

Place of Profession	Total number of Professions	Choir	Lay	From School
Woolton (1795–1807)	7	4	3	1 or 2
Salford (1807–1838)	25	19	5	14
Total	31	23	8	15/16

¹⁸³ SBAA, ‘Dame Ann Teresa Partington’s “Little Book”’.

¹⁸⁴ SBAA, Box 453, letter, 14 August 1799.

¹⁸⁵ Moutray, *Refugee Nuns*, p.157, fn. 108, see also, Percy, ‘Learning and Virtue’, p. 77–99.

¹⁸⁶ Moutray, *Refugee Nuns*, p. 148.

¹⁸⁷ DAA, Parker Letters, Bede Brewer to Henry Parker, 22 July 1812.

A breakdown of entrants in this period at Woolton/Salford reveals that fifteen (or sixteen) members – nearly fifty per cent – had been in the school prior to entry. Moreover, many nuns had relatives who were pupils in the school: figures are difficult to identify accurately, but at least twenty-five can be confirmed and records also refer to ‘nieces and great nieces’ without specific numbers being given. For many the convent was a natural progression from the school. Isabella (later Dame Joseph) Spencer, for example: ‘Being safely arrived at Salford [school in 1812] she soon told the inmates her desire to remain and become a nun’.¹⁸⁸

Two Le Clerc sisters, Justina Day, several of the Tidmarsh family, two Spencer sisters, Teresa Sumner, Editha Breen and Maurus Rayment (née Houghton) all appear first in the school register and later in the monastery at Woolton/Salford. This pattern is replicated in the other communities: in 1805, Mary (Sr Mary Magdalene) Johnson was received at Winchester. She had previously been in the school and was the first pupil to enter the novitiate.¹⁸⁹ Mary was followed by Sr Joseph Hutchinson and her sister Winifred (1807), Austin Witherington (1807), Xavier Bowman and Agnes Whelan (1808), Mary Brenan (1819) and Katherine Kendall (1820). The Benedictine schools did not only provide vocations to their own communities: data from Hammersmith and Caverswall reveals that some schoolgirls went on to enter other convents.

¹⁸⁸ SBAA, Box 456, ‘Dame Joseph Spencer: ‘A short sketch of her life’.

¹⁸⁹ DAAA, Annals, p. 98 (114254).

Vocations to Other Orders

From Hammersmith Convent¹⁹⁰

Year at school	Order Joined	Place of Community	Enclosed or Apostolic	Name
1796	Benedictine	Hammersmith	Enclosed Monastic	Miss Carrington ¹⁹¹
1796	Ursuline	St Gervaise, Paris	Apostolic	Miss Fanny de Trent
1807	Benedictine	Princethorpe	Enclosed Monastic	Miss Ann Reading ¹⁹²
1811	Benedictine	Princethorpe	Enclosed Monastic	Miss Caroline de Chatelot ¹⁹³
1811	Benedictine	Winchester	Enclosed Monastic	Emma Moltano
1811	Visitation Sisters	Shepton Mallet	Enclosed	Teresa Sp[?]
1813	Augustinians (English)	Bruges	Mixed: Contemplative but teaching order	Charlotte Bedingfeld
1814	Benedictine	Winchester	Enclosed Monastic	Elizabeth Moltano
1814	Franciscan	Taunton	Enclosed	Miss Stonor
1814	Franciscan	Taunton	Enclosed	Miss Clifford
1821	Ursuline	Illegible ¹⁹⁴	Apostolic	Miss Georgina Binson
1821	Benedictines	Hammersmith	Enclosed Monastic	Miss Shea (D. Placida)
1821	Benedictines	Hammersmith	Enclosed Monastic	Miss Constable (D. Romana)

From Caverswall Convent

Year at school	Order Joined	Place of Community	Enclosed or Apostolic	Name
1811	Sisters of Joseph	Not specified ¹⁹⁵	Apostolic	Mary Booth
1812	Visitation Nuns	Westbury-on-Tri[y]m	Enclosed	Catherine Shuttleworth
1820-4?	Augustinian ¹⁹⁶	Newton Abbot	Contemplative teaching order	Elizabeth Hardman
1824	Benedictine	Winchester	Monastic	Sarah Gould
1834	Sisters of Charity	Dublin	Apostolic	Anne Margison
1835	Irish Sister of Mercy		Apostolic	Juliana Hardman
1835	Sister of Mercy	Nottingham	Apostolic	Constance Whitgreave (Sr Mary Agnes)

It is not surprising, given the nature of religious life for women at the time, that nine of the thirteen vocations from the Hammersmith school entered enclosed, contemplative houses.

What is remarkable is that only three of them went on to join that community. Two became

¹⁹⁰ DAA, T V II, Entry Book.

¹⁹¹ She had been a teacher at the school.

¹⁹² A teacher at the school.

¹⁹³ Probably Madame de Chastelet, who became principal of the Princethorpe school (see *Catholic Directory* for 1840).

¹⁹⁴ DAA, TVII, Entry Book, location, possibly 'Stoare' or 'Hoare', cannot be identified (200038).

¹⁹⁵ There were four UK houses at Newport, Devises, Malmesbury and Bristol, see Francesca Steele, *The Convents of Great Britain* (Roehampton, 1901), pp. 123–4.

¹⁹⁶ Canonesses Regular of the Lateran, from St Monica's, Louvain. They settled first at Spettisbury, Dorset and moved to Newton Abbot, Devon in 1860, where they gave up their school and devoted themselves to Perpetual Adoration.

Benedictines at Winchester, and two with the French Benedictines at Princethorpe. The Winchester entrants were biological sisters of Italian descent. There is no indication why they did not stay at Hammersmith. Of the two who went on to Princethorpe, one has a French name so this may have influenced her choice. Family connections may have been a factor: there were many Bedingfelds at the English convent at Bruges which might explain why Charlotte went there in 1813. Interesting too are the non-monastic vocations beginning to emerge. The Ursulines were a teaching order and Miss de Trent and Miss Binson may have honed both their religious and educational gifts through the convent school at Hammersmith. The nuns at Caverswall were more successful in keeping their own school vocations (nine out fifty-two professions between 1795–1836 had been pupils) but they also nurtured non-monastic callings for teaching (the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph) and service of the sick and the poor (the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity). Anne (Mary Francis Scholastica) Margison went on to become Superior General of the Sisters of Charity in Ireland and a tribute to her early Benedictine formation may be seen in her taking the name Scholastica, after the sister of St Benedict.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the English Benedictines, among the first religious to re-settle in England, were able through their schools to provide vocations not only for themselves but also for new Orders which were to spring up in subsequent generations. This hitherto unstudied data reveals that the apostolic convents had some roots in the contemplative orders.¹⁹⁸

Who were the Girls?

Aveling's statement that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the social composition of convent schools had changed is supported by the Benedictine school lists.¹⁹⁹ These reveal that girls attending the monastic schools, like the new entrants in England, came from a wider range

¹⁹⁷ DAA BO IV E G Box 2, Golden Jubilee book of Mother Mary Francis Scholastica.

¹⁹⁸ The proliferation of active orders for women in England only began in the 1830s and the impact of the monastic schools as providers of vocations for apostolic sisterhoods later in the century invites further research.

¹⁹⁹ Aveling, *Handle and the Axe*, p. 262.

of socio-economic backgrounds than those who joined on the Continent.²⁰⁰ The level of detail regarding the background and origin of girls in the schools varies. At Woolton and Salford different sources give differing degrees of information. In some cases the first and surname, date of arrival and hometown or county are given but many are less helpful, merely stating date of entry and surname. It is largely impossible to tell whether they were day girls or boarders, or indeed postulants. As already discussed it is not always clear whether an entry was to the school or novitiate. The arrival of servants also seems to have been recorded in the school list: 'Miss [Louisa] Bridge', for example, appears in the school list but actually arrived as a maid in 1802.²⁰¹ On occasion, annotation has been made, for example after an entry in 1800 for 'Miss Crookall', the words 'S^{tr} Monica' have been added. 'Sr Monica Crookall, lay sister' is recorded elsewhere as having entered in 1798 and to have suffered from a mental impairment; 1798 may therefore refer to her final profession date. Her sister, Mary (Sr Catherine) is recorded later, in 1803, with the description 'Maid servant'. Although both were lay-sisters they are also described as being related to 'John Crookall DD, Vice-President of St Edmund's, Ware, President of St Mary's College, Woolhampton 1855–1886'.²⁰² The Crookalls provide a challenge to common perceptions of the correlation of education and social class, and choir/lay status in the nineteenth-century monasteries.²⁰³

Determining actual numbers of pupils is difficult as some appear to have joined, left and re-joined several times. Recurring family names can be traced and the mix of 'old' Catholic families and the 'newer sort' continued.²⁰⁴ At Hammersmith twenty-four pupils joined in 1813, many from 'old English Families' such as: Bedingfeld, Jerningham, Stonor, Clifford and

²⁰⁰ Data is not altogether reliable and requires further interrogation, but the above proposal is supported by surviving pupil-lists and entry material.

²⁰¹ SBAA, Entrance Book and Annals.

²⁰² SBAA, Entrance Book. I am grateful to Abbott Geoffrey Scott for information on John Crookall.

²⁰³ It was not uncommon on the Continent for women of high social station to choose to enter as lay-sisters as an extra act of humility. There is little evidence that this practice continued in England.

²⁰⁴ Hollinshead, 'From Cambrai to Woolton', pp. 477–8.

Vaughan.²⁰⁵ It is likely that the nuns' reputation attracted a 'better sort': the list of names of 'Young Ladies in the School when the Nuns arrived at Woolton' includes none of the old Catholic gentry families or names from previous records of the Cambrai *pension*.²⁰⁶ This changed after the nuns took over and the register included Gregsons, Orrells, Cliftons, Locksleys and Eccleses (names which also appear in the Winchester records). In England, school rolls suggest, students came from a wider social field than would have been able to patronise the Continental schools and the monastic schools created a greater interaction and communication between the English Catholic social classes.

The records also provide some insights into the ethnic composition of the school. At Woolton/Salford there were overseas pupils: 'Carvalho, a Portuguese'; from 'Spane [sic] near Cadiz – Miss Costello'; from 'Jamaica – Miss Kelly'²⁰⁷, from 'the Brazils' – 'Louisa Soares' and 'Miss Hermely from Roscoe, France'. Not surprisingly, given the proximity to Liverpool, there was a significant intake of scholars from Ireland.²⁰⁸ The school-rolls show that the English convents continued to hold an important place in the global Catholic network. The tracing of family connections and the spiritual formation of women, both within the schools and the monastic communities, is important for deepening our understanding of Catholic loyalties and networks in this period.

Social Functions of the Schools

The schools gave the nuns what Aiden Bellenger has described as 'a veneer of respectability [because] a girls' school was more socially acceptable than a convent of enclosed nuns'.²⁰⁹ In

²⁰⁵ Anon, *History*, p. 141.

²⁰⁶ SBAA, Ann Teresa Partington's Account Book.

²⁰⁷ School records from the Sepulchrine Canonesses at New Hall reveal several pupils from the West Indies suggesting plantation/slave-owning roots. I am grateful for Cormac Begadon for this information.

²⁰⁸ There were fewer educational opportunities for middle class Catholic girls in Ireland in this period. In 1800, there were only twelve convents and those which provided schools did so for elementary education of the poor (e.g. Nano Nagle's Presentation sisters). As in England the congregations teaching at a secondary level only emerged in the mid-century. Irish Catholic families who could afford it, educated their daughters in England or, at considerably more expense, on the Continent. See: Deirdre Raftery, 'The "Mission" of nuns in female education in Ireland, c.1850–1950, *Paedagogica Historica* 48 (2012), pp. 299–313.

²⁰⁹ Bellenger, 'Community of the Glorious Assumption', p. 5.

order to facilitate integration into their local communities still further, both Winchester and Hammersmith houses ran ‘poor schools’ in addition to private schools.²¹⁰ The nuns at Cannington also recognised the value of this function and ‘had long resolved, in order to render themselves serviceable to the country, to have a poor school as soon as they conveniently could’.²¹¹ The monastery poor schools may be seen as the forerunners of the elementary and charity schools the apostolic sisters would later run. The requirements for running such schools differed from that of the ‘monastic young ladies’ schools’ and the case at Hammersmith showed these responsibilities to be largely incompatible with the duties of contemplative nuns. William Poynter (vicar apostolic) had provided funding for the school from a legacy left for that purpose in 1817. Five years later he raised concerns as to its running which was described by the nuns as ‘a labour’.²¹² Poynter’s comments highlight the conflict between the contemplative life and the active management of a school. In a letter to the abbess, he cites as problematic:

The early hour at which the school breaks up in the morning, which cannot be avoided on account of your Rule, is a considerable inconvenience to the school, especially for those children who come from a distance. It reduces their morning schooling to very little. These poor children who come from a distance must spend their day at school, and have a place to eat their dinner, in which they may be sheltered from the inclemency of the weather, and be properly guarded from running about in the streets in the intervals between morning and afternoon school. I see how inconvenient it is for you to provide such a place, and a person to watch over them during that time, both of which must be provided for them. The attention which must be paid to them on Sundays to make them all assemble in their proper dress before they go to chapel, to keep them in order in chapel... Notwithstanding the sollicitude with which your Ladyship and Dame Teresa

²¹⁰ The poor school at Hammersmith had been set up by the previous incumbents of the convent, the Mary Ward sisters. Although the Benedictines continued it after their arrival, they did not teach there until 1817. Murray-Sinclair, ‘Hammersmith: A Bridge’. At Winchester, Milner sent Catholic children who paid sixpence a week each, DAAA, Annals, p.78 (112850).

²¹¹ CAA, ‘A Short History of the House’, p. 216 (160317).

²¹² DAA, T VI 1, Annals, p. 100 (194545).

expressed for the good of this Poor School I see that it is not in your power to fulfil its duties.²¹³

The school was passed over to the hands of the parish and the Annals reveal that the nuns felt relief at the lifting of this burden. At Cannington the nuns briefly undertook a poor school. This came at too high a price for monastic life: ‘We only undertook this school at the express order of our Ecclesiastical Superior’.²¹⁴ The schools also took a high cost on the mental health of some of the nuns, see Ignatia Power’s breakdown above (p. 112) and the infringement of enclosure (p. 58).

Transmission of Contemporary Catholic Teaching and Culture

The schools not only provided an education within a Catholic environment for girls but also continued, as they had on the Continent, to play a vital role in the continuation of English Catholic life:

By taking up teaching, willingly or not, the Benedictine convents played a part in the transmission of Catholic culture within the English Catholic community. Some exploration of the type of Catholic culture they transmitted is needed.²¹⁵

This was achieved not only by the initial formation of potential nuns but also through the Catholic education of future wives and mothers in the traditions they would pass on to successive generations back in England. Challenging as a school was for the exiled communities, some viewed it as a continuation of this duty. In Winchester by 1800, there were thirty girls in the school and the annalist records: ‘we could not without inconvenience accommodate so many, but the eagerness of Catholic families to avail themselves of the

²¹³ DAA, T VI 1, Annals, 22 July 1820, pp. 100–3 (194545–194558). Poynter’s diaries show his interest in the poor schools in his region but there is no reference to this episode (only two entries for 1820); Peter Philips (ed.), *The Diaries of Bishop William Poynter, V.A. (1815–1824)* (London, 2006), p. 196.

²¹⁴ The school was opened for a short period from 1808. Later, after the move to Colwich in 1836, the nuns were connected with another parish school, see CAA, ‘A Short History’, pp. 215–16 (160317 ff.).

²¹⁵ O’Brien, ‘An Overview of English Benedictine Nuns in the Nineteenth Century’, p. 8.

advantage of a Convent education prevailed – this blessing having been so long denied to their country’.²¹⁶

The quality of Catholic and secular education provided by the nuns can be gauged from an examination of their schools’ curricula. These appear more rigorous than on the Continent, although few details have survived of how the schools there were conducted. Caroline Bowden has observed: ‘Where schools were set up in contemplative convents the focus of the curriculum seems to have been [...] on creating potential members’.²¹⁷ To some extent, especially in the smaller Benedictine *pensions*, the curriculum may have depended on the expertise of community members or governesses available at the time. Many of the nuns had been well-educated at home, often with their brothers. Dame Bridget More, for example, excelled in ‘Piety, Divinity, Philosophy, Rhetorick, Poetry, Historie and [was] perfectly versed in the Greeke and Latin Tongue’.²¹⁸ While there is no evidence to suggest that this level of learning was passed on to the scholars, it is reasonable to presume that the schools provided an enlightened and eclectic environment. Later, in the eighteenth century, Lady Eleanor Butler, of Kilkenny Castle, who became one of the ‘Ladies of Llangollen’ at Plas Newydd, Llangollen, is recorded as having ‘acquired a certain degree of refinement in literature’ during her education at Cambrai (c. 1753). For the rest of her life, Eleanor followed a daily timetable based on the ‘convent rule’.²¹⁹ She also acquired a spirit of independence and free-thinking which seems not altogether out of keeping with the ‘Cambrai charism’.

²¹⁶ DSAA, Annals, p. 91 (114206).

²¹⁷ Bowden (ed.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 1, p. xxv.

²¹⁸ See Caroline Bowden, ‘Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century’, *English Studies*, 92 (2011), pp. 483–95, especially p. 486.

²¹⁹ Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (Ludlow, 2011), pp. 11–15. A contemporary commented that Butler’s time at Cambrai gave her ‘a distaste for Irish priests and Irish Popery’, p.14, which may reveal something about national prejudice in the convents.

In England not all the schools were established in the most fertile academic ground and this, together with the nuns' unfitness for teaching duties, contributed to the challenges of exile. The Woolton parish, for example, was described, by Brewer as:

Not very considerable in number [and] very scattered for 5 or 6 miles around [...] and composed of many very illiterate, ignorant people, who require great instruction, and of many that are very remiss in their duty [...] who must be frequently admonished and visited.²²⁰

With the growth in Catholic educational establishments following the Relief Acts, the nuns' provision of schooling in England was compelled to become more competitive and professional.²²¹ Pupil ages tended to be flexible, reflecting both the needs of the community for income and the Catholic population for education. At Winchester for example, the Acts of Visitation allowed that: 'Pensioners may be admitted at any age and stay for as long as the nuns decide'. Previously they had not been admitted under seven years old or allowed to stay beyond sixteen.²²²

The Enlightenment had led to interest in the education of women. *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* by Erasmus Darwin, published in 1798, provides insight into how young ladies' schools should be run and what they should be taught.²²³ In addition to sound grounding in grammar, arithmetic, languages and natural history, emphasis was also to be placed on 'Care of the Shape', 'Economy', 'Temperance' and 'Cold bath'. How far the convent schools lived up to this model can be assessed to some extent by the advertisements placed in journals.

²²⁰ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents. The Catholics in Woolton were predominantly rural craftsmen, modest farmers, servants and labourers, Hollinshead, *From Cambrai to Woolton*, p. 467.

²²¹ See advertisements placed in the *Catholic and Laity's Directories* for the early years of the century.

²²² DAAA, Acts of Visitation.

²²³ SBAA, Box 345.

Curriculum

Community	Main Subjects	'Extras'	Terms	Cost
Winchester	'The principles and practice of the holy catholic religion', English and French, reading (but no 'declamation'), history, geography and the use of globes, arithmetic, and writing, plain work, embroidery and 'other fine works'.	'Other branches of ornamental education': all per one quarter: music (1 guinea), dancing (15s), drawing (13s). All to be conducted by 'masters of well-known abilities'.	Board, lodging, washing, mending and education. No vacations (so no extra charge).	20 guineas per annum. Plus, initial fee and annual extras.
Woolton	Useful and ornamental works, reading, English grammar, writing, arithmetic. French, geography, elements of natural and universal history. 'Religion being the first object of education, the principles, history, and genuine practice of the catholic religion will be regularly explained to all three times a week by the Rev. Dr. Brewer.	Drawing (1 guinea a quarter), Dancing (15s), Music (1 guinea). Convenient sea-bathing. Unless sisters, all girls to have separate beds.	Board, washing. Vacations at Christmas (a fortnight) and midsummer (a month). Extra charge for those who remained during vacation time. Provision of: pens, ink, paper, school books, globes, maps and seat in chapel. Age: 5 to 13.	18 guineas. Plus, initial fee and annual extras.

As this table shows, religious instruction is cited as being the 'the first object of education'. At Woolton Bede Brewer's input may have appealed to parents from a liberal background.²²⁴ The range of subjects covered, and variety of extras on offer, are similar with slightly more emphasis on 'ornamental works' at Winchester by 'masters of well-known ability'. Both stress the 'ancient' pedigree of the community and the health-giving properties of the location. Darwin's encouragement of 'Exercise', 'Air' and 'Cold bath' was met at Woolton by the provision of convenient sea bathing.²²⁵ The nuns were actively involved in the development of the curriculum even to the extent of producing their own text books when necessary, for example, *A Short Sketch of the History of England, drawn up for the use of, and dedicated to*

²²⁴ Bede Brewer, MIM 203, his credentials are discussed below, p. 229.

²²⁵ SBAA, from prospectuses, surviving books and letters.

the young ladies educated at the Benedictine Convent, at Salford, Intended to be committed to Memory which provides a revisionist, Catholic, English history.²²⁶

The Woolton school aimed to foster a specifically Benedictine ethos. The standard of deportment expected of pupils, with the reference to modesty and simplicity is very much in keeping with the Rule: ‘all extravagant and expensive dress will be discouraged: parents are earnestly desired to attend to this article, both for their own interest and the very real advantage of their children’ and ‘The greatest attention will be paid to the morals and improvement of the young Ladies’.²²⁷ The battle the nuns faced in this regard may be seen by Brewer’s response to a complaint apparently involving ear piercing by pupils:

The earrings was [sic] occasioned by a foolish notion the drawing master put into the heads of some of the young ladies that the boring of the ears would preserve the sight. Miss Woolet says in her defence that her aunt offered or promised to make her a present of the earrings. I believe it was with reluctance the nuns allowed the operation.²²⁸

That was a battle unlikely to have taken place in Cambrai and illustrates the cultural adaptations the nuns were facing.

The Book List compiled for the Visitation of 1820 at Salford contains further insight into the teaching. A section in the list is entitled ‘the Ladies’ Library’. From both the contents and the other headings, it is clear that this refers to the *young ladies’* i.e. the schoolgirls’ library. Among the predictable histories, grammars, arithmetic and geography books, all in multiple copies, are some interesting works. The list is short on detail but reasonable deductions can be made from the brief descriptions given, for example, ‘A Guide to Heaven’ is certainly *A Guide to Heaven: Containing the Marrow of the Holy Fathers, and Ancient Philosophers*, ‘written in Latine [sic] by John Bona, a Cistercian abbot and in English by T V a Benedictine monk’.²²⁹

²²⁶ SBAA, schoolbooks box. The book was printed, for the abbey, at Evesham by ‘J. Agg, in the Bridge-Street, 1825’.

²²⁷ SBAA, Advertisement for Salford school c. 1820.

²²⁸ SBAA, Letter Bede Brewer to Gregory Sharrock, 24 March 1797 (original at DAA).

²²⁹ 1672, ESTC R12920.

T. V. was Thomas Vincent Sadler, an English Benedictine monk of St Laurence's, Dieulouard, who wrote instructional texts with a confrere from Douai, Anselm Crowther.²³⁰ A number of their works were in the nuns' collections in England and it is significant that Sadler's translation was being used to introduce the girls to patristics and philosophy from a monastic perspective. Clearly their religious education was Catholic in every sense of the word. The 'Epistles and Gospels' appear, and so does 'The Sacraments Expounded', which is probably the Catechism of the Catholic Church.²³¹ The teaching of Catholic faith was fundamental to the education provided and a further '18 Catechisms' are listed with no other details. The presence of John Mannock OSB's *Poor Man's Catechism* reveals the focus on doctrinal education, while also evidencing the nuns' liberal tendencies.²³² Accessible for laypeople, Mannock's manuals gave specific instructions for a range of observances in the home and church.²³³ The Winchester nuns also had a copy of his catechism in the school.²³⁴ Polemic is seen in: *The old fashioned Farmer's motives for leaving the Church of England and embracing the Roman Catholic faith and his reasons for adhering to the same: together with an explanation of some particular points, misrepresented by those of a different persuasion: with an appendix by way of antidote against all upstart new faiths: concluded with asking thirty plain questions.*²³⁵

Liturgy is less well represented but this may indicate the girls, like the nuns, had their own choir books which were kept in the chapel: a Holy Week Book is the only specifically mentioned. Classic spiritual reading was provided in St Augustine ('Confessions' and

²³⁰ Anselm (Arthur) Crowther, MIM 435 and Thomas Vincent Sadler, MIM 326. Sadler had been converted by Augustine Baker OSB, spiritual guide to the Cambrai nuns.

²³¹ A translation of the *Catechismus Romanus*, 1687. The imprimatur refers to the guidance of the Council of Trent and states the ruling to provide 'a catechism concerning all the **sacraments** which the bishops shall take care to have faithfully translated into the vulgar tongue, and **expounded** to the people by all curats' [sic] [bold in original], ESTC R16648.

²³² Anselm (John) Mannock, MIM 535, was committed to Enlightenment principles.

²³³ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 73 and Geoffrey Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone: English Monks in the Age of Enlightenment* (Bath, 1992), pp. 139–41.

²³⁴ Inscribed 'Belonging to the School'. Two copies also at Cannington.

²³⁵ 1778, ESTC T148372. It is not clear whether there were any non-Catholic pupils to whom this may have been aimed, possibly the book was to aid post-school conversations with Protestant neighbours.

‘Morality’).²³⁶ The popular Catholic-Reformation authors were also represented in the school library: *Instructions for Youth* by Charles Gobinet; the *Introduction to a Devout Life* by Francis de Sales and Richard Challoner’s ‘Meditations’.²³⁷ For exemplary and inspirational lives, the girls were offered *The Joys of the Blessed (Being a Practical Discourse concerning the eternal happiness of the saints in heaven)*²³⁸ and missionary tales such as the exploits of Jesuit fathers in *Missions of Paraguay*.²³⁹ Closer to home, they were given an account of *Remarkable Conversions*.²⁴⁰ For lighter relief and specifically aimed at the young, but still with a high moral tone, were volumes such as *The Polite Lady or A Course of Female Education In A Series of Letters from a Mother to her Daughter* by ‘Portia’, 1760,²⁴¹ and *The Looking-glass for the mind or intellectual mirror. Being an elegant collection of the most delightful little stories and interesting tales, chiefly translated from that much admired work, L’Ami des enfans*.²⁴² Perhaps most interesting is a copy of *Travels of Cyrus [To which is annexed a discourse upon the theology and mythology of the ancients]* by ‘the Chevalier’, Michael Ramsay. An unconventional figure – convert, ex-Deist, freemason and formative influence in the early Enlightenment – Ramsay was friend of many liberal English monks through whom his teaching infiltrated the cloister at Cambrai.²⁴³ On a more predictable level the syllabus must have included French; ‘Dialogues and grammars’ (twelve); ‘arithmetics’; syntax (four) and geography (five). History was well covered with titles on Roman history and histories of England (seven), France, North and South America and the German States.

²³⁶ No book can be found with this title, it was possibly a collection of texts from Augustine on the subject.

²³⁷ Probably *Considerations upon Christian Truths and Christian duties digested into Meditations for every day*, first published in 1753. ESTC T165705.

²³⁸ Translated from the Latin of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, 1722. ESTC T104562.

²³⁹ *A relation of the missions of Paraguay. Wrote originally in Italian by Mr. Muratori*, 1759. ESTC T87464.

²⁴⁰ *A Short Account of the Remarkable Conversions at Cambuslang. In a letter from a gentleman in the West Country to his friend at Edinburgh* (1742), ESTC N25375.

²⁴¹ ‘Portia’ was one Charles Allen. ESTC T65274.

²⁴² Anon [Arnauld Berquin], a new edition was published in 1792. ESTC N18861.

²⁴³ *Travels of Cyrus* was published in multiple editions between 1728 and 1800. See below, pp. 228–9.

From all this, it is reasonable to conclude, the nuns at Woolton/Salford provided a varied and liberal education within Catholic parameters which would have rivalled that provided by other establishments in the first quarter of the century.²⁴⁴ None of the other communities have surviving school book lists: the Hammersmith catalogue identifies some books as belonging to the school library, but the sample is not sufficient to give a definitive insight into the education provided. Items of interest include classic spirituality by Gother and Granada, French literature (Racine), history, ‘Mary Tudor, Queen’ and the third volume of a ‘Historie de la Rev Fr’ (titles can’t be identified). In the general interest section, two volumes of the massive *The Percy Anecdotes* are attributed to the school.²⁴⁵ Overall, the collection at Hammersmith suggests an orthodox and undemanding education.

The schools reveal something about the position of the communities in the theological and political debates raging in early nineteenth-century Catholic England.²⁴⁶ This is discussed in greater detail below but, insofar as the schools were concerned, Woolton may be seen as representing liberal values and Winchester more Ultramontane sympathies. At Woolton the mission school had been under the inspection of Bede Brewer since 1791. He passed it into the care of the Cambrai nuns in 1795 and his on-going involvement suggests this school continued as model of ‘enlightened’ Catholic learning. Brewer’s desire for the Cambrai nuns to take over the school at Woolton may have been due to his belief that they would continue (or perhaps raise) the standard of teaching in the school and bring a liberal, enlightened Catholic culture to the impoverished and largely uneducated surrounding parish.²⁴⁷ A very different influence was

²⁴⁴ See Carmen Mangion, “‘Good Teacher’ or ‘Good Religious’? The Professional Identity of Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales”, *Women’s History Review*, 14: 2 (2005), pp. 223–36.

²⁴⁵ By the self-styled ‘Monks of the Benedictine Monastery of Mont Benger’. The authors were Joseph Clinton Robertson, 1787–1852, Scottish patent writer and journalist, and journalist Thomas Byerly, 1788–1826. Whether the nuns knew of their true identity is uncertain.

²⁴⁶ The Cisalpine-Ultramontane debate and the survival of ‘old’ Catholic traditions have been widely discussed. For general background see: Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, Aveling, *Handle and the Axe* and for more specific treatment Peter Phillips, *John Lingard, Priest and Historian* (Leominster, 2008); Joseph Chinnici, OFM, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement 1780–1850* (Shepherdstown, 1980) and Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome* (London, 1978).

²⁴⁷ A similar suggestion is made by Janet Hollinshead in ‘John Bede Brewer: Priest and Property’, pp. 269–84.

at work in Winchester where the nuns came under the patronage of arch-conservative, ‘hammer of the Cisalpines’, John Milner.²⁴⁸ It should be noted that the Winchester nuns’ vicar apostolic for the years 1790–1810, John Douglass, took a more liberal and irenic approach.²⁴⁹ Milner’s influence however, continued to be pervasive.

The nuns only ever viewed the running of a school as a temporary measure which interrupted their true vocation. All abandoned the provision of education as soon as they were able. At Marnhull, it was a small and very brief episode: ‘This little school having only been undertaken as a trial in order to oblige those who asked us was not continued more than about three years’.²⁵⁰ The Hammersmith community were the first to be able to close the school in 1875 when:

through the gracious providence of God, many active Orders were able once more [to undertake] that important duty of teaching. The enclosed Orders, such as ours, could then devote themselves to [...] the main object of the present religious life – the Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament.²⁵¹

Even though for the other three communities the schools had to continue, in some form, into the twentieth century, the temporality of the provision was always understood. For the nuns from Cambrai:

temporarily placed as conductors of the Woolton School [...] shattered in health and hampered by a thousand drawbacks, clad in secular dresses, depending on the school and on public charity for their daily bread, monastic observance was necessarily suspended.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Blom, et al. (eds), *The Correspondence of James Peter Coghlan*, p. xxx. John Milner was vicar apostolic of the Midland District 1803–1826, and missionary at Winchester 1779–1803. See also: Cadoc Leighton, ‘John Milner, History and Ultramontanist’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 63 (2010), pp. 346–74.

²⁴⁹ Douglass supported the statement of Catholic principles written by Charles Butler, 1807, which asserted that ‘no one [Catholic] principle was incompatible with that true loyalty or duty Englishmen owe to king and country’, see Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment*, p. 17.

²⁵⁰ CAA, ‘A Short History of the House from its Foundation until 1845’, p. 214 (160313).

²⁵¹ *History*, p. 130. The growing devotion to Perpetual Adoration, not traditionally part of Benedictine spirituality, is discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁵² SBA Annals and Box 345.

As this temporary measure became a more permanent feature of life, evidence shows that it took its toll on the quality of new vocations, the health of the nuns and the temper of the contemplative life.

Conclusion

We have seen that resettlement came slowly to the Benedictine nuns in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The impediments which created the second exile experience continued throughout the period but the first seeds of growth can also be discerned.

An examination of the composition of the communities reveals numeric growth but at the cost of compromise to traditional values. Changing social backgrounds and family connections of entrants widened the pool of vocations and brought hope to the aging communities, but also brought challenges which further unsettled the identity of the survivors. While numbers increased, Benedictine formation was slow to be fully restored: the immediate requirements of day-to-day living in the second exile took priority over a sound, traditional monastic novitiate. The backgrounds of the new entrants were frequently at variance with the culture of the older nuns making for generational tensions. Thus we see, reflected in the nuns' experience, the transgenerational problems common to refugee communities.

The adjustments of second exile continued to be called for and the reception of boarders (an unwelcome extension of the practice on the Continent) further breached enclosure and caused disruption. Contact with guests however, built on the support of Protestant benefactors, further enabled the nuns to integrate into wider society. The role of the contemplatives in providing a bridge between first exile female religious life and the emergence of the apostolic orders is seen particularly in the establishment of the monastic schools. These paved the way for the arrival of the new sisterhoods and provided some of the first members and teachers of these orders. Inevitably though, the running of the schools proved inimical to the restoration of the

monastic life and impacted on the mental health and formation of the next generation. This study of the schools has also cast new light on the provision of girls' education in the period and the role of female educators. A review of the curricula of the schools reveals a brave attempt to provide a varied timetable, incorporating both religious and secular education, in line with contemporary mores. Although many practices adapted for exile conditions on the Continent had to be continued in England these interim compromises ultimately helped the women discern the fundamental, non-negotiables of Benedictine life and prepared them for renewal later in the century. These conditions, while ultimately leading to growth, impacted not only on practical quotidian living but hit at the heart of Benedictine existence – spiritual and devotional practices. It is to these that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Exile and Devotion

The struggle to reconcile enforced action and contemplation was central to the challenge of the second exile for the Benedictine nuns.¹ As the previous chapters have shown, the demands of schoolkeeping and lack of enclosure proved inimical to the contemplative monastic life. The next chapters explore how the nuns adapted and appropriated their sense of alienation through traditional monastic means: prayer and devotional practices (this chapter); and reading and writing (Chapter Four). An examination of these habits reveals that they renegotiated the terms of their inner spiritual life and used it to articulate their trauma and struggle to regain equilibrium. Development of spiritual expression is essential to a living faith: this chapter contrasts the Benedictine tradition with some later devotional practices originally extrinsic to it. It shows how the nuns' spirituality extended to integrate devotional exercises and indeed how they led the way in these practices which were only to emerge later in the wider English Catholic community. We see the nuns here in both their transnational *milieu* and their English context. Each Benedictine convent on the Continent had developed its specific spiritual focus and these differences continued in England, shaped and exacerbated by political considerations and the influences of male ecclesiastical superiors and benefactors. The chapter goes on to review nuances in spiritual practice particularly those resulting from Jesuit and non-Jesuit influenced houses. Revival, when it came, was affected by prevailing fashions and this was particularly evident in the liturgy with the incorporation of

¹ For a discussion on how the conflict affected the monks see Alban Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival: Continuity and Change in the English Benedictine Congregation 1795–1850* (Farnborough, 2014), pp. 61–83.

increasingly elaborate choral pieces and ceremonies. Finally, we take each practice in turn and examine how it developed in the convents. In some, such as recitation of the Rosary and devotion to the Sacred Heart, the nuns were continuing or reviving older, truly Benedictine traditions. In others, such as Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, they were leading new trends.

The thesis builds on the work of Mary Heimann by showing that many devotions which did not become mainstream until later in the century in England were already practised and disseminated by the nuns.² It questions however, Susan O'Brien's suggestion that it was the new apostolic orders, through their focus on the doctrine of Real Presence and the liturgical calendar, which first influenced English Catholic material culture in this regard.³ Here we see that the impact had begun earlier through the observance of the contemplative nuns, which then spread out to the communities in which they were based, and brought new vocations through practice of such devotions as Perpetual Adoration. The apostolics may have extended the popularity of these, especially in emerging urban areas, but the work began in Staffordshire, Winchester and Somerset. This treatment of the spiritual history of the contemplatives also bridges the gap in the historiography of women religious, by revealing their contribution to Catholic revival in England through their very presence: as silent witnesses in their habits and contemplative prayer, transmitting the presence of the transnational Catholic church in the decades before the 'second spring'.⁴

² Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1995).

³ Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), pp. 142–80, especially pp. 169–70.

⁴ See for example John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975), pp. 295–322, and Carman Mangion, "'Good Teacher" or "Good Religious"? The Professional Identity of Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales', *Women's History Review*, 14 (2005), pp. 223–36, especially pp. 223–6.

Spirituality and Devotion

Spirituality is a problematic term that defies categorisation or quantification. It is an abstract term, not easily defined within a historical context and with multiple meanings such that historians tend to speak of spiritualities in the plural to acknowledge not only several meanings but multiple layers of spirituality.⁵

In Mangion's study of apostolic sisterhoods, she defined spirituality as: 'the core value that gave meaning and purpose to the lives of the religious sisters, providing sustenance to their working lives as well as their spirit and soul'. The Benedictines' lives will be considered in this context: in their whole, lived, spiritual experience and more specifically, in their adherence to 'devotions'. Devotions are private, non-liturgical practices employed to foster what F. W. Faber described as 'a particular propension of the soul to God, whereby it devotes itself [...] to the worship and service of God'.⁶ These are largely alien to traditional Benedictinism. In contradistinction to devotions, this section also considers the nuns' liturgical observances: the Mass and Divine Office – public acts of worship, that constitute the prayer of the Church and are required of all professed religious. The term 'interior' or 'inner' life may also be applied, perhaps more appropriately, to the contemplative experience. Thus, the chapter reviews how the nuns lived and expressed their relationship with God and the Church, both personally and communally, through their religious practices.

Spirituality is not a static phenomenon – it both shapes and is shaped by its socio-cultural surroundings. The spirituality of the English nuns in the early modern period has been the subject of scholarly work in recent years but, as in other aspects of this history, less attention has been paid to the nineteenth century. A shift in the nuns' spirituality can be discerned between these periods. As Lux-Sterritt commented: 'The spirituality of eighteenth-century

⁵ Carmen Mangion, 'The "Mixed Life": Challenging Understandings of Religious Life in Victorian England', in Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (eds.), *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 165–79, p. 166.

⁶ Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, p. 26.

nuns was also a little different from that of their predecessors. Their contemplative *modus vivendi* evolved, new practices emerged, trends in spirituality shifted'.⁷ The shift was even more apparent in years following migration to England. Her treatment of the lived experience of nuns through a study of their 'living spirituality' highlights the need for this consideration to be extended to their nineteenth-century successors.

With the exception of Lux-Sterritt's work, the study of spirituality itself has been largely neglected by historians of English Catholicism. Bossy and Aveling have both discussed it in their wider histories, but Mary Heimann is the only scholar to have worked specifically on the subject for the modern period and her *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* has become a classic.⁸ It is ground-breaking in that it treats devotional practices in their own right: as a matter of spirituality and not merely to support a broader argument, such as the triumph of Ultramontanism. More work is needed on this area, particularly as Heimann only begins her study in 1850, and does not consider religious communities either in their contribution to, or reflection of, the development of these practices. Susan O'Brien has extended the survey of devotional practices to the apostolic orders in England, especially after the arrival of the French congregations from the 1840s onwards and revealed their impact on the Sacred Heart, Marian devotions and Perpetual Adoration in England.⁹ This present research however, demonstrates that the contribution of the Benedictines must be recognised in the rise of this popularity before that date. This chapter shows that the roots of many of these devotions and practices were well established among the nuns before 1840. A recent article by Kate Jordan has touched on the subject from a cultural perspective, but again little attention has been given to the role of

⁷ Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester 2017), pp. 11–12.

⁸ Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*; 'Devotional Stereotypes in English Catholicism, 1850–1914' in F. Tallett, and N. Atkin (eds.), *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 13–25 and 'Catholic Revivalism in Worship and Devotion', in Sheridan Gilley (ed.), *Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 8; World Christianities 1815–1914* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 70–83.

⁹ Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', pp. 142–80, especially pp. 169–73.

enclosed communities.¹⁰ While Geoffrey Scott and Alban Hood have shown the evolution of the Benedictine monks' spirituality, they neglect the female perspective.¹¹ As an established presence within the English Catholic Church, a study of contemplative nuns' place in nineteenth century English Catholic spirituality, is overdue.¹²

An examination of the convent book lists in Chapter Four will show that authors of the Catholic Reformation continued to form the basis of the nuns' spiritual nourishment in England. There was, by the end of the eighteenth-century, significant decline in their study of the mystical authors – once their traditional sustenance. As their reading came to reflect much more the Continental, especially French, influence, they were firmly part of the transnational spirituality movement. This shift is reflected particularly in the devotions which became central to their spiritual observances, enabled not least by the growth of Catholic publishers such as James Coghlan who: 'made available to his English audience contemporary fashions in continental piety and devotion, such as devotions to the Sacred Heart and the cult of the venerable Benedict Labre'.¹³ Frances Dolan in writing about the first exile period highlights the importance of material objects in nuns' communities: 'on creating material and lasting memorials to one's faith and one's life – a religious house, a safe house, a book', such praxis was re-produced in their appropriation of the second exile.¹⁴

¹⁰ Kate Jordan, 'Artists Hidden from Human Gaze: Visual Culture and Mysticism in the 19th Century Convent', *British Catholic History* (2020), 35, pp. 190–220.

¹¹ Geoffrey Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone* (Bath, 1992), and Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*.

¹² The recent availability of the archives of women religious to scholars, and the funding provided to support work in this area will greatly contribute to the historiography. In particular, the work of Brian Casey on the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood and Cormac Begadon on the Sepulchrine nuns (both fellowships in the History of Catholicism, Durham University).

¹³ Francis Blom, Jos Blom, Frans Korsten and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *The Correspondence of James Peter Coghlan (1731–1800)* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. xxxi).

¹⁴ Frances E. Dolan, 'Reading, Work, and Catholic Women's Biographies', *English Literary Renaissance*, 2003, pp. 328–57.

Shades of Benedictine Spirituality

While general trends can be discerned in the communities' practices, this comes with a caveat: Lux Sterritt's observation that 'Benedictine nuns [...] offer an interestingly mottled picture of various strands of spirituality within the same order' remains true to the present day.¹⁵ The historical-political context of each community's foundation is an important element in their developing charism. The community from Ghent, it may be argued, was the most Jesuit-influenced Benedictine community at this time. A comment in the Annals reveals something of its stance: 'The Low Countries were [by the end of the century] penetrated with the spirit of Jansenism and the eighteenth-century philosophy'¹⁶ – suggesting the nuns saw the two as dangers equally to be resisted. The Annals express Ultramontane sentiments, describing the Cisalpine Club as having an 'un-Catholic spirit'. Those nuns had been formed in the Jesuit tradition and never had a Benedictine confessor or director until after the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773. At Preston they attended a chapel run by ex-Jesuits, although Veronica Buss relates that: 'As far as our records go we seem to have had little or no community contacts with Jesuits after their restoration in 1814 apart from one or two retreats'.¹⁷ They do not however, seem to have had much contact with Benedictines either. It was not until the appointment of Bernard Ullathorne as bishop of Birmingham in 1850 that, for the first time in their history, they came 'directly under Benedictine influence'.¹⁸ The big influence on the community in England was Dr John Milner, vicar apostolic for the Midlands and arch-Ultramontanist.¹⁹

¹⁵ Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester 2017) p. 10–11.

¹⁶ Anon, *Annals of English Benedictines of Ghent* (Oulton), pp. 70 and 74.

¹⁷ The convent was founded from Brussels to take supporters of Jesuit teaching after the schism within that community. It has been suggested that the Ghent location was chosen as the Jesuit Tertian House for the English Province was based there. Dame Veronica Buss, 'Influences which have helped to form our spirituality': A paper given at the EBC History Symposium, 1977. Published in *Ampleforth Journal*, 83, 1978. 87–91.

¹⁸ DAA, BO.V.d5, Veronica Buss, notes (095729).

¹⁹ Milner, 1752–1826, was mission priest at Winchester from 1779 to 1803. See Frederick Husenbeth, *Life of the Right Rev. John Milner D.D.* (Miami, 2017, originally published Dublin, 1862); Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, 1781–1803* (London, 1909), particularly pp. 123–4; Anon, 'Bishop Milner and the

Milner wrote many spiritual directives and commentaries for them and shaped their reading. Buss ascribes the community's emphasis on extra-liturgical devotions as due to his influence.²⁰

While Lux-Sterritt contrasts the 'inner prayer' of Cambrai and Paris with the focus at Ghent on 'physical apprehensions of the sacred', the former two were by no means identical in their spiritual development.²¹ Although founded from Cambrai, the Paris house came under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris and in England, under the vicar apostolic of the region and was never under the immediate authority of the EBC. In Paris, the community was closely aligned for a while with the French Port Royal nuns and probably only escaped sharing their fate because they still practiced Bakerite contemplation.²² Although the original spirituality of Father Augustine Baker persisted quietly in the community their comparative isolation outside the EBC meant French influences were pervasive.²³ One distinctive characteristic was the addition of dedication to the name in religion. The most popular appellations tell something of the spiritual demeanour: during our period there were six 'of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary'; five 'of the Blessed (or Adorable) Sacrament'; and six dedications 'of the Holy Ghost'.²⁴ Names are also revealing in that while traditional Benedictine ones such as Benedict/a, Scholastica, Placid/a, Gertrude, as well as old English names such as Winifride, Walberga and Etheldreda still predominated, Continental and non-Benedictine influences may be seen in the increasing occurrence of Aloysia, Xaveria and Philomena, all of which grew in popularity after arrival in England.

Nuns of Caverswall Castle', *Downside Review* (1913), pp. 3–20 (123645, Cadoc Leighton, 'John Milner, History and Ultramontaniam', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 63 (2010), pp. 346–74.

²⁰ Dame Veronica Buss, 'Influences which have helped to form our spirituality': A paper given at the EBC History Symposium, 1977, *Ampleforth Journal*, 83, 1978. 87–91, pp. 4–5.

²¹ Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile*, p. 251.

²² Ruth Clark, *Strangers and Sojourners at Port Royal* (Cambridge, 1932). For a revisionist reading of the Port Royal community see: Daniella Kostroun, *Feminism, Absolutism and Jansenism* (Cambridge, 2011).

²³ Benedict Rowell OSB, 'Baker's Continuing Influence on Benedictine Nuns', in M Woodward(ed), *That Mysterious Man: Essays on Augustine Baker OSB 1575–1641* (Abergavenny, 2001), pp. 82–91

²⁴ This practice began at Cambrai but seems to have been abandoned by the end of the seventeenth century.

The spiritual focus of the nuns from Cambrai changed in the years after repatriation. Based on the evidence of books at Salford the quality, as well as the quantity, of books available to the nuns was much less substantial than that reflected in the 1793 catalogue of books.²⁵ This may indicate that the formation of novices was *per force* less theologically thorough and that a more devotional, pietistic diet may have been their food. Generally, the new entrants were less well educated in the classics and more directed to ‘accomplishments’ than previous generations.²⁶ The most valued assets of new entrants may be seen in a letter written in 1835:

She [the newly professed] plays the piano exquisitely and we have a postulant who excels on the harp. Both will prove great acquisitions to the community. We have at present four postulants, and one novice, three of them know French very well, and one of them knows Italian.²⁷

How these accomplishments would aid the monastic vocation is not explained. Aspirant Sarah McArdle was reportedly told by Gregory Robinson,²⁸ missionary at St Peter's, Liverpool, that: ‘It is a Community, which if not the most austere, has never lost its first fervour and there I wish you to go.’²⁹ Bishop Bernard Ullathorne, who first visited Salford in 1830, later wrote: ‘how amazed I was at the laxity of its discipline’.³⁰

Liturgy

Traditionally Benedictines strongly emphasise liturgical celebration over extra-liturgical devotions such as Benediction.³¹ However, the nineteenth century saw a growth in devotional

²⁵ See Jan T. Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres Provenant des Religieuses Angloises de Cambrai: Book List of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai, c.1793* (Salzburg, 2013).

²⁶ In the 1860s, Fr Laurence Shepherd held Latin classes for the community at Stanbrook Abbey.

²⁷ SBAA, Box 455, bundle A, letter 28 November 1835, D. Francis [de Sales] Sayles to Kitty Nock.

²⁸ Gregory Robinson OSB, 1780–1837, monk of St Laurence’s.

²⁹ Anon, *In a Great Tradition* (London, 1956), p. 47.

³⁰ SBAA, Box 33, letter 47, 2 August 1878, to Gertrude d’ Aurillac Dubois.

³¹ See Pierre Doyère OSB ‘St Gertrude, Mystic and Nun, *Worship* 34 (1960), pp. 536–43 for a description of Benedictine spirituality and liturgy.

practices and the English Benedictines were part of this expansion.³² It was particularly strong at Caverswall, which Veronica Buss attributed to Jesuit influence: ‘we lisped in numbers [...] There were seven Saturdays in honour of Our Lady’s Dolours; ten Fridays in honour of St Francis Xavier; ten Tuesdays in honour of St Benedict [...] and the Hours of the Passion were said hourly throughout Lent’.³³

This development may be explained by the rupture of the Revolution, and the lack of space and capacity to perform the more elaborate liturgical celebrations that had been the norm on the Continent.³⁴ At Woolton, the nuns struggled to say the Divine Office and were grateful to hear Mass rather than more actively participate through music or ceremonies. It was only after arrival at Salford that they began to sing parts of it again. Plainchant formed the basis of monastic liturgy in the seventeenth century but polyphonic settings were being introduced by the nuns following trends in England and the Continent. Andrew Cichy’s study of the liturgical repertoires of three convents, including the Brussels Benedictines, shows the connection between recusant devotional practices and the blurring of sacred and secular musical boundaries and provides a basis for understanding monastic musical developments in the subsequent era.³⁵ In the eighteenth century the monastic celebration of the liturgy continued to follow musical fashion and developed polyphonic ‘figured chant’, the shape of the note determining its time-value, rather than traditional plainsong. Although it is unclear how much plainchant was sung by the end of the eighteenth century, T. E. Muir contends that it never

³² For accounts of the development of English Catholic liturgy see: Bennett Zon, *The English Plainchant Revival* (Oxford, 1998) and T.E Muir, *Roman Catholic Church Music in England, 1791–1914: A Handmaid of the Liturgy?* (London, 2008).

³³ Dame Veronica Buss, ‘Influences which have helped to form our spirituality’: A paper given at the EBC History Symposium, 1977, pp. 4–5.

³⁴ These had been changing during the eighteenth century when the traditional Gregorian chant gave way to complex polyphony and choral masses.

³⁵ Andrew Cichy, ‘Parlour, Court and Cloister: Musical Culture in English Convents during the Seventeenth Century’, in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Farnham, 2017), pp. 175–90

disappeared but was adapted.³⁶ Certainly, chant was a skill the nuns had to re-learn from scratch later.³⁷ In the first half of the period they sought to adopt the liturgical settings practiced in fashionable Catholic chapels in England where the ‘musical tone was set by operatic Masses’.³⁸ A description of Salford organist and chantress, Magdalen Le Clerc, sets the tone: ‘She had been trained in music and singing by the best Italian masters and her beautiful rendering of the soprano solos in Mozart’s Masses [...] was proverbial’. Dame Magdalen collected ‘a large store of well-chosen Church music for those days’ and trained the choir in the ‘regular singing of Masses (Mozart etc.) on many feast days’.³⁹ At Easter 1817, they sang motets at Mass and Benediction for the first time, accompanied by Dame Magdalena on the harpsichord. This was under the direction of Fr Benedict Wassell, chaplain from 1817–1822,⁴⁰ and far removed from traditional plainsong. The purchase of *Novello’s Sacred Music* in 1833 gives some indication of the music the nuns were using at this time; the ‘music of Webbe and Winter⁴¹ provided ferial fare; Haydn and Mozart glorified high festivals’.⁴² At Caverswall, a volume in the library indicates that the nuns there were attempting Webbe’s ‘Collection of Motetts or Antiphons, for 1, 2, 3 & 4 Voices, or Chorus, calculated for the more Solemn Parts of Divine Worship’.⁴³ Under chaplain Augustine Lawson,⁴⁴ the choir became even more ambitious and sang

³⁶ Thomas E. Muir, *Roman Catholic Music in England, 1791–1914: A Handmaid of the Liturgy?* (Aldershot, 2008).

³⁷ Fr Laurence Shepherd, influenced by the Solesmes revival, taught plainchant at Stanbrook Abbey in 1876. See Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p. 55.

³⁸ Aveling, *Handle and the Axe*, p. 270. See Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival* on the musical tradition at Salford, p. 55.

³⁹ SBAA, Annals, part 1, vol. 2, pp. 568–9.

⁴⁰ Thomas Benedict Wassell OSB. Monk of St Gregory’s.

⁴¹ Vincent Novello, professor of music and organist, began publishing in 1811 and the work referred to here is probably *Novello’s Sacred Music as performed at the Portuguese Royal Chapel*. Novello’s output included his own compositions of motets, masses and evening services as well as arrangements of Purcell, Mozart and Hayden. See: Fiona M. Palmer, *Vincent Novello (1781–1861): Music for the Masses* (London, 2006); Michael Hurd, *Vincent Novello and Co.* (London, 1981). For Novello and the other musicians mentioned here see: Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, pp. 179–190 and Muir, *Roman Catholic Church Music*, pp. 71ff.

⁴² SBAA, inventory for 1825. See also Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 54–5. For an account of musical liturgy in the English convents on the Continent see Caroline Bowden, ‘Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century’, *English Studies*, 92 (2011), pp. 483–95, especially pp. 485–6.

⁴³ DAA, Ghent/Oulton 6 (London, 1792).

⁴⁴ MIM 521.

complicated pieces for unaccompanied voices by Gesualdo⁴⁵ for Tenebrae on Maundy Thursday.⁴⁶ A note in the House Chronicle reads: ‘It is usual to count him [Lawson] as one of the three pre-eminently raised up by God to work at the “spiritual building” of the Convent of Our Lady of Consolation, at the three most critical points of its existence’.⁴⁷ An account of the profession of Maura Rayment at Salford gives an idea of the liturgic style:

It was a grand ceremony and was performed by our dear amiable bishop. He preached a very pretty sermon. On Tuesday evening [...] the ceremony of the profession was performed; on Wednesday at the offertory at Mass we sang Mass in grand style, nine priests were here for the occasion four helped us to sing before the commencement of Mass. We go in procession to the noviceship to fetch the novice down. On returning to the choir we chant the psalm *Laetatus Sum*, which I believe has a very pretty effect.⁴⁸

The Cannington nuns also began to sing the Office at ‘feasts and all except the Creed at Mass’, although the prioress complained of the difficulty of getting priests who could sing.⁴⁹ Motets were popular and copies exchanged between Cannington and Salford. In July 1826 abbess Christina Chare wrote to prioress Clare Knight thanking her for: ‘the little motet you sent us [which is] perfect for the festival of our Holy Mother’.⁵⁰ The two communities also shared their Ceremonial. Hammersmith too became ‘noted for its music’ and Dame Mary English composed a Mass in four parts, as well as a number of Voluntaries which led, according to the Annals, to making at least one convert.⁵¹

Specific Offices were said on regular occasions such as the Office of the Dead, once a month at Salford, and the Office of our Lady on Saturdays. In 1821 the nuns at Colwich obtained

⁴⁵ See Glen Watkins, *Gesualdo: the Man and his Music* (Oxford, 1973).

⁴⁶ SBAA, Boxes 456 and 507.

⁴⁷ SBAA, ‘Notes and Chronicles’ pp. 385 ff. The others were Father Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and Father Laurence Shepherd (1826–1885).

⁴⁸ SBAA, Box 455, A, letter 28 November 1835, D Francis [de Sales] Sayles to Kitty Nock.

⁴⁹ SBAA, Box 456, letter 11, 30 January 1824.

⁵⁰ SBAA, Box 456, items 11 and 12.

⁵¹ Dame Mildred Murray-Sinclair, ‘Hammersmith: A Bridge’, paper given at the EBC History Symposium, in 1994, p. 3. See also DAA, T.V.1.

permission from the Holy See to upgrade the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Our Lady to a solemnity and have all day exposition.⁵² Music and office books at Salford reveal the feasts and offices that were observed: a pinch of printed sheets includes:

*Officium de Septem Doloribus B. Mariae Virginis, Duplex Maius. Iuxta ritum Breuiarii Monastici. Feria sexta post Dominicam Passionis. Nouiter celebrari concessum à Sanctissimo Domino Nostro. Clemente Decimo. Omnibus vtriusque sexus Christi fidelibus, qui ad Horas Canonicas tenentur Hispaniarum Regi Regnis subiectis, Septembris In Festo Nominis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae. Duplex Maius. Iuxta Ritum Breuiarii Monastici.*⁵³

Music for ‘Lamentations and Benedictus for Holy Week’ was sent to Fr Lawson in 1823. Each nun (or at least chantress) would have had her own copy of the *Rituale* which included clothing, profession, renovation of vows and jubilee ceremonies. Marking of anniversaries was especially important in the second exile as a way of celebrating and commemorating heritage. Thus, a manuscript of ‘An Abridgment of the Profession [ceremony]’ described as: ‘A small collection or abridgment of the edifying ceremonies of the truly great and renowned Abbey of Salford which have already been used in the solemn consecration of several, once your virtuous children’ was copied by Fr Lawson, and presented ‘To the most venerable Dame Clare [Crilly] the assiduous and motherly Instructor of numberless Children’.⁵⁴

The organ had been introduced in monasteries on the Continent in the eighteenth century ‘to increase dignity’.⁵⁵ All the communities were keen to revive the custom in England. At Salford, the nuns had to make do with a harpsichord for many years although an organ appears in the 1825 inventory. This must have been an inferior instrument as subscriptions were raised for

⁵² CAA, Council Book (160029).

⁵³ Translation: ‘The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Double. According to the manner of the monastic breviary. On Friday after the Lord’s Passion, recently granted by our most holy Lord Clement X. For all those faithful to the canonical hours kept in Spain. September: Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. First Order according to the monastic breviary’. SBAA, More library, printed in black & red. At top of p. 15, ‘A.R. Salford House.’ SBAA, More library, 20184, the variations in the Latin are in the original text.

⁵⁴ SBAA, ‘Dame Clare Crilly’s Box’.

⁵⁵ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 58. Some of the monks also used wind and string instruments although there is no evidence this practice extended to the nuns.

the purchase and installation of a new one in 1833. The fund-raising was successful and an organ was built in May of that year. It cost a total of £110 and the list of benefactors shows that £134 was raised.⁵⁶ The donations covered its repair and servicing until 1838. Two copies of Novello's *Sacred Music* were also purchased. At Caverswall donations raised £165 for the purchase of a new instrument in 1839. The old one was sold for £10.⁵⁷

As the liturgy was restored it became more ambitious but less monastic and for much of this period extra-liturgical devotions held a central place in the observance. The return to traditional chant practices in the mid-nineteenth century, which the Stanbrook nuns were to promote under the influence of the Solesmes congregation, was due largely to the triumph of Ultramontanism and the return to neo-gothic, medieval sources.⁵⁸

Devotions

Many of the devotions which are sometimes viewed as Continental innovations in the nineteenth century, have a much older pedigree. Heimann lists the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the use of devotions to the Sacred Heart, novenas, litanies and May devotions; as 'the more flowery' or 'Italianate' aspects of Catholic worship⁵⁹ but the aim of her work is to show that English devotional practices did not arise spontaneously from the 'Second Spring' or Roman imperatives.⁶⁰ Certainly all became more popular during the nineteenth century, but many had been practiced, albeit more soberly, by English Catholics for centuries. Susan O'Brien has discussed the influence the devotional practices of nuns had on the re-making of English Catholicism, although she has concentrated

⁵⁶ SBAA, Archives Box 455, Magdalen Le Clerc's note and list of benefactors, 1823.

⁵⁷ DAA, BO-IV-A Box 7, 'Early Letters'.

⁵⁸ See Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, p.170 and Muir, *Roman Catholic Church Music*, pp. 96–107. Although, as Muir makes clear plainchant and polyphony should not be seen in opposition but rather as having a 'symbiotic relationship', p. 110.

⁵⁹ Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.59. See also Derek Holmes, *More Roman than Rome* (London, 1978), especially pp. 19–50.

particularly on the French convents and apostolic sisterhoods, which arrived later in the nineteenth century.⁶¹ The influence of French religious women in this area has been overstated by Aidan Bellenger. His comment, ‘there is undoubtedly a very strong French influence on the women religious in England’, does not do justice to the role of the English contemplatives in preserving and disseminating the unbroken devotional tradition of English Catholicism.⁶² Evidence from the Benedictine archives, reveals the hitherto unrecognised contribution of native contemplative women to the continuity of this practice and evidences the dual role of the contemplatives in importing ‘new’ Continental practices while also maintaining older recusant traditions.

Sacred Heart

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, although rarely advertised in English churches in the nineteenth century according to Heimann,⁶³ is an old devotion which had been present in writings of great English and Benedictine saints such as Julian of Norwich and Gertrude the Great.⁶⁴ Both influenced the nuns’ spirituality.⁶⁵ The claim that St Gertrude developed devotion to the Sacred Heart is made by Gilbert Dolan OSB, in what remains a definitive life of Gertrude published in 1913: ‘With St Gertrude the Church’s devotion to the Sacred Heart enters a new phase’.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Susan O’Brien, ‘French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England’, pp. 142–80. O’Brien, ‘*Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England*’, *Past and Present*, 21 (1988), pp. 10–140.

⁶² Aidan Bellenger, ‘France and England: The English Female Religious from Reformation to World War’, in F. Tallett and N. Atkin (eds.), *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 3–11.

⁶³ Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ In her Tenth Revelation, Julian recounts Christ’s invitation to enter mystically, through his open wound, into the depths of the Sacred Heart. See *inter alia* Elizabeth Dutton, ‘The Seventeenth Century Manuscript Tradition and the Influence of Augustine Baker’, in Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 127–38; Julia Bolton-Holloway, *Anchoress and Cardinal: Julian of Norwich and Adam Easton, OSB* (Salzburg, 2008) and David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London, 1961). On St Gertrude see M S Compton, ‘St Gertrude the Great and the Loveliness of Jesus’, in A L Soror and M S Compton (eds), in *Sisters in Wisdom: Twelve Women Disciples from East and West* (Wisconsin, 2013), pp. 207–29.

⁶⁵ Gertrude’s placing of the devotion in the centre of Benedictine liturgical experience may also have ensured its continued influence among the nuns, see Anna Harrison, ‘“I am Wholly Your Own”: Liturgical Piety and Community Among the Nuns of Helfta’, *Church History* 78 (2009), pp. 549–83.

⁶⁶ Gilbert Dolan, *OSB St Gertrude the Great* (London, 1913), See especially pp. xv–xxi. Dolan was chaplain at Stanbrook Abbey 1894–1899. For an insightful discussion of the centrality of St Gertrude’s *Revelations* to devotion to the Sacred Heart and Benedictine spirituality and liturgy see: Pierre Doyère OSB, ‘St Gertrude, Mystic and Nun’, *Worship*, 34 (1960), pp. 536–43.

Dolan shows that this tradition was kept by Benedictines down the ages, for example by Abbot Blossius, and charts its roots in English mysticism through William Langland, Julian of Norwich and Cambrai-mentor Augustine Baker.⁶⁷ The nuns' long tradition of reading and meditating on Julian of Norwich, fostered by the abiding spiritual influence of Baker, reveals them to be steeped in Sacred Heart imagery.⁶⁸ The spread of this devotion, attributed by Susan O'Brien to the apostolic sisterhoods from the 1840s, was anticipated by the Benedictines by at least twenty years.⁶⁹ The nuns' appropriation and continuation of the Julian tradition, especially in connection with physical/bodily imagery, should be understood in the light of recent studies which relate mysticism to phenomena that define and contextualise human lives within late-medieval devotion and lived religion.⁷⁰

There are many hints at the nuns' earlier adherence to this devotion. The Brussels convent used a cross emblazoned with the Sacred Heart as their arms and dedicated an altar to it in the abbey church.⁷¹ A surviving sermon from Lamspringe monk Denis Bishop⁷² given to the nuns at Cambrai (c. 1705), speaks of the 'the society of the heart of Jesus, for which many of you

⁶⁷ A link between the visions of Langland, Julian and Gertrude has also been made by Barbara Newman 'Redeeming the Time: Langland, Julian and the Art of Lifelong Revision', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 23 (2009), pp. 1–32 which demonstrates how deeply embedded the devotion was in English tradition.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the influence and appropriation of Julian's writings on the Cambrai nuns, see Jaime Goodrich, "'Attend to me": Julian of Norwich, Margaret Gascoigne and Textual Circulation among the Cambrai Benedictines' in James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds), *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017, pp. 105–22. Goodrich illustrates how study of Julian's work 'gained a life of its own' at Cambrai and came 'to represent the distinctive contemplative tradition' there.

⁶⁹ Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', pp. 169–73. This was not unique to the Benedictines. For example, Christina Dennett of the Sacred Heart, WWTN LS061, a Sepulchrine nun who was 'greatly revered for her mysticism', did much to promote the devotion in the late eighteenth century including the installation of a dedicated altar and statues at Liège. I am grateful to Cormac Begadon for this information.

⁷⁰ See Juliana Dresvina, 'What Julian Saw: The Embodied Showings and the Items for Private Devotion', *Religions*, 10, (2019) and *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁷¹ According to Dolan this was the first altar to be so dedicated, *St Gertrude the Great*, p. xxvii.

⁷² MIM 727.

have a particular devotion'.⁷³ A picture of the Sacred Heart from the cell of a nun at Paris was sealed up by her gaolers in 1793.⁷⁴ The Ghent Annals recount:

In the year 1769 we find the first trace of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in our monastery. Pope Clement XIII, in a rescript dated January the 29th, granted an indulgence of one hundred days for the veneration of a statue of the Sacred Heart there. The feast was not kept very generally at the time and it was not observed by our sisters until after their arrival in England.⁷⁵

A footnote adds 'Bishop Walsh⁷⁶ first obtained permission for the feast to be kept by our convent at Caverswall Castle [...] in the year 1833 at the request of Lady Teresa Shuttleworth'.⁷⁷

The devotion did not revive more generally in England until the 1840s, according to Heimann, but it is significant that the imagery of divine love and mercy, represented in the human heart of Christ, spoke to the nuns in their new exile, which seemed like 'the last days'.⁷⁸ It has been described as '*Una devozione per gli ultimi tempi*' and a final effort of Love before the return of '*l'empire de Satan*'.⁷⁹ For the nuns the devotion was a means of direct intercession between God and man. This is expressed in a conference of 1829, given by abbess Christina Chare to the nuns at Salford:

You are particularly consecrated to the Sacred Heart by the vows of your Holy Profession [...] He presents you His Sacred Heart that you may enjoy a close and

⁷³ Quoted by Geoffrey Scott, 'Abbot Maurus Corker [1636–1715] and Augustine Baker's Later Influences among the English Benedictines', in James Hogg (ed.), *Stand Up To Godwards: Essays in Mystical and Monastic Theology in Honour of the Reverend John Clark on his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Salzburg, 2002), pp. 91–101.

⁷⁴ Eaton, *The Benedictines of Colwich, 1829–1929* (London, 1929), p. 49. Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione Cristiana dell società* (Rome, 2001) makes the case that the Sacred Heart became an important symbol for Catholic opposition in the French Revolutionary period, pp. 76–89.

⁷⁵ Anon, *Annals of the Benedictines of Ghent*, p. 65. The feast was declared a holy day of obligation for the whole Church by Pope Pius IX in 1856.

⁷⁶ Thomas Walsh succeeded John Milner as vicar apostolic of the Midland area in 1826.

⁷⁷ Anon, *Annals of the Benedictines of Ghent*, p. 65.

⁷⁸ See Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, pp. 44–5 and 152–3.

⁷⁹ Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, p. 21. It is significant that at all stages, the devotion was promoted by women mystics: Julian, Gertrude, Margaret Mary Alacoque and certain Benedictine nuns.

familial union with it [...] by cultivating a true devotion to the Sacred Heart, you will find a model of every virtue.⁸⁰

Evidence that the devotion was widespread among the nuns may be seen from their bookshelves: numerous eighteenth-century copies of Jesuit Thomas Lawson's *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* were present at Caverswall, Cannington and Hammersmith.⁸¹ Also present were copies of *La devotion au Sacré Coeur* by Jean Croiset (one showing continual use from Cambrai to Salford); *Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, also an account of the origin, progress and object of devotion* (in editions from the 1790s) and the French original, *L'esprit et la pratique de la devotion au Sacré Coeur de Jesus*, 1808. John Milner was a foremost promotor of the devotion in England and given his closeness to the nuns, one may speculate whether he learned it from them. A copy of his pamphlet *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, was presented by him to the abbess at Salford in 1821.⁸² A stylised hand-written and decorated prayer card for the Sacred Heart survives from this period in the archives inscribed, 'Dear Sister Mary Teresa, Pray for your affectionate Sister Mary Frances'.⁸³ Engravings of the Sacred Heart were also kept in manuscript books: 'Frances Benedict's Book. Collected for her use anno 1755'; inscribed 'for the use of S. M. Edithe'[sic].⁸⁴ Similar images are preserved from Hammersmith.⁸⁵

Long before the beatification of Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1824, the Sacred Heart had a central place in all the Benedictine convents. The nuns were continuing their allegiance to a very old devotion rather than rediscovering a fashionable cult in mid-century England.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ SBAA, Box 455, item 25.

⁸¹ (Bruges), Blom 1620.

⁸² SBAA, Box 456.

⁸³ SBAA, Box 455, 21. 14 October 1831.

⁸⁴ This was Edith[a] Breen who professed on her deathbed in 1831.

⁸⁵ DAA, TI A3, hand-painted and dated 1826.

⁸⁶ See for example, Margaret Mary Alacoque and Paul Wenish, *The Promises of Our Lord to St Margaret Mary: A Textual, Theological and Pastoral Study* (New York, 2018).

Rosary

The recitation of the Rosary was an old Benedictine tradition which had been fostered by the monks in England in the mid-seventeenth century with the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary in London. It is, therefore, surprising that there are few mentions of the practice in the nuns' archives.⁸⁷ Possibly this is because for the monks it was: 'superseded, if not replaced, by other devotions as the century progressed'.⁸⁸ It did subsist however, among the nuns. Abbess Christina Chare at Salford was signed, at her request, into the Album of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary on 1 May 1827, by one John Woods. He wrote: 'The beads you have will answer every purpose. The chief indulgences granted to the members of the Confraternity are: [a long list follows] the members are obliged (not under sin) to recite the 15 tens every week'.⁸⁹ Presumably, she observed the obligation, although there is no reference to it in her conferences. A Rosary and smaller set of child's beads were found at Salford Hall when it was renovated in 1966 and returned to the nuns.⁹⁰ Few texts relating to the devotion appear in the nuns' lists: a single copy of 'The Rosarie of Our Lady', composed by 'a prisoner of the faith in the Tower of London under Elizabeth', dated 1600, was at Hammersmith and copies of Antony Batt's *Poor Man's Mite: A Letter of a Religious Man of the Order of St Benedict, unto a Sister of His Concerning the Rosarie* (1647), showing use, were at Cannington and Caverswall.⁹¹ As portrait photos became the vogue, nuns were depicted holding rosary beads.⁹² It clearly became a regular devotion: the 1820 Constitutions at Salford directed that

⁸⁷ The Confraternity was established at the Queen's Chapel, c. 1650, and was a rallying point for Catholic aristocracy at Court. See Anne Dillon "'To Seek out some Comforts and Companions of His Own Kind and Condition": The Benedictine Rosary Confraternity and the Chapel of Cardigan House, London', in Lowell Gallagher (ed.), *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism* (Toronto, 2017), pp. 272–308 (this paper incorrectly references the then Hammersmith nuns as Benedictines, in fact they were the Mary Ward sisters (p. 1).

⁸⁸ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, pp. 133–4.

⁸⁹ SBAA, Box 456, letter 19.

⁹⁰ SBAA, Box 455.

⁹¹ Anthony (William) Batt, MIM 197.

⁹² SBAA, Box 77. Nuns from the period, Francis de Sales Sayles, 1796–1865, Evangelista Weetman, 1806–1882, and Scholastica Gregson, 1806–1875, are all portrayed with their beads.

monthly ‘the Religious to say a pair of beads or rosary’ for the EBC.⁹³ The existence of the Confraternity, and evidence of the nuns’ continued use of the practice, supports the argument put forward by Mary Heimann that the ‘pious legend’ that the practice of the Rosary had died at the Reformation and was not restored until the nineteenth century was just that: a legend.⁹⁴

Renunciation and *Bona Mors*

Like the Sacred Heart and Rosary devotions, historiography suggests that *bona mors* spirituality (praying for a happy death) emerged in England only in the second half of the nineteenth century, but evidence from the libraries shows it was practiced by the nuns at an earlier date.⁹⁵ The nuns at Caverswall each said one thousand *paters* a month for a happy death and novenas were made each year on the Feast of the Assumption for a happy death for the next to die.⁹⁶ The concept of renunciation of self was also central to the Benedictines’ spirituality. The conferences of the most Cambrai-like abbess, Christina Chare, were full of exhortations to disengagement from all creatures and objects; to humility and mortifications for the sake of interior union with their ‘heavenly/divine lover’. The nuns are frequently reminded that they are spouses of Christ.⁹⁷ Discipline was an important part of this approach: ‘The end of a religious life is our advancement in the ways of God and our tending to perfection’. At Caverswall, John Milner ordered the abbess to hold regular chapters which should include ‘exhorting and instructing the Religious on the several obligations of the Christian and of a religious life, pointing out defects and faults [and] inflicting proper and substantial penances.’⁹⁸ A manuscript from Hammersmith entitled ‘Meditations for the Renovation Days’ reveals the affirmation the nuns needed of their vocation in an alien

⁹³ SBAA, Box 345, 1820 Constitutions.

⁹⁴ Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, p. 60.

⁹⁵ The confraternity of *Bona Mors* was founded in 1648 but only became widespread in England in the 1890s according to Heimann, *ibid.* p. 80. Bennett Zon, however, has shown a resurgence of the confraternity and publishing of *Bona Mors* books by the end of the eighteenth century, see Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, p. 62. The convent libraries contain many *Bona Mors* texts dating from this period.

⁹⁶ Buss, ‘Influences’, p. 5.

⁹⁷ SBAA, Box 455, various conferences 1825–1830.

⁹⁸ Anon, ‘Bishop Milner and the Nuns of Caverswall Castle’, *Downside Review* (1913). DAA. C.M.17.

environment. The text is an expansive exposition on the life of a nun, written by ‘M. Catherine’ in 1819 for meditation on the three days after solemn profession.⁹⁹ It begins: ‘An esteem for our state, a love for our state, a zeal for our state are the foundation and base of an interior life for a religious soul’ and continues:

An esteem for our state: how great it is in itself. How holy its duties! How exalted and sublime in the designs of God! Inspired by a particular light of God, directed by a particular spirit God, and become the nursery of an infinite number of saints [...]¹⁰⁰

Declaring the religious life to be a ‘sacred asylum of virtues’, the manuscript conveys a beleaguered existence consoled by the assurance that this is the way to achieve perfection and bring about the ‘living image of the holy Jerusalem’ in a land of exile. Identity as a bride of Christ is strong and provides an exemplar to those outside the fold: ‘ye excellency of your state renders your persons the spouses of Jesus Christ, your souls the temple of the Holy Ghost, your life a perfect image of the angels’.¹⁰¹ The manuscript frequently addresses relief for the depression and anxiety which afflicted the refugees: the chief message being that they could use their suffering for spiritual growth. Another manuscript at Cannington: ‘A Briefe Treatise shewing how spirituall persons should carry themselves & make true profit of Consolations, & desolations, and how to avoid Illusions’, demonstrates this further. It seeks to show ‘which consolations come from God, how to carry oneself while they last and when you find yourself in desolation’ and ‘how to proceed and profit in the practice of solid virtues.’¹⁰²

Devotion the Blessed Virgin Mary

The cult of devotion to Our Lady has been portrayed as increasing in popularity in England (and Ireland) only from the 1850s, as part of the Ultramontane ascendancy.¹⁰³ It has however,

⁹⁹ DAA, T IV 4 (Old Books) (134251). The author is probably Dame Catherine Smith, 1797–1841, professed in 1819.

¹⁰⁰ DAA, T IV 4 (Old Books) (134301).

¹⁰¹ DAA, T IV 4 (Old Books) (134301).

¹⁰² CAA Ms 48.

¹⁰³ See Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, pp. 58ff; ‘Catholic Revivalism in Worship and Devotion’, in Sheridan Gilley (ed.), *Cambridge History of Christianity, vol 8; World Christianities 1815–1914* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.

held a central place in English Catholicism since the Middle Ages when a medieval devotion saw Mary as a special patron of England and the country as her dowry. This is demonstrated in the nuns' practice as both English and contemplative women, Mary has always been seen as special patron and exemplar for nuns. All the communities kept the practice of dedicating Saturdays (in Mass and Office) to her honour. At Caverswall this practice was taken further: Saturday 'oblations' included the singing of Marian hymns and prayers before statues of Mary and Jesus for the recovery of Our Lady's Dowry. Each group within the monastery was assigned a specific mystery from her life: the school had the Presentation; the novitiate, the Annunciation; the infirmary, the Assumption and the whole community her Dolours. The abbess received Holy Communion each Saturday for the spiritual welfare of the community. Anticipating the sodality of Children of Mary,¹⁰⁴ all the schoolgirls received a silver ring engraved *Ave Maria*. At Hammersmith the schoolgirls were made oblates of Our Lady. The nuns continued various Marian devotions from Dunkirk, including recitation of the 'Five Psalms of Our Lady' on her feast days, through which they heard: 'the far-off echoes of long silent lips. Across the Channel, through the awful horrors of the French Revolution, amidst poverty and suffering, these notes have never died away and link us [...] more closely to our sisters who have gone before'.¹⁰⁵

A manuscript of 'Exposition for the Emblematic Pictures of the Litany of Loreto, written by the Rt Rev John Milner at Caverswall Castle *anno Domini* 1812', shows good use and was considered so instructive that it was copied out in four notebooks for the novitiate with illustrations added.¹⁰⁶ An engraving has been inserted in another old book of '*Fili Redemptor*

70–83 and Emmett Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–74', *American Historical Review*, 77 (1972), pp. 625–52.

¹⁰⁴ Not widely established in England until the 1870s, see Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, pp. 128–9. See also Buss, 'Influences', pp. 4–5.

¹⁰⁵ Anon, *History*, pp.100. The nuns traced the practice back to twelfth century England.

¹⁰⁶ DAA, BO IV D Box 1 (114637–114831). Milner, the Ultramontanist, promoted the litany while Lingard, more Cisalpinist-inclined, critiqued it. For a treatment of the Loreto controversy see Peter Phillips, *John Lingard, Priest and Historian* (Leominster, 2008), pp. 314–18.

Mundi Deus’ depicting a triad of Father, Son and Mary. This striking imagery for the exiled nuns depicts God grasping a thunderbolt to smite the world while Our Lady entreats him in the words of Esther; ‘One thing I beg of you, give me my people’.¹⁰⁷ Devotion to Mary was shared by Milner whose many interventions to the community reflect this, for example: *The Imitation of the Blessed Virgin: Composed on the plan of the Imitation of Christ*, 1816, ‘Given to Dame Etheldreda with leave. The gift of Dr Milner. Pray for him’.¹⁰⁸ Although the Assumption of Mary was not declared a dogma until 1950, the feast was a central point in the liturgical year for all the communities, as evidenced in their Calendars and Ordos.¹⁰⁹ An abbatial conference of 1811 at Caverswall, gives a deeply theological exposition as well as a personal one.¹¹⁰ The nuns are reminded: ‘we have a double title to her protection above Christians in general, in being elected spouses of her Blessed Son by our Religious Vows and with this comes a much greater obligation to imitate her virtues’. Dying to worldly values was crucial and the motif of a happy death strongly emphasised. The address ends with a militant call to pray for: ‘Our Holy Mother; the Church, the liberation of our Holy Father the Pope, the extirpation of Heresy and Schism’. On a more irenic note, she also urges prayer for: ‘peace and union among Christians, the happy repentance of all in mortal sin, the delivery of the poor souls in Purgatory, the Spiritual and Temporal needs of our own community and an increase of good members’.

Perpetual Adoration

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in the form of Benediction and Perpetual Adoration developed in nineteenth-century England with ‘visits’ to the Blessed Sacrament and the *Quarant’ore* (forty hours continuous prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament) growing in vogue from the mid-century.¹¹¹ There is no record of the practice in the early modern

¹⁰⁷ DAA, BO IV D Box 1 (115038).

¹⁰⁸ DAA, BO IV D Box 2 (153012).

¹⁰⁹ Ordos are produced annually giving the liturgical dates for that year.

¹¹⁰ DAA, BO IV D Box 2 (150232). Given by Lady Aloysia Jefferson.

¹¹¹ Heimann, *Catholic Devotion*, pp. 42ff. This may be seen as the parish equivalent of the nuns’ Perpetual Adoration, although its practice remained low throughout the nineteenth century.

convents and this is confirmed by Jesuit John Thorpe who had to explain Perpetual Adoration to the English Carmelites at Lierre in 1779.¹¹² The Paris Benedictines seem to have been the first to express an interest in this un-Benedictine devotion developed from their Eucharistic devotion.¹¹³ At a time when frequent communion was unusual (because there was perception that it would become mere habit, lead to vanity or, under Jansenist influence, through a sense of irredeemable unworthiness)¹¹⁴ the Paris nuns had acquired an exemption allowing them frequent, possibly daily, communion. They were probably influenced by their connection with the Port Royal nuns¹¹⁵ who associated to the Institute of the Perpetual Adoration in 1647 and by Catherine de Bar (Mother Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament) who founded the first order of Benedictine Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris in 1654. The Paris Benedictines may have had direct contact with de Bar's community and their reading shows they were inspired by them. A copy of *Vie de la vénérable Mère Catherine de Bar, dite en religion Mechtilde du Saint-Sacrement, institutrice des religieuses de l'Adoration Perpétuelle*¹¹⁶, was in their book collection along with an 1803 edition of Bar's own work *Le véritable esprit des religieuses adoratrices perpétuelles* and *Exercices de piété à l'adoration perpétuelle de S Sacrement*.¹¹⁷ The desire for Perpetual Adoration originated with Prioress Clare Bond in the 1780s, although permission was not granted for its celebration during her lifetime. In 1808, the annals recorded, 'Madame the Princess de Condé, formally of the

¹¹² James E. Kelly, 'Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity: The Letters of John Thorpe to the English Carmelite Nuns at Lierre, 1769–89', in James E. Kelly and Hannah Thomas (eds.), *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c. 1580–1789: 'The World is our House?'* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 337–60.

¹¹³ Benedict Rowell has pointed out that Perpetual Adoration was in direct conflict with one of Augustine Baker's 'very few absolute rules, namely, not to attempt to pray on a full stomach' (or in the afternoon generally). See, Rowell, 'Baker's Continuing Influence on Benedictine Nuns', in M. Woodward (ed.), *That Mysterious Man: Essays on Augustine Baker OSB 1575–1641* (Abergavenny, 2001), pp. 82–91, p. 89. The Hammersmith nuns were told 'not to listen to those who try to persuade you that yours [Perpetual Adoration] is not a Benedictine work', see: Anon, 'A Jubilee of Eucharistic Adoration' in *The Buckfast Abbey Chronicle*, 1950. DAA T I 4 (112203).

¹¹⁴ See Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 129.

¹¹⁵ See above, p. 161.

¹¹⁶ By A-B d'Icard Dunquesne, 1775, wc.

¹¹⁷ L Vaubert, 1751.

Perpetual Adoration, proposed to establish the institute in our convent. Our Worthy Bishop Dr Collingridge entered into the project, but, the Peace of Amiens soon following, the Princess returned to France'.¹¹⁸ Collingridge believed the community too fragile and small to authorise the commitment, although he was a firm believer in the practice and tried to establish it in other settings under his jurisdiction.¹¹⁹ The nuns conducted a long campaign before achieving their desire, by the help of a miracle. Witnessed by Collingridge, 'a very learned Prelate of a strong mind and particularly incredulous with regard to believing supernatural occurrences', the miracle concerned the cure of Sr Aloysia Joseph Halloran who was 'especially devoted to the Adoration of the Sacrament of the Altar'.¹²⁰ She had recurring bouts of illness which by January 1829, became so severe that she was not expected to live. During her illness many novenas were made for her recovery, but to no avail. Expecting to die at any moment, and completely bedridden at this stage, she made a novena for her recovery in the days leading to the feast of the divine name of Jesus, vowing that should she recover her health she would 'spend as much time as I could, day and night, before the Blessed Sacrament until the devotion was established'. Her account is quoted at some length as it exemplifies many aspects of piety and devotion expressed at the time.

I took up the *Following of Christ*¹²¹ which was on a shelf at the side of the bed, from which Book I had often received both light and comfort: when opening the 12th Chapter of the 3rd Book accidentally the first words that caught my attention were these: 'Delight in our Lord and he will grant the petitions of thy heart' [and] 'I will come this afternoon and say the Litany of the Holy Name to you'.

On the morning of 13th, the third day of the novena, I woke about one o'clock and [...] was all at once forcibly struck with the conviction that I should be cured. It seemed as if someone said to me in a very short, quick manner, '110 Psalm'. I was at a loss to

¹¹⁸ CAA, manuscript, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation', chapter the 16th, p. 217ff (160331ff). No further information is available about the Princess.

¹¹⁹ Ibid p. 219 (160342).

¹²⁰ CAA, 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation' p. 220 (160351). Aloysia Joseph Halloran, professed 1821, died 1857.

¹²¹ An alternative title for *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. There were six copies at Cannington.

know what it could mean but having the Psalter by me on a little shelf and having always a light, I read it. I had scarcely shut the book when I received again the same indescribable suggestion to read the 84th Psalm but I was so astonished as what all this reading could mean that I strongly resisted it, fearing some delusion.¹²²

After being prompted to read another psalm, she felt at peace and even more convinced she would be cured. Immediately after receiving communion in her bed: ‘I felt such a strength and feeling of power within me [...] as soon as I was alone, I knelt up and found no pain doing so, indeed I felt perfectly well.’ After being unable to get out of bed for many months, she got up, dressed, took up a lamp walked out of the Infirmary. She continued:

I had taken the precaution to pull down our veil, for fear of frightening anyone if I met them. I was never more composed in my life and perfectly vigorous, I went quickly down the dormitory to a large staircase which I descended with great ease and swiftness [...] and opening the choir door went in and knelt down very quietly.

There is a note of almost gothic romance as she describes how the prioress came up to see who was kneeling there and lifted her veil to the surprise and joy of all the sisters. There and then Mass and *Te Deum* were offered in thanksgiving and Sr Aloysia remained kneeling throughout. She then went and presented herself to Dr Collingridge and told him:

‘I had asked for my health that I might spend as much time as I could in Adoration and that God had granted my request. He then cried out “*Te Deum Laudemus*” and immediately decreed that Perpetual Adoration should begin to be celebrated by the community from the second of February’.

Sr Aloysia was examined by the doctor who declared her recovery to be, ‘only a light up before Death’ however, ‘from that time I was for 5 years in the exact observance of all my duties’ and she went on to live for nearly another thirty years. The Chronicler concludes:

Her appearance at the time of her cure was like a living carcase [sic]. She had been entirely confined to her bed for many months [...] His Lordship was so struck at her miraculous recovery that he intended to have a well authenticated copy of the

¹²² CAA, ‘A Short History of the House from its Foundation’, p. 218–229 (160338 ff.).

extraordinary manifestation of Divine Providence, but his death prevented the execution of this design.¹²³

This account provides an insight into the spirituality of the community; the custom of saying novenas and litanies; the practice of interactive *lectio divina*; the in-depth reading and praying over a text; the reliance on regular communion and the simple faith which could empower healing. The community believed that it was entirely due to this miraculous intervention that they achieved their desire for instituting Perpetual Adoration. They led the way in its promotion in England and, as a result, attracted new members. In Dame Benedict Rowell's view the community's, 'spiritual focus had altered somewhat because of the practice' and, while it was responsible for the growth in vocations, it was not necessarily furthering the Benedictine charism: 'All were called to Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament but it is unlikely that all were contemplatives'.¹²⁴ Nevertheless the practice probably saved the house: numbers rose from nine in 1818 to twenty-five in 1836.¹²⁵ The Council Book records that many entrants were 'particularly attracted to this community by the Perpetual Adoration', and some transferred from other establishments because of it. One was Mary Ann French, educated by the Benedictines at Oval Mount¹²⁶ but with a 'strong desire to devote herself to the Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament', who arrived in 1833. Another was Miss Maria Fagan who had entered the Presentation sisters: 'but God had given her a decided preference [...] for the Perpetual Adoration'.¹²⁷ The practice was so popular that the community rose to over fifty in 1859 and led to the foundation of a second house at Atherstone. The devotion was undertaken with the declared object of the conversion of England through the prayer: 'Jesus convert England: Jesus have mercy on this country'. It was this intercession to which

¹²³ Ibid 228–229.

¹²⁴ Benedict Rowell, 'Absent Brethren: The Monastery of Our Lady of Good Hope and the English Benedictine Congregation', English Benedictine History Symposium, 2000.

¹²⁵ Figures supplied by Dame Benedict Rowell, archivist at Colwich Abbey.

¹²⁶ The French community later at Princethorpe.

¹²⁷ CAA, Council Book (162904, 162321, 162442).

Collingridge's successor, Peter (Augustine) Baines, objected which resulted in their temporary abandonment of the practice. Baines believed the intention to be futile, offensive and antagonistic to the Protestant English with whom he saw a need to build bridges. This drew the nuns into the feud which was raging between Baines and the 'conversionists' about public prayer and the relationship between Catholics and the wider Protestant community. The nuns' clash with Baines led to their making direct appeal to Gregory XVI in Rome and move to Colwich.¹²⁸

Perpetual Adoration was also popular at Hammersmith. In 1846 the nuns, after some lobbying, obtained permission for a day of Adoration and at that time entered into an Adoration association with the Cannington community.¹²⁹ In 1875 the annalist noted: 'a growing desire in the community to give up teaching and take up the work of Perpetual Adoration', which led to an appeal to Pius IX who responded: 'They must begin at once and rely on Providence'.¹³⁰ From that moment the nuns saw Perpetual Adoration as their main job: they had undertaken 'education only as a necessity and welcomed the arrival of the apostolic sisterhoods to whom they gladly handed over this service in order to devote themselves to the entrancing and sublime duty of keeping court with the King of Kings and pleading for a world where He is forgotten and neglected'.¹³¹ Where these young women developed the desire for the observance is uncertain given that the *Quarant'ore* practice of adoration hardly existed in English parishes throughout the nineteenth century. Possibly they had exposure through their education and reading to the French and Italian devotions.¹³²

¹²⁸ Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, pp. 118–90. See also Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 79 and Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, pp. 388–90.

¹²⁹ Murray-Sinclair, 'Hammersmith: A Bridge', p. 3.

¹³⁰ DAA T I 4, Anon, 'A Jubilee of Eucharistic Adoration' (112203). See also Anon, *History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk*, pp. 182–6.

¹³¹ *History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk*, p. 130.

¹³² Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, p. 44.

It is difficult to know precisely why the observance, far removed from the time-honoured contemplative tradition, became so attractive to these communities. It may have been a reaction to the Enlightenment and secularism of the previous century or perhaps their experiences of suffering and exile impelled a desire to pray for the world in more constructive way: a demonstrable work at a time when there was pressure on contemplatives to be seen ‘to do’ something. The Industrial Revolution and growth in Utilitarianism resulted in a more practical culture which measured activity and outputs.¹³³ The Cannington community’s specific intention of praying for the conversion of England through their Perpetual Adoration continued the missionary aspect of their work from the Continent. Perhaps the visible sign of the ever-present Lord in the Sacrament provided comfort and sustenance in exile. Another interpretation can be found in recent research which links *réparatrices*, as they came to be known, with active penitence and atonement for the excesses of the Revolution.¹³⁴ Yet again, the English nuns appear to have anticipated the rise of this movement by a decade or so.

The practice of praying for the Conversion of England was far from abandoned after the migration and was frequently the subject of special devotions as a letter from Lady Clifford to Abbess Juliana Forster at Caverswall in 1838 shows. She wrote asking that the nuns join in praying for the Conversion of England by offering up: ‘every Thursday all your actions, prayers, Masses, communions, in reparations of honour to the adorable Sacrament in the Eucharist’ and added that the nuns at Mount Pavilion (Colwich) were also participating.¹³⁵

¹³³ See, for example, Geoffrey Scarre, ‘Utilitarianism and Evil’, in Douglas Hedley (ed.), *The History of Evil in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: 1700–1900 CE* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 118–35.

¹³⁴ See Kristien Suenens, *Humble Women, Powerful Nuns: A Female Struggle for Autonomy in a Men’s Church* (Leuven, 2020), pp. 50–3. I am grateful to Kristien for her insights into this development.

¹³⁵ DAA BO-IV-D-Box 3 (155855).

Conclusion

The experience of second exile went to the heart of the nuns' lives: their prayer, both liturgical and interior. While acknowledging shades of difference within Benedictine spiritualities, this chapter has identified common themes of devotional expression and sustenance, which suggest that differences had declined by their arrival in England. The struggle to reconcile enforced action and contemplation was central to the Benedictine experience in the second exile. They renegotiated the terms of their inner spiritual life through their devotional practices which provide a window into the nuns' articulation of their trauma, their continuing exile experience and struggle to regain equilibrium.

In devotional practices, the nuns' history of this period also provides a bridge between the 'old English' Catholic practices of the Recusants and the Ultramontane arrivals later in the nineteenth century. While the role of religious women has been identified in the dissemination of Ultramontane devotions, this has been credited to the French sisters arriving in the 1830s. In fact, as shown here, the contemplatives were practising a range of old and new observances which percolated from them to the wider catholic community.

The first forty years in England saw the communities developing a range of extra-liturgical devotional practices, some of which were largely alien to traditional Benedictinism. This was particularly noticeable in liturgy, where attempts were made to restore an elaborate, polyphonic celebration along Baroque lines. This, in turn, led to the valuing of different gifts and accomplishments within the membership. Physical restraints on the full celebration of the Hours and Mass led to greater concentration on more accessible, personal devotions. The nuns were in the vanguard with practices such as Perpetual Adoration which was an adaptation of their long-standing reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. Traditional Benedictine devotions such as the Sacred Heart and Rosary continued to sustain and nourish them, and the nuns anticipated the later popularity of these in England.

Chapter Four

Exile and Reading

A study of the nuns' libraries reveals the centrality of reading in their lives. It also reveals the impoverishment of the new exile experience, the value they placed on continuity and changes in their reading habits over the period. As Alban Hood remarks: 'In assessing the nature and development of English Benedictine spirituality in this period, several different types of evidence must be drawn upon, firstly, the books they read'.¹ The nuns' reading was a multi-dimensional phenomenon. As well as providing theological and devotional sustenance,² it connected the nuns with broader European Catholic Culture and with the devotional life of English Catholics. Moreover, it facilitated a living link with their spiritual forebears in the Benedictine tradition – not merely as recipients, but as active agents in re-shaping that tradition for a new era.

This chapter extends existing research on convent libraries in the Early Modern period to an examination of collections in England and provides insight into the religious and cultural life of the nuns in their new exile.³ As members of transnational textual communities, the nuns' engagement with their exile is examined through the medium of the books they owned and read

¹ Alban Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival: Continuity and Change in the English Benedictine Congregation 1795–1850* (Farnborough, 2014), p. 61.

² Reading as nourishment was stressed by Augustine Baker: 'good books are a necessarie food for your soules [and] farre more than [...] other temporal goodds', cited by Anselm Cramer, 'The Librarie of this Howse: Augustine Baker's Community and their Books', in James Hogg (ed.), *"Stand Up To Godwards" Essays in Mystical and Monastic Theology in Honour of the Reverend John Clark on his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Salzburg, 2002), pp.103–110.

³ The reading habits of nuns adds a new dimension to studies on women's reading and books as gendered cultural expressions. See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain: 1750–1835* (Cambridge, 2009); Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1834–1914* (Oxford, 2002); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004) especially pp. 210–34, 275–92; Jeffrey Auerbach, 'What they Read: Mid-19th Century English Women's Magazines and the Emergence of a Consumer Culture', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 30 (1997), pp. 121–40. More generally on women's use of libraries; Edward H. Jacobs, 'Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33 (1999), pp. 43–64.

and the compilations, meditations, translations and other compositions they made which flowed from their reading.⁴ It begins with an overview of the libraries in exile examining sources of the books, as well as continuity and acquisitions, and goes on to discuss factors that influenced reading, physical constraints on book storage and the effect this had on reading habits and ownership of texts. It also assesses how gifts of books by superiors or male directors were used to promote particular spiritual emphases.

The next section gives a survey of the range of books in the collections, identifying broad subject categories: liturgy; exemplary lives; Scripture; instructional and polemical manuals; constitutions and rules; devotional and spiritual literature; history (church and secular) and a miscellaneous selection of subjects including philosophy, travel and natural sciences. The contents of each category are discussed briefly for insights into the nuns' religious practices. Further breakdowns are given of works according to gender of author and language. The categories also reveal insights into the nuns' responses to the Catholic Enlightenment and subsequent developments such as millenarianism and the mystical tradition. The section continues with a comparison with monks' and other – non-Benedictine – nuns' libraries before and after the migration. Nuns' textual interaction embraced not only reading but writing, copying and translation too, and the chapter ends by analysing what these express of their exile experience. This can be perceived as much in short prayer compositions and fragmentary glosses as in the longer historical narratives considered earlier.

⁴ See in particular: Caroline Bowden, 'Building Libraries in Exile' and Jaime Goodrich, 'Common Libraries: Book Circulation in English Benedictine Convents, 1600–1700', both in Leah Knight, Micheline White, and Elizabeth Sauer (eds), *Women's Bookscapes in Early Modern Britain* (Ann Arbor, 2018), pp. 153–70; Jan Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres Provenant des Religieuses Angloises de Cambrai 1793* (Salzburg, 2013); 'Dom Augustine Baker's Reading Lists', *Downside Review*, 3 (1993), pp. 157–73 and 'The Library Catalogue of the English Benedictine Nuns of Our Lady of Good Hope in Paris', *Downside Review*, 130 (2012), pp. 54–86. For a discussion of French nuns' reading see: Sarah Barthélemy, 'Lectures de Religieuses de la Contre-Révolution: La Bibliothèque Parisienne des Filles du Coeur de Marie', in Fabrice Preyat (ed.) *Femmes des Anti-Lumières, Femmes Apologistes* (Bruxelles, 2016), pp. 23–37.

Importance of Libraries in Measuring Exile Experience

Reading and study are at the heart of the Benedictine injunction to listen: ‘Listen, O my child [...] and incline the ear of your heart’. Monasteries were (and are) textual communities.⁵ An interrogation of what the nuns read and wrote is essential to gaining understanding of their experience of spiritual exile, repatriation and resettlement: ‘God often speaks to us in time of reading as we speak to Him in prayer’.⁶ The libraries are considered not only to establish what the nuns were reading but also to illustrate how they came to terms with the second exile trauma.

Original manuscripts can provide a textual analysis of the collective spiritual state, but it should be recognised that all narratives have their own conventions: within the writings and record-keeping of the monastic houses there are common themes, structures and images which produce an important intertextuality. While the convent experiences were not identical, the writers generally used familiar forms and modes of expression which tell much about the prevailing spirituality and shared response to external forces. ‘The type of manuscripts [...] left by each convent [...] is a revealing indication of its type of spirituality and of its political positioning’.⁷ Historians and scholars of the early modern convents have revealed how much can be learnt about the spiritual, intellectual and social life of the communities from their libraries: ‘Books were essential for all aspects of the religious life: at the daily office... in private prayer and meditation [...] for the formation of novices and the spiritual development of nuns’.⁸ This approach is now extended to the modern era.

⁵ St Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, Prologue, 1.

⁶ CAA, MS 48, ‘A Briefe Treatise shewing how spirituall persons should carry themselves & make true profit of Consolations, & desolations, and how to avoid Illusions’.

⁷ Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester 2017), p. 252.

⁸ Caroline Bowden, ‘Building Libraries in Exile: the English Convents and their Book Collections in the Seventeenth Century’, *British Catholic History*, 32 (2015), pp. 343–82.

The *Rule of St Benedict* (RB) gives specific times at which the monks should devote themselves to reading.⁹ It distinguishes three types of reading: the private (*lecta sua cum omni silentio*); reading as part of the Divine office; and communal reading aloud during meals and other activities. Reading thus links the three ‘liturgical’ spaces of the monastery: cell, church and refectory. Books were at the heart of community observance: meditative, communal, liturgical, and private study; not only in the novitiate but as life-long commitment to on-going formation. The seriousness with which St Benedict took reading is set out in RB 48 where monks are appointed: ‘to make the rounds of the monastery at the hours when the brothers are devoted to reading to see that each applies himself to his reading and does not distract the others’. The Salford Constitutions required the seniors to question the juniors on what had been read in the liturgy and refectory to ensure they had been paying attention.¹⁰ A portion of the Rule was read aloud each day in the monasteries and thus each nun was continually reminded of the sacred duty of reading. These practices continued to be central to all Benedictine observance throughout the centuries.

Libraries became even more important to the nuns in their second exile, denuded as they were of so much of normal monastic infrastructure. Books were, after prayer, the most important expression of their Benedictine roots and source of sustenance in an alien environment. They provided the means for them to negotiate the relationship between their identity as Englishwomen in their native land and as Catholic nuns in a new exile. They also built new repositories for Catholic publications in England.¹¹

⁹ *The Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 48.

¹⁰ SBAA, Box 345, Constitutions, chapter 5, ‘Of the Common Diet’.

¹¹ For an introduction to book collections in pre-Emancipation England see Bennett Zon, *The English Plainchant Revival* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 59–71. The contents of his list are similar to the nuns’ libraries.

Sources of Books

The sources for this chapter are drawn from reading lists or actual books in the five communities' archives. The 'Haslemere Collection', at the Douai Abbey Archives and library, contains over 400 volumes dating from the early seventeenth century at Brussels until the mid-nineteenth century. A card catalogue of each volume, which includes details of inscriptions, was compiled by Abbot Geoffrey Scott in 1978. In addition, stray books and manuscripts are also kept amongst the archive collection at Downside Abbey and have been included in this study. The Stanbrook Abbey Archives contain three separate and seemingly mutually exclusive, sources of information: the library list drawn up for the 1820 Visitation¹² which has ninety-nine items listed, but with vagueness in many cases as to title, author or number of volumes. A second, more detailed source of information is the 'More Library' list, drawn from actual books still in existence in the present library at Stanbrook Abbey, Wass, which numbers around 1,400 volumes, sixty-five of which were in the nuns' possession between 1795 and 1838. There are also approximately seventy-five books the archive collection, with personal inscriptions or insertions, which have been separately listed. For the Ghent/Caverswall community, around 900 books, dating from 1599, are now at Douai Abbey and were catalogued there in 2013–16. The Paris/Cannington community had a collection of over 1,650 old and precious books, which are being transferred to Stanbrook Abbey. A catalogue was compiled in 2013 by Jan Rhodes. The collection consists of pre-nineteenth-century volumes, many but not all of which were brought back by the nuns from Paris and later books which were acquired after their arrival. A list of books belonging to the Dunkirk/Hammersmith community, is preserved among the Teignmouth collection, now at Douai Abbey Archives.¹³ This records both manuscripts and printed books. There is no date of compilation but it is written in a

¹² SBAA Box 456.

¹³ T VII A h5.

nineteenth-century hand and was most likely made at Teignmouth (c. 1862). There are 600 volumes listed, which date from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

During the nearly 200 years the English convents spent on the Continent, they collected many books deemed essential to the religious life.¹⁴ The rupture of the French Revolution required a re-building of these libraries. While it is impossible to identify with certainty the number of books owned by each between 1795–1838, it can be stated confidently that these collections were significantly reduced from the pre-Revolution libraries: for example, the library at Cambrai of over 4,000 titles, was replaced by approximately 1,794 in England by 1840.¹⁵ Given the disruption and displacement experienced however, a remarkable corpus of information on their books and reading has survived. The high survival-rate of collections belonging to English nuns evidences the centrality of reading to conventual life. Some communities who were able to travel to England in an orderly fashion brought a considerable part of their library with them. The Poor Clares from Aire transported seventy-nine crates in 1799 and the Augustinian Canonesses arrived from Liege with 800 boxes in 1795.¹⁶ This was not the case for the Benedictines but, despite the losses they sustained, their lists reveal that once in England, they gained access to a considerable number of books.

Over 5,000 volumes were in the five communities' possession by 1838. At least 1,247 of these were published before 1795, many showing continuity with the convent of origin. This is a surprisingly high figure, given the migration accounts with comments such as: 'they have

¹⁴ See Rhodes, 'Dom Augustine Baker's Reading Lists'. Of the five Benedictine convents, Cambrai has the most detailed surviving book list: with approximately 4,000 books, see Jan T. Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres*; a catalogue of books at Paris nuns also survives but this was compiled earlier, c. 1682, and contains only 256 items, see Jan T. Rhodes, 'The Library Catalogue of the English Benedictine Nuns of Our Lady of Good Hope in Paris', *Downside Review*, 130 (2012), pp. 54–86. The monks of St Edmund's kept various library catalogues; the first, by Dom Benet Weldon (in 1702), was built on by successive compilers, see <https://www.douaiabbey.org.uk/st-edmund>.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the growth of libraries and cataloguing conventions in the period see, Edward H. Jacobs, 'Buying into Classes', pp. 43–64. The nuns' collections provide additional hitherto unexamined material in this area.

¹⁶ Bowden, 'Building Libraries in Exile', p. 345.

stript us of all, intirely [*sic*],¹⁷ and ‘many came out with nothing but the clothes upon their backs’.¹⁸ The Brussels and Paris nuns were most fortunate: at Brussels¹⁹ they had time to pack their belongings, including books, while the Paris community, despite being imprisoned, were able to retrieve and bring many of their precious manuscripts and books with them to England.²⁰ In 1803 the Winchester nuns received more papers, books and vestments which were recovered in Brussels.²¹ The Ghent nuns had taken precautionary measures to preserve their most precious property. A typescript in the archives relates that in 1794, after the invasion of the Austrian Imperial army, the nuns sent over to England ‘part of their treasures and records’.²² Where these were stored is not known, but the substantial surviving material marked ‘Ghent/Gant’ suggests they were safely reunited.

That so many books arrived back in the nuns’ possession testifies to the stability and security libraries provided in their new exile. It is also a tribute to the generosity of benefactors. In examining the nuns’ collections, one must consider whether they were, in fact, able to bring back more property than contemporary accounts record or whether there is a degree of ‘false memory’ in the migration accounts, deriving from the traumatic shock of the whole event.²³ For example, a throw-away remark written towards the end of the century in a Stanbrook manuscript, ‘A History of the Constitutions’, explains the discovery of Cambrai documents in a ditch near Woolton due to: ‘the hasty unpacking of goods transmitted from France to

¹⁷ SBAA, Knight Letters, Dame Anne Joseph Knight to Alexander Knight, May 1795.

¹⁸ Anon, *History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk* (London, 1957), p. 121.

¹⁹ That the community from Brussels has the smallest surviving recorded collections in England does not mean they had fewer books but rather shows the paucity of surviving material. In the twentieth century the community, then at Haslemere, fell victim to James Molloy who obtained, by deceit, old books from various Catholic institutions in England and sold them in America. The nuns at Kylemore, Ireland (originally from Ypres) also came into Molloy’s clutches. See Nicolas K. Kiessling, ‘James Molloy and Sales of Recusant Books to the United States’, *Catholic Historical Review*, 102 (2016), pp. 545–80.

²⁰ From a conversation with Dame Benedict Rowell, archivist at Colwich Abbey.

²¹ DAAA, Annals 1794, pp. 95–7 (114234).

²² DAA, BO IV Box A (111349) and ‘The English Benedictines of Ghent’ by Louis Fournier (unpublished).

²³ For exploration of this phenomenon see: Helena Mendes Oliveira, Pedro B. Albuquerque and Magda Saraiva, ‘The Study of False Memories: Historical Reflection’, *Trends in Psychology*, 26 (2018), pp. 175–85; Joseph E. Davis, ‘Victim Narratives and Victim Selves: False Memory Syndrome and the Power of Accounts’, *Social Problems*, 52 (2005), pp. 529–48, Christina Howard and Keith Tuffin, ‘Repression in Retrospect: Constructing History in the Memory Debate’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 15 (2002), pp. 75–93.

Liverpool'.²⁴ Unable to bring many books with them, the communities did seek to retrieve more after arrival in England. The Dunkirk experience reveals that during the nuns' time in prison in 1794, in Gravelines, a fire consumed much of the old monastery building (and, presumably, contents). After release, two of the community returned to Dunkirk to search for property. Dame Placida Messenger reported that 'she found nothing of any importance'.²⁵ Yet the evidence of their surviving book lists reveals that out of a total 406 books published before 1795 – for which publication dates are given – forty-seven had been in their possession at Dunkirk. Four are identified as coming from the Poor Clares at Gravelines, one from Brussels and one from Paris.²⁶ One clue to their survival is found in the manuscript records at Hammersmith which reveal that, from as early as spring 1795, the nuns were petitioning for the recovery of property and, through two English agents in the town, were retrieving 'office books', 'ye chapter book' and 'ye little debt book'.²⁷ It is possible that significantly more of their library was restored in this way. While no direct evidence exists concerning the books from Dunkirk, the Hammersmith nuns' library list refers to a section called the 'Dunkirk Cupboard', suggesting that the books and manuscripts kept there were recovered from the Dunkirk convent.²⁸ One theory is that the bookseller, Peter Coghlan, instrumental in the repatriation and resettlement of many English communities, may have had the means to track down and return some of the books.²⁹ Chaplains, monks and exiled clergy were conduits for return and some book inscriptions support this. Networks of benefactors and agents were also active on the nuns' behalf in the re-acquisition of property.³⁰

²⁴ SBAA, Box 345. This raises the question whether property was later recovered from Cambrai and shipped to England. There is no other reference to such an occurrence.

²⁵ DAA, BO IV Box A. Anon, *Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent* (Oulton, 1894), pp. 123–4.

²⁶ DAA, T VII A h5.

²⁷ DAA, TI IV 1. Ms, 'History of Hammersmith', p. 21–4 (193027).

²⁸ DAA, T VII A h5 (143325).

²⁹ His published letters reveal certain hints to this effect. See Francis Blom, Jos Blom, Frans Korsten and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *The Correspondence of James Peter Coghlan (1731–1800)* (Woodbridge, 2007).

³⁰ CAA, MS 48, a note on the verso of the front cover: 'Mo. Mary Justina thinks this Manuscript was not brought by our Mothers from Paris, but that it has since come to the community through the Clifford family'. Another example is the manuscript completed in 1649, 'Gemitus Pecatorum'[sic] by Dame Barbara Constable, WWTH

All the communities continued to hope to recover their cherished library collections. In November 1815 abbess Augustina Shepherd³¹ at Salford wrote to Benedictine agent in Paris, Henry Parker:³²

Though I fear there is little hope of recovering our property [...] I confidently rely on you Sir, when there is any prospect of any petitions being prosecuted. In our Memorial of losses no mention was made of many valuable Books which would certainly be of infinite use if they were not destroyed. I should feel quite indebted to you. Sir, would you make some inquiry on this subject, by means of some person at Cambray, we were told that books belonging to Cambray were at the Abey [sic] of St Aubear³³ how far this is true I cannot say, but if they are not destroyed, by proper application might possibly be recovered, perhaps you are acquainted with someone who would make this enquiry. Pardon me, sir, [for] this liberty I am taking.³⁴

There is little evidence to suggest a successful outcome of this appeal: only twenty-three books show definite Cambrai provenance. Subsequent recovery of lost books was however, a pattern for other communities. In 1802 the Caverswall annals record that ex-Jesuit, Thomas Barrow, residing in Liege, ‘took the Ghent affairs to heart’ and was able to trace some of the community’s property and presumably, return some of their books.³⁵ The Ghent/Oulton library list includes a number of books of pre-Revolutionary origin which are inscribed: ‘Library Caverswall Castle, 1819’, suggesting a re-acquisition of property at this time. This may have been the result of the efforts of Christian Shülte [or Shütte] a Catholic pastor at Glandorf in

CB043, of Cambrai. It was alienated from the community at some time in the eighteenth century (before the Revolution) and subsequently purchased from a bookseller in New Bond Street, London in 1784. There is no information as to how or when the manuscript returned to the community although it must have been by the mid-nineteenth century. Various annotations show the reverence with which it was regarded by the nuns.

³¹ WWTN CB170.

³² MIM 139.

³³ Possibly St Gery, in Cambrai. It was founded in the sixth century and became Saint-Aubert abbey church in c.1200 when it was taken over by Augustinian canons. Archives du Nord [ADN] Lille, 36 H 1–1848, Abbate [sic] Saint-Aubert de Cambrai. Christina Hooke, abbess at Cambrai, mentions the abbey in a letter to EBC President Augustine Walker dated 5 October 1789, and asks permission for a ‘M. Le Febvre of St Aubert’ to visit the nuns at Cambrai (ADN, Lille: 18 H 39). The abbey was used as a granary at the Revolution and later as a cultural centre.

³⁴ DAA, Parker Letters, Letter 178 (102725).

³⁵ DAA, Annals, p.93–4. Thomas Barrow SJ, 1747–1813.

Germany. He appears to have been acting as agent for the Caverswall nuns and wrote to the abbess, Teresa Shuttleworth,³⁶ outlining expenses he incurred regarding ‘the Books of the Community’.³⁷ Shülte was obliged to ‘travel a long way with the Coach to get the Books’ and to remain for some time at Ostende where he rented ‘a large room to make a Catalogue of the Books’ and ‘hire of a man to help in the writing’. In addition, five men were hired ‘to get the boxes of books to the Custom House and onto a vessel’.³⁸ Presumably these came to the community at Caverswall. Shülte’s catalogue has not survived but the large number of Ghent books at Caverswall are testimony to his intervention.

The monks’ libraries suffered a similar fate to those of the nuns. St Laurence’s, Dieulourd, lost some 3,000 books at the Revolution and the contents of St Gregory’s library – around 80,000 volumes – was dispersed by 1793. Both communities had to re-build their collections from scratch.³⁹ Money was scarce and the monks also depended on benefactors. Francis de Sales and Bossuet, Peter Gandolphy, Charles Dodd’s *Church History* and the Bollandists *Acta Sanctorum* feature in their re-acquisitions and show some shared reading interests with the nuns.⁴⁰

³⁶ Teresa Shuttleworth, 1789–1837.

³⁷ DAA, BO IV D Box 2 (153555 ff.). Letter dated 23 July 1822. The letter also reveals that the community were able to retrieve other items from Ghent, including a marble altar piece which they donated to the church of St Michael’s, Ghent. The nuns also supported the small Catholic community in Glandorf with their prayers and gifts.

³⁸ DAA, BO IV D Box 2 (153555 ff.).

³⁹ Cramer, ‘The Librarie of this Howse’ Augustine Baker’s Community and their Books’ and Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 151–52.

⁴⁰ Weldon’s Catalogue of St Edmund’s Priory, www.douaiabbey.org.uk/st-edmund/.

Number of Books and Manuscripts in Benedictine Nuns' Library Collections 1795–1838

Community	Approx. total in England by 1838	Approx. number published before 1795⁴¹	Approx. number published between 1795–1838	Books in possession of the convent on the Continent & in England*
Brussels / Winchester	410	129	55	5 (1)
Cambrai/Salford	1,794	52	46	23 (23)
Ghent/Caverswall	864	194	153	24 (18)
Paris/Colwich	1,698	547	433	34 (13)
Dunkirk/Hammersmith	536	325	140	26 (12)
Total	5,302	1,247	827	112 (67)

*The numbers in brackets refer to books which show continuity of ownership with names and inscriptions of nuns' pre and post 1795, the others have the abbey library mark. No publication date is given for a considerable number of books in the collections; these have not been included in this analysis.

These figures are drawn from actual books and titles given in the archive collections. Two important caveats must be noted. Firstly, it is impossible to say with certainty when some of the books published before 1795 entered the communities' libraries.⁴² Thus, the figures in column two may include books published prior to 1795 but acquired after 1838. Secondly, what was on the library shelf does not necessarily reveal what was being read. Other indicators, such as the existence of multiple copies of a particular volume, repair and wear-and-tear, inscriptions which show continuity of ownership, copies made or referred to in other documents (such as abbatial conferences), are used to inform these points. Perhaps most instructive regarding the nuns reading, and the value they placed on continuity, are the figures in columns four and five. The effort which all the communities took to rebuild their collections evidences the significance books had for the maintenance of their life in England.

Acquisitions

Some 827 books published between 1795 and 1838 were acquired after arrival in England and before 1838. Most of these were unlikely to have been purchased by the nuns, as their poverty remained considerable throughout the period and account books yield very little information

⁴¹ Not all these have provenance of the Continental convent, although most of the Cambrai ones do.

⁴² See Goodrich, 'Common Libraries', p. 179.

about expenditure on books.⁴³ Occasional entries give a glimpse of purchases: ‘for breviaries’ at Salford in 1838⁴⁴ and ‘letters, books and paper – £2.10.6’ in 1802 at Preston.⁴⁵ The little information in the account books on book purchases reflects Bowden’s experience in seventeenth-century convents that: ‘only fragmentary evidence about the acquisition process [...] exists’.⁴⁶ While Michael Schaich found that German monks were constantly renewing their book collections: ‘in 1800 the number of books published during the eighteenth century surpassed the holdings of older titles in most monastic libraries, underling again how up-to-date they were’, this was not an option for the nuns either before or after their second exile.⁴⁷ The majority of acquisitions were donations. Gifts of an English Martyrology and ‘2 Books of Sermons [of or from] the Rev Mr McDonald, Liverpool’ are listed in the benefactors’ book at Woolton.⁴⁸ The book collection of the nuns at Marnhull was considerably increased by the arrival of French émigré priest, Abbé Prémord, as their chaplain in 1800. He brought with him ‘a fairly large library, packed in wooden cases’.⁴⁹

Continuity of Ownership

Preserving connectivity with the past is evident in the remarkable chains of ownership recorded in books dating from the Continental period despite the rupture of 1789–95. Out of 112 books in the collections which were previously in the Benedictines’ possession on the Continent, sixty-seven show continuous ownership spanning the migration. A 1789 edition of Richard

⁴³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London, 2000), pp. 42–3 discusses the high cost of books in the eighteenth century and shows that the price of a novel, the cheapest published work, would feed a family for a week: *Tom Jones* in six duodecimo volumes cost more than the average labourer’s weekly wage.

⁴⁴ SBAA, Box 457.

⁴⁵ DAA, BO IV C Preston (165745).

⁴⁶ Bowden, ‘Building Libraries in Exile’ p. 354–5.

⁴⁷ Michael Schaich, ‘Libraries in Southern German Monasteries during the Baroque and Enlightenment Periods’ (unpublished paper given at ‘Libraries, Learning and Religious Identities: Britain, Ireland and the European Context, c.1100–c.1900’ conference, Durham University, 12 September 2019). Schaich also found that German monks built considerable private libraries. This was not the case for the nuns although the Benedictine monks living on the mission did so, see for example, the inventory drawn up after the death of Henry Parker, OSB at Paris, 1817; DAA, BE/VI/A/I/3/3, document number 46.

⁴⁸ SBAA, ‘Dame Anne Teresa Partington’s Little Book’. These were given in 1796.

⁴⁹ Robert Eaton, *The Benedictines of Colwich 1829–1929, England’s First House of Perpetual Adoration* (London, 1929), p.72.

Challoner's *A Manual of devout prayers and other Christian devotions* bears the mark of the abbess at Cambrai followed by *ad usum* names: Sr Mary Magdalene Kimberly, Scholastica Caton and Dame Placida le Clerc.⁵⁰ Similarly, Cuthbert Fursdon's⁵¹ translation of the *Second Booke of the Dialogue of S Gregorie the Greate* (1638) by Antony Batt OSB⁵² bears the inscriptions: 'This book belongs to our Bld Lady of Comfort in Cambray; for the use of Str Anne of y^e most holy sacrament. For the use of Sister Mary Scholastica Cayton [sic]; for the use of Str Mary Christina; for the use Str M. Francis 1830'.⁵³ At Brussels-Winchester, similar narratives are found: a Latin psalter shows continuity from 1612 (Margaret Curson) to nineteenth-century England (Mary Ann Rayment).⁵⁴ Being part of this genealogy provided a vital link with their past for the exiled nuns. Family connections were important too – another Fursdon which survived from Cambrai records *ad usum*: 'Sister Margaret Swinburne: This was given me by my Br Henery [sic] who Departed this Life on Trinity Sunday the 15 of June Resquiescat in Pace, 1690'.⁵⁵

These books were significant: the giving of a book from the old home inspired a sense of reverence and historical connectivity for the English-based sister. Rules were particularly treasured: a 'Rule of St Benedict' published in 1700, in the Stanbrook collection, is inscribed: 'Belonging to the Blessed Lady of Consolation at Cambray. For the use of Sister Mary Martha. Professed 1833 at Salford'. It also notes 'D. Mary Joseph Spencer. Professed 1815'.⁵⁶ Similarly

⁵⁰ SBAA, Box 29. Knight, WWTN CB111; Kimberley, CB110; Caton, CB031, and Dame Placida le Clerc, 1801–1843.

⁵¹ MIM 453.

⁵² MIM 197. He was responsible for seeing the book through to publication after the death of Fursdon. He was also the author of *A Poor Man's Mite: A Letter of a Religious Man of the Order of St Benedict, unto a Sister of His, Concerning the Rosarie*, 1674, copies of which were at Caverswall and Colwich.

⁵³ Clementina (Anne) Cary, professed at Cambrai and went, in 1651, as a foundress of the Paris daughter house, WWTN CB027. The book must have remained at Cambrai as Sr Scholastica Caton, was a lay-sister there, CB031. Sr Mary Christina is Christina Chare, 1788–1830; Sr Francis is Francis Sayles, 1796–1865.

⁵⁴ Curs(d)on, WWTN BB052; Martha Dallyson (lay-sister), BB054; Mary Bell, BB011; Mary Catherine Eccles, BB068; Mary Ann Rayment, BB147.

⁵⁵ WWTN CB183.

⁵⁶ SBAA, Box 4. A hand-written loose note identifies these as being lay-sister, Martha Mary Chew, 1810–1878, and Dame Joseph Spencer, 1801–1876.

at Hammersmith a French *Règle du B Père de S Benôit* passed down through various names from 1729 to Mary Benedict Sheldon who, presumably, brought it with her to England.⁵⁷ Continuity can be seen in the other communities. At Hammersmith, for example, clear chains of ownership, with narratives, appear in twelve volumes. A copy of the Statutes for the Brussels Convent is inscribed ‘Ann Augustine Meynell’ followed by a narrative; ‘I came here Oct 1793; Gravelings [sic] Sept 15th 1794 Teresa O’ Kane [illegible] 1800’.⁵⁸ A 1608 edition of the *Dialogues* of St Gregory begins with an inscription ‘Belonging to the English Benedictine Dames at Dunquerque [sic] *Ad usum* 1764 Sr Mary Martha’ and continues with a long list of names at Hammersmith.⁵⁹ Thus, the libraries in the new exile affirm Goodrich’s statement that ‘[monastic] book circulation participated in the construction of a communal identity that spanned centuries.’⁶⁰

Telling the story of individual sisters was an important part of remembering: inscriptions reveal the materiality of books to be as much part of the nuns’ legacy construction as the actual content of the text. A copy of *Elevations De L’Ame A Dieu, Ou Prieres Tirées de la Sainte Ecriture*, 1755, by Denis-Xavier Clement, features inscriptions (in several hands) including: ‘*Prier pour moi*, the gift of Dame Ann Joseph 1798’ and ‘Mary Ann Chare’ with a dried leaf pressed between the pages.⁶¹ Perhaps families and confreres were recalled more intimately through the handling of books than through official necrologies. Books were frequently used to keep memories of deceased community and family members: an *Imitation of Christ* at Salford, showing a chain of ownership from Cambrai, prescribes: ‘a long dirge for Parents,

⁵⁷ Sheldon, WWTN DB153.

⁵⁸ DAA, T VII h5 (143342). Meynell, WWTN DB108. [O’] Kane, 1749–1799, DB120. In October 1793, the Dunkirk nuns were imprisoned with the Poor Clare nuns at Gravelines. The second date possibly refers to the date she acquired it or her profession anniversary (1774 according to the register at Hammersmith, 1775 according to WWTN). The illegible writing followed by the date 1800 may be presumed to be the year it passed on to her successor after her death in England.

⁵⁹ DAA, T VII h5 (143342).

⁶⁰ Goodrich, ‘Common Libraries’, p. 160.

⁶¹ SBAA, Rare Books, Box 1. Ann Joseph[a] Knight, WWTN CB112. Christina Chare, 1778–1830, abbess from 1822.

Brothers and Sisters of any of the Religious; a short dirge besides the long one in choir for a monk'.⁶² Particularly valuable in keeping alive the exile experience are inscriptions such as: 'Mary Francis Austin Jackson, Gravelines, Nov. 16 1794. Imprisoned during the French Revolution', in a copy of *Exercises Interieur* by Père Nepueu (1689). Francis Jackson entered as a lay-sister at Dunkirk but was never professed. She remained with the community as a servant and suffered imprisonment with them.⁶³ This book is significant because it shows memories of lay-sisters and servants were valued. Another lay-sister is memorialised in 'Devout and Instructive Reflections on the Lord's Prayer, with Penitent Sentiments'⁶⁴ which is inscribed: 'Madgline [sic] Kimberley her Book 1766: Given her by Mrs J Stonor' with a pressed flower enclosed.⁶⁵ Nourishment provided by books during hard times can be seen in a *Bona Mors or the art of dying happily in the congregation of Jesus Christ crucified and of his condoling Mother*⁶⁶ which records on the fly leaf: 'For the use of Sister Mary Agnes [Robinson], July the 2nd 1828 pray for M.M.A.', with an insert in another hand:

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may see the delight of the lord and visit his temple. Expect the Lord, do manfully and let thy heart take courage and wait etc.⁶⁷

Both women were imprisoned at Compiègne during the Revolution and the inscriptions reveal expressions of their suffering and faith in the subsequent exile.

⁶² By Thomas á Kempis, 1726, ESTC T92383.

⁶³ DAA, T VII (192855). Jackson, WWTN DB086, was clothed at Dunkirk but never professed.

⁶⁴ Translated from the French by J. S. Sharp (no ESTC).

⁶⁵ WWTN CB110.

⁶⁶ SBAA, first edition 1706, with very many re-prints. *Bona Mors* confraternities grew in the eighteenth century, see Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, p. 63.

⁶⁷ WWTN CB160.

Factors Impacting Reading

Book Spaces

A major challenge of life in the English exile was cramped living-space which impacted on the storage of books. The importance of texts is revealed in the efforts made to accommodate growing collections. It is certain that no house in this period had the luxury of a purpose-built library, which may not have differed that much from the early days on the Continent, although this changed by the later eighteenth century.⁶⁸ The community at Cambrai, for example, with their collection of nearly four thousand books, needed a substantial room in which to house them. The inventory of the Cambrai property drawn up by Abbess Lucy Blyde after settlement in England, mentioned: ‘A Good Library containing a collection of useful Books’.⁶⁹ In England, it is most likely that, the term ‘library’ referred to the collection rather than a central physical repository for all books.⁷⁰ Books were stored in various places: cupboards, corridors and odd corners and perhaps the majority – in contempt of the Benedictine prohibition on private ownership – in the nuns’ cells. Some surviving volumes reveal their location: ‘belonging to the infirmary’, ‘to be kept in the refectory’, ‘the abbess’ library’, ‘Chantress, right side’ and even, simply, ‘top shelf, left’.⁷¹ Many have an *ad usum* inscription which implies storage in the nun’s cell.

The Salford book list for the Visitation of 1820 is divided into categories which reveal something of the set-up of the monastery.⁷² The sub-divisions: ‘Library Books Salford Convent’; ‘Books of Piety’; ‘Mrs Stanford’s Books of Piety’; ‘Other Books of Mrs Stanford’;

⁶⁸ Caroline Bowden comments that there is little evidence of the creation of a separate designated space for books in convent plans from the seventeenth century, see ‘Building Libraries in Exile’, p. 350. The Paris nuns were able to build a library in the mid-seventeenth century, ‘for the better conserving the afore sayd Treasures [sic]’ Rhodes, ‘The Library Catalogue of the English Benedictine Nuns of Our Lady of Good Hope in Paris’, p. 55. The monks of St Edmund’s, Paris, built a library on the ground floor of their monastery in 1676 which continued until the French Revolution, see Catalogue of St. Edmunds, www.douaiabbey.org.uk/st-edmund.

⁶⁹ SBAA, ‘Dame Lucy Blyde’s Memorial and Statement of Claim’.

⁷⁰ This may have been the case even in better resourced monasteries at the time, according to Michael Schaich who records variations in book-storage in German monasteries, ‘Libraries in Southern German Monasteries’.

⁷¹ Books were often shelved according to format/size in this period, see Jacobs, ‘Buying into Classes’ pp. 51–2.

⁷² SBAA box 456.

and ‘The Ladies Library’, suggest that books were kept in separate places and the schoolbooks – ‘the [young] Ladies Library’ – were included as part of the convent property. ‘Mrs Stanford’s Books’ may refer to books given by her, or those left in the house by her for the nuns’ use, but remaining in her ownership. Few of the actual books have survived and little information is given in the list – not even the author in many cases.

The more detailed Hammersmith list also provides insight into location: ‘third shelf down on left’ etc.⁷³ The books preserved in the specially designated ‘Dunkirk Cupboard’ were predominantly Rules, Constitutions or Statutes, eleven of the twenty-six volumes, all of which related to the governance of the monastery. The others were spiritual treatises, prayer books and ceremonials. Many included historical references to their location: ‘Belonging to Our Lady’s Altar in ye Dormitory of the English Benedictine Dames of Dunkirk’⁷⁴ and in a 1667 Roman Martyrology, ‘Belonging to the Convict [sic] of the Benedictine Dames at Dunkirk whom I love dearly Elizabeth Strickland [...] to be read every day at dinner’, suggesting its location was the refectory.⁷⁵

Texts, especially from Scripture, were so important that a way to keep the word ever before the nuns’ eyes can be seen in the practice at Caverswall. Here a specific verse was applied to each room in the building and, presumably, displayed in a prominent place:

Refectory ‘Whether you eat, whether you drink or whatever else you do: do all to the glory of God’ I Cor 10:41. Kitchen: ‘Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary’ Luke 10:41. School: ‘Train Youth according to his way, when he is old he will not depart from it’ Proverbs 22:6. Dormitory: ‘I sleep and my heart watches’ Song of Songs 5:2. Infirmary: ‘I was sick and you visited me’ Mat 25:36. Novitiate: ‘Take up my yoke upon you and learn of me to be meek and humble

⁷³ DAA T VII A h5.

⁷⁴ In ‘True Motives of Trust and Confidence in the Blessed Virgin Mary’ (no other details given).

⁷⁵ DAA T VII A h5 (143356). There were two Strickland nuns at Dunkirk; Catherine, WWTN DB169 and her niece Henrietta, DB170. Henrietta was the daughter of Mannock Strickland, 1673–1744, the agent who acted for many of the English convents in exile including the Benedictines at Dunkirk. See Richard G. Williams (ed.), *Mannock Strickland 1683–1744 Agent to the English Convents in Flanders. Letters and Accounts from Exile* (Woodbridge, 2016).

of heart and you will find a gift for your soul' Mat 21:29. Work Room: 'We labour, working with our hands' 1 Cor 4:12.⁷⁶

Private Ownership

Many of the books must have been kept in individual nuns' cells in contravention of the *Rule* and Constitutions of all the communities:⁷⁷

All ye books must belong to y^e common librarie, and be kept under lock and have written on the name of y^e monasterie, and be common to all indifferentlie, and let none say y^s belongeth to me [...] and whosoever doth appropriate anie thing to herselfe in y^s kind let her be punished exemplarelie. Yet y^e Lady Abb. may let anie one have what she will for her use in her celle as long as she please.⁷⁸

There were to be regular inspections:

Let the Vicarius have special care that no books, written or printed (even papers of instruction or devotion) that savour not of a religious, monastical spirit, or that tend not unto it, be kept in the monasterie and therefore let the catalogue be examined at everie Visit, and at such time as the Ordinarie shall judge fit.⁷⁹

At Caverswall, in his 1811 Visitation Report, John Milner made it clear that the embargo on private ownership was: 'a matter of the utmost consequence to the spiritual good and even the salvation of persons who have vowed poverty'. He therefore urged the abbess: 'to watch with particular care [...] that no one has anything [...] belonging to herself, neither money, nor clothes, nor books, nor works, nor anything else'. But, given the circumstances in which they were living, he continued: 'The abbess, however, may permit the Religious to have the use of such books or works as she shall think useful or expedient to them'. This was allowed with the

⁷⁶ DAA, BO-IV-D-Box 1 (115930).

⁷⁷ The Council of Trent re-affirmed this: XXV, II, 'Private Ownership is absolutely Forbidden', see H.J. Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Illinois, 1978), pp. 218–9. Jaime Goodrich discusses Benedictine observance of common property and book ownership amongst nuns in 'Common Libraries', pp.156–69, as does Caroline Bowden in 'Building Libraries in Exile', p. 353.

⁷⁸ SBA, 1631 Constitutions, Chapter 4, Of Povertie, p. 32–3.

⁷⁹ SBA, 1631 Constitutions, Chapter 1, Of Pietie, p. 5.

caveat that ‘they have fulfilled the essential duty of their profession and entered into the spirit of effectual poverty’.⁸⁰ In fact, such practice was already the norm both before and after 1795.⁸¹

The Stanbrook archives contain many volumes which were present in the community in 1820 but do not appear on the Library List prepared for the Visitation for that year.⁸² This suggests that many more, held in individuals’ cells, were not included in the general property of the library.⁸³ The inscriptions in the books still in existence suggest they were particularly valued and read regularly. Titles on the 1820 list are possibly instructive simply because they *are* there on the shelf and not actually being read. Certainly, the list contains books of an academic, theological or apologetic nature as well as collected volumes, for example, ‘Works of Gother’. One may speculate whether they were there to impress the Visitor or simply because they were not being read. Books showing multiple use and continuity of ownership tend to a more devotional nature. These include works such as *An Introduction to a Devout Life* by Francis de Sales; *A Manual of Instructions & Prayers: Useful to a Christian, Devout and Instructive Reflections on the Lord’s Prayer, with Penitent Sentiments, A Dayly Exercise of the Devout Christian [...] to Live Holily and Die Happily* by T.V. Sadler, OSB; *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, and *Spiritual Exercises of the most Vertuous and Religious D Gertrude More*, together with her *Ideots Devotions*. These were titles which were treasured, handed on and prayed with. They were familiar and, possibly, less challenging works which provided the nuns with the strength and comfort needed to endure life in second exile. The flouting of an otherwise scrupulously observed precept may be evidence of the value placed on books and reading; the lack of communal book space which necessitated personal storage in cells – as an

⁸⁰ DAA, BO-IV-D-Box 1 (114129 and 114135).

⁸¹ Augustine Baker assumed the practice in a treatise, referring to ‘books that shall be [...] in the private cells’, see Cramer, ‘The Librarie of this Howse’, p. 109. See also Goodrich, ‘Common Libraries’, pp. 156–57.

⁸² There are around seventy-five books extant in the SBA collection which have inscriptions to show existence at Salford in 1820 but which do not appear on the 1820 list.

⁸³ This is also true of the Dunkirk community. The manuscript catalogue begins, ‘N.B. There are many other M.S.S books which belonged to former Nuns of our Community in the Annalist’s Cupboard’. DAA, Box T VII A h5 (142629).

over-flow library – and most importantly, the need to hold closely to the most valued items for fear of another sudden experience of rupture.⁸⁴

Reading Habits

The presence of books in the nuns' cells suggests active engagement in contemplative reading. The cramped and unenclosed conditions of their temporary homes meant that the cell was the only place for personal study and *lectio*. Inscriptions in books and manuscripts of meditations reveal how powerfully the women did this despite the disruptions of daily life. Some personal annotations show practical guidance for the spiritual life.⁸⁵ Juliana Horsman's copy of the *Rule of St Benedict* includes a study-guide for the Rule in her own hand, listing daily reading of specific chapters for specific themes:

Obedience: Monday 5–68th to 71st Chapters;

Patience & disinterestedness: Tuesday 72nd–34th–36th;

Silence & Prayer: Wednesday, 6th–19th–20th–42nd–52nd;

Humility: Thursday: The degrees of humility; [chapter 7]

Poverty: Friday: 32nd–33rd–54th;

Satisfaction for faults: Sat: 45th–46th–43rd and Sund: 49th–38th.⁸⁶

Whether this was her own private schema or that of the novitiate or whole community is not certain. The *Rule*, as the most regularly read text after the Bible, was frequently annotated with personal observations: a 1704 French version, *La Règle de S Benôit*, at Hammersmith contains long handwritten biographies and notes on *la conversion des Moeurs*.⁸⁷

Specific times for reading were designated in the more detailed *horaria* which have survived, but reading as a private practice was encouraged as well: to be taken up whenever time

⁸⁴ See Baker's instruction in Cramer, 'The Librarie of this Howse', p. 109.

⁸⁵ See Bowden, 'Building Libraries in Exile' p. 353.

⁸⁶ SBAA, John Fursdon (trans.), *Dialogues II & Rule of St Benedict* (Douay, 1638). Flyleaf: 'Str M. Juliana Horseman [sic]'.
⁸⁷ DAA, T VII A h5 (143325). The biographies are all written in French. Although the convents maintained a distinctly English culture, French was read by some nuns (there was only one French lay-sister at Dunkirk).

permitted outside the prescribed hours: 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul; and therefore the brothers should be occupied at certain times in manual labour; and at certain other hours in sacred reading' exhorted Saint Benedict.⁸⁸ Abbess Christina Chare urged her nuns in an Advent conference: 'to give as much time as you can spare to prayer and pious reading, and to be exact in spending the half hour after four in that holy exercise'.⁸⁹ Reading was also a preparation for prayer and manual labour. In another conference Chare recommended that the nuns take a period of reflection before the Divine Office: 'you ought to retire from all distractions [and] endeavour to prepare yourselves for the divine work [...] by reading a spiritual book'.⁹⁰ The 'Distribution of Time for the Ladies of Woolton from March 21st to Sept 21st', drawn up in 1795, allowed them half an hour after the midday meal for *lectio*.⁹¹

In 1826 the timetable was amended by Christina Chare in her effort to increase practices of prayer, reflection and *lectio divina*. In her conferences she encourages interiority, silence, aspirations to perfection and union with God, and a greater preparation for – and zeal in – praying the Divine Office. The Benedictine practice of *lectio* was central to Chare's campaign for a return to a more contemplative *modus vivendi* which only become possible as the pressures of the school eased and demands of manual labour declined with more, younger, entrants.⁹² At Salford, spiritual reading was programmed in the morning for the half-hour after Mass before manual labour commenced and again in the afternoon from half past two until 'a quarter before four'.⁹³

⁸⁸ *Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 48.

⁸⁹ SBA, Box 455, Conference 27, 30 November 1829.

⁹⁰ SBA, Box 455, Conference 19, given on 30 October 1828.

⁹¹ SBAA. For a wider discussion of reading in convent timetables on the Continent see Caroline Bowden, "'A Distribution of Tyme": Reading and Writing Practices in the English Convents in Exile', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 31 (2012), pp. 99–116.

⁹² See Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 61–81. What Chare did at Salford prioress Clare Knight did at Cannington at the same time; 'she resolved to bring back the old customs and traditions of the community', see Eaton, *Benedictines of Colwich*, p. 107.

⁹³ SBA, Box 455.

Male Influences

Caroline Bowden has described the influence male directors exercised over nuns' reading in the early years of their foundation.⁹⁴ By the end of the eighteenth century, the nuns appear to have had more agency in their selection of texts and evidence of the lists suggests books recommended by spiritual teacher, Augustine Baker, were less read from the 1750s.⁹⁵ The nuns within the ambit of the EBC (Cambrai and Paris) were exposed to the monks' intellectual developments. Geoffrey Scott has shown that English Benedictine monks, in the course of their priestly education, were engaging with the philosophical debates of the eighteenth century and transporting these to the England.⁹⁶ Alban Hood has recorded the theological shift of the monks from neo-Scholastic Thomism towards rationalist and Enlightenment tendencies as the century progressed.⁹⁷ By the 1800s there was danger of division: the English monks fell into two camps: progressives who continued to espouse liberal theology e.g., Cuthbert Wilks,⁹⁸ and conservatives, some of whom were originally influenced by their Continental education but subsequently reacted against it e.g., Charles Walmesley.⁹⁹ The line could be drawn between Cisalpinists and Gallicans, on the one side and supporters of the English hierarchy and Ultramontanes, on the other. Both camps are represented in the nuns' libraries and they would have been exposed to both trends through confessors, chaplains and ecclesiastical superiors.¹⁰⁰

The influence of Ultramontane John Milner at both Winchester and Caverswall, is significant but hardly surprising.¹⁰¹ In both places, he directed the nuns' reading by gifts of books and through his conferences. At Winchester, possibly to replace lost volumes, he gave: 'Teresa of

⁹⁴ See Bowden, 'Building Libraries in Exile', pp.365–70.

⁹⁵ See below, pp. 239–40.

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone: English Monks in the Age of Enlightenment* (Bath, 1992), pp. 142–4.

⁹⁷ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival* pp. 139–40, see also Scott D. Seay, 'For the Defense and Beauty of the Catholic Faith: The Rise of Neo-Scholasticism among European Catholic Intellectuals 1824–1879', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5 (2002), pp. 131–46.

⁹⁸ MIM 184.

⁹⁹ MIM ID177.

¹⁰⁰ See below, pp. 227ff.

¹⁰¹ See also, John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (London, 1975), pp. 334–7.

Avila – Her works in 2 parts’; inscribed to ‘Revd Mother Mary Ann¹⁰² given her by Bishop Milner June 13th 1803’.¹⁰³ He also gave *Oeuvres Spirituelles* by Fenelon.¹⁰⁴ For the Caverswall nuns, to whom he was ecclesiastical superior for many years, he used books as a didactic aid; a copy of Richard Hopkin’s translation of *Prayers and Meditations* by Luis de Granada contains notes on the author made by Milner.¹⁰⁵ His annotated copies of Challoner and Henri Marie Boudon were also given to the nuns along with his personal copy of the heroic poem *The Christiad*.¹⁰⁶

Milner contributed traditional Catholic Reformation texts including Francis de Sales’ own works; six volumes of Jean Pierre Camus’ *L’Esprit du B. Francois de Sales; La vie de la bienheureuse Mère de Chantal*,¹⁰⁷ as well as a vulgate New Testament (1796), and a French Life of St Augustine.¹⁰⁸ This conservative and Ultramontane vicar apostolic was sharing with the nuns a traditional transnational library.¹⁰⁹ Among his own authored books to appear in the Winchester and Caverswall collections are various copies of *An Inquiry into Certain Vulgar Opinions Concerning Catholic Tradition of Ireland* (1808); *The History and Antiquities of Winchester* (1786); *The End of Religious Controversy* (1819) and *The Meditations of St Teresa* (1790). His gifts brought remembrance: *The Imitation of the Blessed Virgin: Composed on the plan of the Imitation of Christ*, 1816, is inscribed ‘Given to Dame Etheldreda with leave. The gift of Dr Milner. Pray for him’.¹¹⁰ Milner’s *On Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (1821) was popular in all the collections, reflecting the widespread devotion among the nuns; a signed

¹⁰² Mary Ann Rayment, WWTN BB147.

¹⁰³ DAA, Haslemere Books (3028).

¹⁰⁴ October 1800.

¹⁰⁵ 1584 edition, ESTC S105964.

¹⁰⁶ By Marco Girolamo Vida, first published 1535, this edition 1771, ESTC T101572.

¹⁰⁷ DAA, by Jacques Marsollier, 1752. Inscriptions show use: ‘Abbess’s Library bookplate’. Fly leaf: ‘Lent to D. Sales by Lady Abbess, April 3rd 1831. [from] J. Milner. Abbess’s Library’.

¹⁰⁸ DAA, Claude de la Roche and Claude Rey, *La Vie de S. Augustin Eveque d’Hyppone*. Inscribed: ‘Dame M. Clare given to her by the late Bishop the Rt. Revd. Dr. Milner’.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of Milner’s views see Cadoc Leighton, ‘John Milner, History and Ultramontanism’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 63 (2010), pp. 346–74.

¹¹⁰ DAA, BO-IV-D Box 2 (153012).

copy was given to the Salford nuns – the only Milner in their collection but clearly treasured and preserved.¹¹¹

In order to ensure liturgical conformity, Milner's *Exercise for sanctifying Sundays and Holidays, and for preparing to assist at Mass profitably* [...] *For the use of the Midland District* was kept at Caverswall and marked 'Ad usum sacerdotis, Caverswall Castle, April 22, 1812'.¹¹² Milner was a most significant donor at Caverswall and to a lesser extent, at Winchester. The other communities do not seem to have a single dominant male book-benefactor at this stage, although the Salford library contains inscriptions from various EBC monks. The library at Cannington was considerably increased by the books of long-term chaplain abbé Premord and also housed twelve volumes by and from Peter (Augustine) Baines, vicar apostolic of the Western district from 1829.

A copy of *Explanation of the Sacraments* (1823) by EBC monk Benedict Glover, a liberal who encouraged fuller participation of the laity in the Mass,¹¹³ was given 'for the use of Sister Mary Gertrude, the kind gift of Revd Fr Barber, April the 18 1835'.¹¹⁴ An undated copy of *Religious Soul Elevated to Perfection by the exercises of an Interior Life* by Barthélemy Baudrand was presented to 'Sr M Agnes' at Salford as, 'the gift of dear Father Lawson. *Requiescat in pace*'.¹¹⁵ The end fly-leaf contains handwritten notes on the symbolism of the monastic habit by Sr Teresa Maurus, probably based on teaching given by Lawson.

Gifts of Superiors and Benefactors

The giving of books reflects the value placed on them and a gift from the superior may indicate a spiritual lesson. At Salford a copy of Archibald Benedict Macdonald's popular *Companion*

¹¹¹ SBAA, Box 456.

¹¹² Third edition revised and corrected. Bound with *Praeparatio ad Missam pro opportunitate sacerdotis facienda* (Antwerp, 1687).

¹¹³ Dom Benedict (Edward) Glover, 1787–1834, monk of St Laurence's. Dom Bernard (Luke) Barber, 1790–1850, monk of St Gregory's, was chaplain to the nuns from 1830–1850.

¹¹⁴ SBAA, Box 182.

¹¹⁵ MIM 521. Chaplain to the nuns at Salford, 1822–1830.

to the Altar, or Prayers for the Morning and Afternoon service, on Sundays and Holidays records: ‘Hellen Shepherds Book, Aug 6th 1796; Mary Francis Sayles April 18th 1818 given by dear Lady Abbess; for the use of Sister Mary Agnes Lacy 1825’.¹¹⁶ Macdonald was a ‘prolific writer of popular commentaries and catechisms’ who like Glover, attempted to make the liturgy more accessible.¹¹⁷ Francis Sayles was schoolmistress for many years and the gift of Macdonald to her by the abbess, indicates that he was used in liturgical teaching in the school. The passing on of the volume to lay-sister Agnes Lacy, suggests pedagogical purpose. An 1800 edition of the *Devotion of the Three Hours*¹¹⁸ at Hammersmith shows how treasured books were handed on. It is inscribed: ‘Jane Campbell, given by her dear Mistress, Mrs Turnstall, 1807. Jane Campbell gives this book to Dame Mary when she dies.’¹¹⁹

Personal gifts by benefactors to individual nuns reflect contemporary reading tastes: boarder and benefactor Lady Charlotte Bedingfeld bestowed many books on the Hammersmith community including the vaguely described ‘Retraite [...] Sanctae’ (1714), inscribed: ‘Mary Placida Selby the gift of Lady Bedingfeld 1830’. She also gave Selby a volume of letters in French that year.¹²⁰ Family connections were important: a copy of ‘*Prières de Louis de Blois*’ is inscribed: ‘Charlotte Bedingfeld 1839, bought at Bruges RIP, Mary Thaise English’ and ‘given me by Mrs Cary in memory of her mother, Lady Bedingfeld, d. 29 July 1859’. The theme of martyrdom also surfaces in her gifts: she gave a copy of Alban Butler’s *Life of Mary of the Holy Cross* to her ‘dear sister’, Emily, a convert who ‘suffered severe persecution for her faith’.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ SBAA, Box 29. Macdonald, MIM 530; Shepherd, WWTN CB171; Dame Francis (Mary) Sayles, 1796–1865; Agnes Lacy, 1806–1878, lay-sister. A second copy (1805) was ‘Presented to Lady Abbess [Augustina Shepherd] by Mr Tarleton, 1816’. Tarleton was a regular benefactor at Woolton/Salford.

¹¹⁷ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 105.

¹¹⁸ *The Devotion of the Three Hours Agony on Good Friday* by Alonso Mesia, SJ, first published in 1795, in Spanish.

¹¹⁹ DAA, T VII A h5 (143721) and T V 11 (200031). Jane Campbell was a parlour boarder who died at the convent.

¹²⁰ Gifts between the abbess and Bedingfeld were numerous. See Bedingfeld’s Journal, February 1830. Cadbury Research Library (CRL), Special Collections, University of Birmingham, ‘Jerningham Letters’, JER/1770, p. 3.

¹²¹ DAA, TV11 A h5 (143531). It may have originated from Pontoise, further notes record the history of the Benedictines there. Several books from Pontoise are in the Caverswall collection.

Themes in the Book Collections

None of the English lists follow conventional book classification methods.¹²² The Salford list with its: ‘Other Books of Mrs Stanford’ and ‘The Ladies Library’, is particularly unsystematic; probably dividing books according to situation or ownership rather than subject matter.¹²³ The Hammersmith nuns’ applied more helpful categories such as: ‘Aesthetic Reading’, ‘Retreats’, ‘Meditations’, ‘Biography’, ‘Devotions’, ‘Miscellaneous’ and ‘Spiritual Combats and autographs’.¹²⁴ For the purposes of analysis, the contents of the communities’ lists can be divided into twelve broad categories. A breakdown of the number of copies held in each convent under each category is given. This section examines the nature of the nuns’ reading within these categories.¹²⁵

	Brussels/ Winchester	Cambrai/ Salford	Ghent/ Caverswall	Paris/ Colwich	Dunkirk/ Hammersmith	Total
Liturgy	48	35	78	70	66	297
Lives	54	15	104	114	51	338
Scripture	27	10	54	49	7	147
Manuals	15	11	14	31	25	96
Polemical	7	5	8	90	2	112
Devotional/ Spiritual	44	56	73	523	216	912
Philosophy		1		24	25	50
History (church & secular)	14	5	16	37	5	77
Monastic Rules etc.	13	9	31	30	29	112
Literature	3	2	8	39	1	53
Natural & social sciences, geography, health etc.	2	9	19	26	1	57
Dictionaries		29	8	20	4	61

¹²² For a discussion of library classifications in the period see: Jacobs, ‘Buying into Classes’ pp. 52–4.

¹²³ SBAA, Box 456. Weldon divided the library of St Edmunds into twenty categories such as ‘*Libri Pii*’, ‘*Patres Latini*’, ‘*Historici Sacri*’ which is more systemised than the nuns’ collections. www.douaiabbey.org.uk/st-edmund/summary-description-and-analysis.

¹²⁴ DAA, T VII A h5.

¹²⁵ The figures reflect the numbers of copies not titles. Some communities had multiple copies of a particular title, and these are included in the figures.

Devotional and spiritual works form the largest section in all the collections.¹²⁶ Volumes of hagiography and eminent lives follow in popularity and reveal continuity with pre-Revolutionary reading. Liturgy is less numerous: the nuns' individual choir books being kept in chapel. Monastic Rules and manuals were important texts which either survived the migration or needed to be speedily reacquired. The number of secular books – geography, natural and social sciences, and literature – reflect a growing availability of, and thirst for, wider knowledge.¹²⁷ The majority of books are English but Latin and French works are also well-represented.

Devotional and Spiritual

The English nuns remained loyal to classical writers beloved of the English Catholics: especially Richard Challoner, Thomas à Kempis, John Gother and Charles Gobinet.¹²⁸ The evidence of the nuns' libraries supports Mary Heimann's contention that the nineteenth-century Catholic community continued to read old English recusant texts. Gobinet, who transmitted the Francis de Sales–Fenelon tradition and condemned Jansenism, had been popular at Cambrai (seventeen copies) and continued so in England (three copies at Salford and two at Cannington). Gobinet's reflections on the interconnectedness of study, prayer and moral living, would have spoken to the nuns as they juggled the conflicting demands of the new exile. New translations of key authors of the Catholic Reformation, such as Luis de Granada,¹²⁹ Lorenzo Scupoli¹³⁰ and Alphonsus Rodriguez,¹³¹ were also popular. Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, with its emphasis on practical living and the incessant struggle for self-

¹²⁶ This reflects Caroline Bowden's findings in the seventeenth century: 'Building Libraries in Exile', pp. 377–80. See also Cramer, 'The Librarie of this Howse', p. 108 and Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, p. 63–71.

¹²⁷ See Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres*, pp. 216–36.

¹²⁸ See Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 67–8; Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, pp. 70–99; Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, pp. 364–69,

¹²⁹ *A Sinner's Guide* (Dublin, 1790), ESTC N23304. Second copy (London, 1760), ESTC N23305 and *A Memorial of Christian Life* (Dublin, 1795), ESTC T122820.

¹³⁰ *The Spiritual Combat* (Birmingham, 1769), ESTC T118997 Second copy (Dublin, 1782), N63934 and two more (London, 1786 and 1788), T473478, T61562.

¹³¹ *A Treatise of the Virtue of Humility* (London, 1733), ESTC T193054.

sacrifice, continued to have resonance in England. Ten copies were acquired at Hammersmith, between 1795 and 1838, all of which show use: ‘With love from Lady Abbess, Pray for me. MR’; ‘This book was given by Lady Abbess Constable¹³² to Francis E Rumsey, now Mary Justina’, 1803; ‘Sr Mary Benedict – often pray for Mr B^d Weld, 1821, Mary Romana [Constable], 1833’; and ‘Accept this my dear Dame Scholastica from your affectionate friend, Francis’, 1811. Interest in these writers was shared with the monks too.¹³³ A manuscript from Cannington with advice on *lectio* – ‘Of reading spirituall Bookes’, shows the breadth of the nuns’ reading. It recommends:

Ignatius’ Exercises and St Teresa [...]: De Sales Introduction to a devout life; for Religious: Arias Life and Imitation of our Blessed Lady¹³⁴ and Fr ‘Punilla’¹³⁵, The practise of religious perfection, called in English the Mirror of Religious Perfection. For more contemplative person, Lewis de la Ponte Dux spiritualis (not yet in English).¹³⁶

It later cites patristic writers including John Cassian, St Jerome and St Gregory.

The Ignatian tradition was influential in all the English convents on the Continent, including the Benedictine houses, and Bowden identifies Nathaniel Bacon’s *A Journal of Meditations for Every Day in the Year*, as ‘possibly the single most popular title among devotional works in the convents’.¹³⁷ Even the least Ignatian influenced house, Cambrai, had no less than thirteen copies. Nevertheless there is no Bacon in their English library, further evidence that the Cambrai nuns had evolved from exercise-based meditations and a reflection of their rejection

¹³² Abbess Romana Constable, 1811–1889, and Justina (Francis) Rumsey, 1836–1916 (she was a convert and the community’s annalist).

¹³³ See Hood, *From Reparation to Revival*, pp. 66–9.

¹³⁴ By Francisco Arias, SJ, 1533–1605.

¹³⁵ Author uncertain.

¹³⁶ CAA MS 48: ‘A Briefe Treatise shewing how spirituall persons should carry themselves & make true profit of Consolations, & desolations, and how to avoid Illusions’, pp. 82–6 and 86–124. There is no date but a note remarks ‘Mo. Mary Justina thinks this Manuscript was not brought by our Mothers from Paris, but that it has since come to the community through the Clifford family’.

¹³⁷ Bowden, ‘Building Libraries in Exile’ p. 371.

of Ignatian teaching in favour of contemplative practices.¹³⁸ The other Benedictines in England did re-acquire the *Journal*, there was one copy at Winchester; two at Cannington – one showing continuity with Paris; two at Caverswall – one inscribed ‘I beg nobody will deprive me of [it]’ – and four at Hammersmith.

Older books, published before 1795, were [re]acquired after arrival in England, suggesting enduring popularity: two copies of *Devotions to St Francis Xavier* (1687) dedicated to Lady Abbess Caryll of Dunkirk¹³⁹ are recorded in the ‘Dunkirk Cupboard’. One shows continuity with Dunkirk while the other is recorded as having been returned to the community by ‘J Sweeny OSB’ in 1841.¹⁴⁰

A deepening of adherence to Continental devotional practices can be seen in the popularity of Michel-Ange Marin.¹⁴¹ *The Perfect Religious: A Work Designed for the Assistance of those who Aspire after Perfection in a Religious State and Equally Useful for all others who Desire to Advance in True Virtue and Piety*, was translated into English by an anonymous Franciscan who dedicated it to: ‘All religious ladies of different orders in the several English monasteries, who are truly desirous of acquiring the perfection of their state’.¹⁴² Multiple copies, in French and English, were at Caverswall, Cannington and Hammersmith. The very title suggests a quasi-Pelagian tendency¹⁴³ towards achieving ‘perfection’; an approach less noted amongst the Cambrai and Paris Benedictines. Caverswall had five English copies which show good and

¹³⁸ See Anon, *In a Great Tradition* (London, 1956), pp. 75–6. While the nuns continued to read Jesuit writers, these were of a less exercise-based nature, for example, Louis Bourdaloue, who was also popular among the Cisalpines and ‘witnessed to the “mystic” way in his own personal life’ see Joseph P. Chinnici OFM, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement 1780–1850* (Shepherdstown, 1980), p. 183.

¹³⁹ Jesuit missionary.

¹⁴⁰ Norbert (James) Sweeney, 1821–23, monk of St Gregory’s.

¹⁴¹ Michel-Ange Marin, 1687–1767. His popularity among the English nuns is not reflected in the French book lists, see below.

¹⁴² ESTC T123005.

¹⁴³ A simplistic understanding of the teaching of Pelagius, c. 355–420, that humans could achieve righteousness through responding to God’s grace by their own efforts.

continuous use.¹⁴⁴ One copy belonged to the ‘Noviceship’, suggesting it was required reading for novices. Marin gave advice to monastic librarians:

It is a grievous crime to bring in and spread bad books in a monastery, whether they are against faith or only capable to corrupt the purity of our manners [...] Make choice of those books which can instruct you in your duty, teach you the practice of it, and encourage you to be faithful in it.¹⁴⁵

Liturgy

The most numerous volumes in this section are Office books – not the regular choir books which would be kept in the chapel – but volumes for special occasions such as the Holy Week Office, Office for the Dead and Octave books. Missals and rituals are the next most popular categories – also representing special ceremonies rather than quotidian usage. Latin, English and French language versions appear. Few liturgy books were purchased, possibly reflecting Christina Chare’s complaint that, ‘As for Breviaries, it is quite as difficult to meet with them here, as in England they having been mostly destroyed in the revolution’.¹⁴⁶ Three copies of the – Anglican – ‘Book of Common Prayer’ were at Cannington¹⁴⁷ while numerous books of Devotions to, and Offices of, the Sacred Heart were acquired in all the houses.¹⁴⁸ Archibald Benedict MacDonald’s *Select Discourses on the Gospels for all Sundays and Holy Days throughout the Year*,¹⁴⁹ appears well-read at Salford and he presented his *Companion to the*

¹⁴⁴ DAA, marked: ‘For the use of Str Mary Austin Watkinson with leave of superiors 1762’, ‘For the use of Dame Mary Agatha Theresa Hoy, Caverswall Castle 1834 with leave of superiors’, ‘Dame Benedicta with Lady Abbess’ leave’; ‘Mary Bernard with leave’, with prayer to St. Bernard inserted.

¹⁴⁵ Michel-Ange Marin, *The Perfect Religious* Article L, p. 27. Part of this text is reproduced in Lux-Sterritt (ed), *English Convents in Exile*, 2, pp. 84–94.

¹⁴⁶ SBAA, Box 457, Letters of Presidents’, Dom Richard Marsh (Douay) to Dame Christina Chare (Salford), 15 April 1829. See Zon, *English Plainchant Revival*, pp. 62–71 for a list of principal eighteenth-century English Catholic liturgical texts.

¹⁴⁷ 1804 edition.

¹⁴⁸ Jean Croiset, *La Dévotion au Sacré-Cœur de Notre Seigneur* (1691), was at Salford (1758 edition, from Cambrai) and Cannington. It has been described as the main channel for dissemination of the devotion see, Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: Un Culto tra Devozione Interiore e Restaurazione Cristiana della Società* (Roma, 2001), p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ 1801. There were three copies each at Caverswall and Hammersmith.

Altar (1805) to the abbess in 1816. John Milner's *Exercise for sanctifying Sundays and Holidays, and for preparing to assist at Mass profitably* (1810), was kept at Caverswall in the sacristy. A manuscript dated 1837, entitled, 'Calendar observed at Ghent, Preston, and Caverswall', suggests an attempted reconciliation of the observances kept from Ghent through the days in exile in England, is marked 'To the care of the Chantress'.¹⁵⁰ Scriptural acquisitions include: Challoner's 'Holy Bible' in four volumes (1796);¹⁵¹ the *Sermon on the Text of St Matthew chapter 2, v.21* (1813), by ex-Jesuit Peter Gandolphy and James Appleton's 1815, *An Analysis or Detailed Explication of the Gospels as Read at Mass on Sundays and Feasts throughout the Year*. The latter inscribed, at Caverswall, as 'for the use of Refectory' (1816).¹⁵² Women's writing on liturgy is represented by numerous copies of an 1802 edition of Lucy Herbert's *Several excellent methods of hearing Mass, with fruit and benefit*.¹⁵³

Exemplary Lives

Reflecting the nuns' own experiences of suffering, many acquisitions published after 1795 show interest in the lives of saints, particularly martyrs. Through their reading, the nuns identified with other narratives of martyrdom. Various volumes of Alban Butler's works appear in the lists, including thirty-nine copies of *Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints* (1798) at Caverswall.¹⁵⁴ A desire to retain or revive monastic roots is indicated by the presence of the Venerable Bede's *Lives of Benedict, Ceolfrid, Easterwine, Sigfrid, and Huetbert, the first five abbots of the united monastery of Wearmouth* (1818)¹⁵⁵ and *Lives of the most Eminent Saints of the Oriental Deserts* (1806), by Richard Challoner, as well as a 'Life' of the Trappist Dom Armand Jean de Rance, by Charles Butler (1814).

¹⁵⁰ DAA, G50, BO. IV, Box 4.

¹⁵¹ At Winchester and Hammersmith.

¹⁵² There was also a copy at Hammersmith.

¹⁵³ Lucy Herbert became an Augustinian at Bruges, WWTN BA101. Two copies of the book were at Winchester; multiple copies at Salford; one at Caverswall; seven at Cannington and two at Hammersmith.

¹⁵⁴ It is not clear whether this number refers to individual copies or entire twelve-volume sets. Interest in Butler is indicated at Caverswall with two copies of *An Account of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Alban Butler, 1799*, by his nephew, Charles Butler. One belonged to the school.

¹⁵⁵ Published 1818, edited and translated by Peter Wilcock.

Nor did the nuns just look to the past for inspiration – accounts of miracles and new saints were eagerly received.¹⁵⁶ Nicholas Wiseman’s *Lives of St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Francis de Girolamo, St. John Joseph of the Cross, St. Pacificus of San Severino and St. Veronica Giuliani: whose Canonization took place on Trinity Sunday, May 26th, 1839* was acquired at Caverswall immediately after the canonization.¹⁵⁷ Jesuit Aloysius Gonzaga, canonised in 1726, was also popular among the Benedictines. Two copies of his *Life* (1751) were at Hammersmith, one belonging to Teresa Meade who was ‘much devoted to S Aloysius’.¹⁵⁸ The devotion was popular at Cannington too: a ‘vie de St Louis de Gonzague’ [1788], is recorded and inscribed ‘Sr De l’Assomption; Bl Sacrament’, while a manuscript entitled, ‘S. Aloysius Gonzaga proposed as a model of a holy life’, inscribed ‘Catherine P, 1799’, shows his work was being copied by the nuns. Jesuit priest John Thorpe, who distributed religious images to the enclosed convents on the Continent, included depictions of St. Aloysius Gonzaga in his benefactions.¹⁵⁹

News of the beatification of another popular saint, Margaret Mary Alacoque, was circulating in England in 1820: correspondence on the subject between the Visitation sisters at Shepton Mallet and John Milner was shared with the Caverswall Benedictines, reflecting the great interest in the Sacred Heart devotion among the religious.¹⁶⁰ Also prominent in the acquisitions are twelve biographies of heroic Catholic women including Mary Queen of Scots,¹⁶¹ and the hagiographic *Trois Heroines Chrétiennes*.¹⁶² Other exemplary religious-monastic lives were popular too: *Life of Princess Louisa of France, a Carmelite Nun*¹⁶³ and *History of the Life of*

¹⁵⁶ See James E. Kelly, ‘Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity: The Letters of John Thorpe to the English Carmelite Nuns at Lierre, 1769–89’, in James E. Kelly and Hannah Thomas (eds.), *Jesuit Intellectual and Physical Exchange between England and Mainland Europe, c. 1580–1789: ‘The World is our House’?* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 337–60.

¹⁵⁷ DAA, Rare Books, Oulton 8 (London, 1839).

¹⁵⁸ DAA T VII A h5 (143521). Teresa (Elizabeth) Meade, 1768–1840.

¹⁵⁹ Kelly, ‘Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity’, pp. 348–9.

¹⁶⁰ DAA, BO-IV-D-Box 1 (115801).

¹⁶¹ Published in 1838, by the Protestant, Alexander Cunningham, 5th Earl of Glencairn.

¹⁶² Published in 1801, by Guy Toussaint Julien Carron, 1760–1820.

¹⁶³ Abbè Proyard (or Proyard), *Vie de Madame Louise de France, Religieuse Carmélite, dédiée a Madame Elisabeth, Sœur du Roi Louis XVI* (Brussels, 1793) a translation was made by Abbè Premord, chaplain to the Cannington nuns, *Life of Princess Louisa of France, a Carmelite Nun, and Daughter of Louis XV, King of France*

St. Jane Frances de Chantal, founder of the Visitation Order, were present in numerous French and English copies.¹⁶⁴ Jane Chantal was canonised in 1767 and Louise[a] was an inspirational figure in the Revolution. This reveals the nuns' engagement with contemporary developments in the Church. Although experiencing a time of personal upheaval, they were far from being isolated. Both intellectually and spiritually they were firmly connected to the wider Catholic community and contemporary affairs.

Scripture and Theology

Scripture is less well represented, probably because the nuns would all have had their own bibles. The Douay-Rheims appears in many editions and the Latin vulgate is also plentiful. Few texts could be described as commentaries in the modern sense – the majority are of a more homiletic nature, e.g., *Homilies on the Book of Tobias; being a detailed history, and familiar explication, of the virtues of that holy servant of God* by Francis Martyn¹⁶⁵ and *An Analysis or Detailed Explication of the Gospels as Read at Mass on Sundays and Feasts throughout the Year* by James Appleton.¹⁶⁶

The presence of works by Utilitarian philosopher and Anglican clergyman William Paley at Cannington, Hammersmith, Caverswall and Salford is noteworthy. *Horae Paulinae, or the truth of the Scripture history* (1796 edition) was at Cannington and Hammersmith, suggesting a fundamentalist approach to biblical hermeneutics by today's standards. Paley's work was at Salford – *Principals of Moral and Political Philosophy*,¹⁶⁷ and at Caverswall – *Natural*

(Salisbury, 1808). Note the change in title – showing her relationship to her father rather than brother. Premord dedicated his translation to Lady Mary Christina Arundell (née Wardour). She and her husband, Henry, Lord Arundell were benefactors of many Catholic enterprises in England and may have funded this translation. She collaborated with ex-Jesuit John Jones on the publication of an English version of Lasne d'Aiguebell's *Sentimental and Practical Theology* which Jones dedicated to her. See Blom, *The Correspondence of James Peter Coghlan*, pp. 82–4.

¹⁶⁴ By William Henry Coombe, 1830.

¹⁶⁵ (York, 1817). There were three copies at Caverswall. Martyn had been a mission priest in Staffordshire until 1827 and probably visited and preached to the nuns.

¹⁶⁶ (London, 1815), wc.

¹⁶⁷ At Salford in the 1820 List, no details of date or publication are given. The fact that it was on the Library List for the Visitation rather than in the possession of a nun may indicate that it was not being read.

Theology; or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, collected from the appearances of nature (1805 edition) and *A View of the Evidence[s] of Christianity in three parts* (1822). In *Horae Paulinae*, Paley argues for the historical accuracy of the Pauline epistles by comparing them with the *Acts of the Apostles*. The debate on natural theology was at the heart of much Anglican thought – being well supported by the Evangelicals and opposed by the Oxford Movement.¹⁶⁸ *A View of the Evidences* was based on a course of lectures given by Paley to Anglican ordinands at Cambridge, and raises the question of how far and why the nuns' reading was so ecumenical. Certainly Paley's theology of utility was not in line with contemporary Catholic exegesis. Even less was his account of theological utility, which turned utilitarianism into a system of ethics, expressed most fully in *Principals of Moral and Political Philosophy*. Here Paley expounds a classic statement of the evolving, post-Enlightenment understanding of liberty and virtue. His rejection of social contract theory and replacement of it with a 'natural' theology is a kick against modernism and Humanist/Relativist thought. How can the presence of Paley in the nuns' collections be understood? Was it a reaction on their part to the horrors of the Revolution and 'Enlightened' thinking which some of them may have bought into on the Continent?¹⁶⁹ This back lash was not being experienced elsewhere in the EBC. None of Paley's works appear in the Douai or Ampleforth library collections at the time. Perhaps it may be seen as an avenue for some in their quest for perfection; for the development of the virtues and management of the passions by philosophical means. There is nothing however, in their life or writing to suggest that a fervent, neo-Pelagian Utilitarianism was creeping into their spirituality which as the century progressed, tended in a rather more Quietist direction, after their revival of mystical traditions.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ See Niall O'Flaherty, 'William Paley's Moral Philosophy and the Challenge of Hume: An Enlightenment Debate?', *Modern Intellectual History*, 7 (2010), p.1–31 and *Utilitarianism in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2018).

¹⁶⁹ See below, pp. 226ff.

¹⁷⁰ See below, p. 234ff.

Rules and Constitutions

Eleven of the twenty-six titles listed in the Dunkirk Cupboard from Hammersmith were Rules, Constitutions or Statutes. These were the key texts for observation and administration in the monastery. They were used, rather as family bibles, to record major events, genealogies and important notes. Eight copies of the Rule, in various editions, some of which were bound with the community Constitutions or the *Dialogues* of St Gregory, had been preserved from Dunkirk. Publication dates range from 1618 to 1700. All show continuity of ownership, contain inscriptions and evidence regular use. One battered edition, without a title page, bears the name Magdalen Berry who professed, illegally, at Dunkirk in 1790 and died at Hammersmith in 1829.¹⁷¹ A 1618 Rule in Latin and French returned with Benedict Sheldon who died in 1798, soon after arrival in England.¹⁷² Many contain abbreviated convent histories: two copies of the 1632 *Rule*, ‘in the feminine gender’, show multi-ownership and chronicling.¹⁷³ One expresses especial reverence for the last abbess of the Pontoise community, Anne Clavering: ‘This was my Lady Clavering’s Book, RIP’, with a list of offices in the monastery.¹⁷⁴ The second, also with Pontoise heritage, belonging to Dame Placida Roper, contains biographical details from the Pontoise Chapter Book.¹⁷⁵ This was passed on to ‘Mary Catherine, April 12th 1828’ and, at her death, to ‘Mary Walburga Woollett May 25th 1842’.¹⁷⁶ A copy of Fursdon’s 1638 translation of the *Rule* at Salford (which may have come from Cambrai), is inscribed inside the

¹⁷¹ WWTN DB018.

¹⁷² WWTN DB153.

¹⁷³ This was the first new edition of the Rule to be printed in English, together with the Statutes of the Brussels Benedictine nuns, for over one hundred years. Traditionally held to have been translated by Dame Alexia Grey of the Ghent Benedictines, Jaime Goodrich has argued that a more nuanced process took place with Grey as editor rather than translator. See ‘Nuns and Community-Centred Writing: The Benedictine Rule and Brussels Statutes’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 77 (2014). Numerous copies of this *Rule* are present in all the collections (except Winchester, possibly reflecting the schism at Brussels or the depletions of Molloy, see fn. 18, above).

¹⁷⁴ Many Pontoise nuns transferred to Dunkirk after their convent was disbanded in 1786. The abbess, Dame Anne Clavering, WWTN OB030, was among them.

¹⁷⁵ WWTN OB105.

¹⁷⁶ Dame Catherine Smith, 1797–1841, and Dame Walburga Woollett, 1816–1854

front cover 'For the use of Sister Monica Crookall' and gives considerable detail of family births and movements inside the back cover.

History

Keeping alive the English Catholic story was important during the Continental exile. The book lists show the nuns continued to value both their English and Benedictine heritage in the new exile. Copies of Bede's *Church History* were at Winchester and Caverswall.¹⁷⁷ Four volumes of Cisaplinist Alban Butler's *Historical Memoirs of the English, Scottish and Irish Catholics* were at Winchester and, in counterpoint, one copy of Ultramontanist, John Milner's *History and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (1786). *Anglia Notitia: or the present state of England* (1687) by Edward Chamberlayne was at Caverswall (1819) and John Lingard's *Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (1810) at Winchester and Salford. French Church historian Claude Fleury, who had been popular at Cambrai (seventeen copies), although not re-acquired at Salford, did continue to be read at Hammersmith¹⁷⁸ and at Cannington.¹⁷⁹ Fleury's contemporary, Louis Ellies Dupin (Du Pin), was shelved at Winchester, with two copies of *Histoire des Controverses* and the *Histoire abrégée de l'Eglise* at Cannington and his *Church History* (translation) at Salford.

The presence of Benedictine Serenus Cressy's 1668 *Church History of Brittany* at Winchester, Caverswall and Cannington (two copies), is interesting.¹⁸⁰ Cressy, writing the history of the 'true Church', cites England as one of the first and most successful places that it took root. His description of the English as playing a crucial role in spreading the true faith would have stirred the nuns' commitment to the mission for England, as much in their new exile as it had in the first. Also revealing of continuing sympathies at Hammersmith is:

¹⁷⁷ 1814 edition.

¹⁷⁸ DAA, T VII A h5, listed as *Catechisme historique*, 1754 (3646). An English translation (1833) was at Caverswall.

¹⁷⁹ CAA, *Discours sur l'histoire ecclesiastique* (1733) and *Short Historical Catechism* (1800).

¹⁸⁰ All reveal good use with various inscriptions. ESTC R4335. Cressy: MIM 433. See also Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p.134, for the significance of this work as evidencing English Benedictine antecedents and pre-eminence.

‘Chronological Historian Romans – George 1st’.¹⁸¹ Which is inscribed: ‘1733, Jacobite illus.’ and ‘a very valuable book of reference, regular and true’. Other annotations list English martyrs and their details of execution.¹⁸²

The Colwich collection reveals that a number of pamphlets and historical documents on the French Revolution and its aftermath were studied and, while it may be argued that these were brought by the French émigré chaplain abbé Premord, it would be dismissive to suggest the nuns were not also reading and discussing these affairs through which they had so recently and tragically lived.¹⁸³ The school library at Hammersmith lists a copy of ‘Historie de la Rev. Fr. Vol. 3’ (1816), revealing study of the Revolution to be on the curriculum.

Manuals

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the age of the manual.¹⁸⁴ In England, advice manuals abounded in both secular and religious areas, and a thirst for knowledge can be discerned in the convents as much as in wider society. For lay Catholics, the Manual (a compilation of instructions and prayers) and the Primer (a similar compilation, usually on devotion to Mary) formed the basis of their devotional practice and provided a connection between beleaguered communities. This seems to have been true for the nuns too: the perennial Challoner remained popular, with numerous copies of all his works in their collections, as did Gother.¹⁸⁵ The English Benedictine monks, keen players in the Catholic Enlightenment, contributed to this genre and many of their works appeared in the convent libraries.¹⁸⁶ John

¹⁸¹ This work was produced in an updated, third edition in 1747: Thomas Salmon, *The Chronological historian: containing a regular account of all material transactions [...] relating to English affairs. From the invasion of the Romans to the fourteenth year of King George II*, ESTC T147248.

¹⁸² DAA, T VII A h5 (143554).

¹⁸³ Published between 1797 and 1825, all but one in French.

¹⁸⁴ For the manual phenomenon generally see, Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914*, pp. 71–117; for a discussion of the religious manual, Eamon Duffy, ‘Praying the Counter-Reformation’ in James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds.), *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 206–25. See also Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, pp. 364–90 and Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 70–99.

¹⁸⁵ *Afternoon Instructions for the Whole Year*, 1699, ESTC R202236.

¹⁸⁶ See Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 73–7 and Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, pp. 139–44.

(Anselm) Mannock was particularly popular.¹⁸⁷ His *Poor Man's Catechism* (1752) and *Poor Man's Controversy* (1769) were at Winchester, Salford and Cannington. Two copies of the *Catechism* were at Salford, one kept specifically for the use of the schoolgirls. Archibald Macdonald was popular at Salford.¹⁸⁸ Radical monk Gregory Gregson (see above), was also read with copies of his *Devout Miscellany*¹⁸⁹ at Salford and Cannington. That the pedagogical approach was popular, suggests the need for statements of certainties and Catholic Truth in the insecure environment of exilic England. *A Directory for Novices of Every Religious Order* (1817), was in the Novitiate at Cannington and *Help to Parents in the Religious Instruction of their Children* (1821), by Henry Rutter, was acquired at Winchester and marked, 'Belonging to Dame Agnes's Bookcase No 3' (Agnes Whelan was schoolmistress). Such acquisitions suggest the nuns' serious commitment to formation and education.

Secular Reading

The nuns' book collections not only reflect the spirituality of their times; the 1793 catalogue from Cambrai is also representative of book consumption among the wider public in the eighteenth century. Ian Watt has shown that by far the greatest single category of books to be published early in that century continued to be religious in nature; from theological tomes to *Pilgrims Progress* to devotional tracts.¹⁹⁰ As the century progressed secular tastes grew, and publication of religious texts did not increase in proportion to sales of other types of reading matter. While the rupture in the nuns' libraries makes it difficult to judge, there is evidence to suggest that this development in reading fashions was also permeating the cloister. According to Michael Schaich's study, Southern German monastic libraries show considerable growth in secular reading in the eighteenth century: 'All areas of contemporary scholarly research were

¹⁸⁷ MIM 535. He was part of the Mannock-Strickland dynasty, with sisters and nieces at Brussels, WWTN; BB117 and BB121; BB118 and BB119. See fn. 74 above.

¹⁸⁸ MIM 530.

¹⁸⁹ 1791 edition, ESTC N471616.

¹⁹⁰ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 49–50.

present; from history, philosophy, jurisprudence, philology and geography to the full range of the natural sciences'.¹⁹¹ This is not surprising amongst prosperous and erudite monks; what is unexpected is that the collections of the enclosed and so-called unworldly nuns reveal a similar range of topics. In the Cambrai Catalogue, after hefty sections containing theology, liturgy and devotional works, we see: 'Jurisprudence', seven items; 'Sciences et Arts', twenty-nine items; 'Histoire', one hundred and forty-two items; 'Belles Lettres', seventy.¹⁹² Evidence from the English collections, shows that the nuns' wide-ranging interests were not diminished in their new exile.

Novel reading was in fashion: German monks were actively discouraged from, and even punished for, reading novels and this was most likely the case for the nuns too. The recommended reading list for *the Filles du Coeur de Marie* in 1818 was drawn up to ensure that only quality works of piety were read, and to exclude, '*les poésies profanes, les comedies, les romans at les livres d'amusement*'.¹⁹³ The Cambrai Catalogue lists only one novel: *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The novel, however, was becoming established as a literary form from 1793, and the transition from religious to secular was mediated through what Watts has described as the: 'compromise, between the wits and the less educated, between belles-lettres and religious instruction' and is perhaps, the most important trend in eighteenth-century literature.¹⁹⁴ It finds expression in the most famous literary innovations of the century, the establishment of the *Tatler* in 1709 and the *Spectator* in 1711.¹⁹⁵ These periodicals, containing essays on topics of general interest, political journalism, poetry, literature, recipes

¹⁹¹ Schaich, 'Libraries in Southern German Monasteries'. Ulrich L. Lehner, *Enlightened Monks: The German Benedictines 1740–1803* (Oxford, 2011) describes a sophisticated book-exchange system between German monasteries, pp. 101–2.

¹⁹² Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres*.

¹⁹³ Barthélemy, 'Lectures de Religieuses de la Contre-Révolution', p. 29.

¹⁹⁴ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, p. 50. Watts's work, while a classic, has been critiqued by feminist and cultural historians in recent years. It needs to be read alongside recent scholarship which sets an alternative context for further consideration of convent books and reading. See, for example, Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006).

¹⁹⁵ They were followed, in 1731, by the monthly *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Guardian* in 1713, which ran for seven months.

and conundrums, all appear in the nuns' collections, possibly because they 'tried to make the polite religious and the religious polite' and were particularly popular in groups where 'most other secular literature was frowned on'.¹⁹⁶ An anthology of the journals was also on the shelves: *The beauties of the Spectators, Tatlers and Guardians, connected and digested under alphabetical heads*.¹⁹⁷

The contemporary thirst for knowledge and instruction in all manner of subjects, was also well-represented on the monastery shelves in England. Collected volumes of the *Spectator* appear along with the popular *Elegant Extracts: useful and entertaining passages in prose* (1789). Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* appears in all the library lists, in editions published after 1795. His *Dictionary* and *Lives of the English Poets* were also present. Dictionaries, grammars and thesauruses were also being added to the collections and a variety of works on the social and natural sciences, gardening, cookery and medicine reveal the wider interests and activities of the nuns. A copy of Abel Boyer's *The Royal Dictionary. In Two Parts. First, French and English. Secondly, English and French* is inscribed on the fly leaf: 'This Booke belongs to the Abbess of the English Benedictins [sic] of Gant'.¹⁹⁸ Its heritage was important and there is a long note at the back describing how it was returned to the nuns at Caverswall in 1866, by one Casimir Claus.

The fashion for fiction was penetrating English book collections and seems to have provided a secular escape for the recovering nuns. Turn of the century reading tastes tended towards the Gothic and Romantic, 'innocent and amusing', rather than serious or instructional¹⁹⁹ although, not surprisingly, there are no works by Horace Walpole or Ann Radcliffe in the nuns' collections. Nevertheless, they did turn to literature and poetry more than hitherto and were

¹⁹⁶ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁷ For a discussion of the various issues and re-printings of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* see A. S. Collins, 'The Growth of the Reading Public During the Eighteenth Century', *The Review of English Studies* 7 and 8 (1926), pp. 284–94 and 428–38.

¹⁹⁸ (La Haye, 1702), wc.

¹⁹⁹ Jeffrey Auerbach, 'What they Read', p. 121.

accessing new literary genres for *lectio*-type material. The presence of a first edition of Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promesi Sposi (The Betrothed)* at Cannington (1828) is evidence that the nuns were reading contemporary fiction. The book deals with corruption and sanctity in the Church; enduring, faithful love – the love of the betrothed couple represented for the nuns their betrothal to the divine spouse; mob violence, warfare and politically induced suffering. The overarching themes of the problem of evil and innocent suffering would certainly have had personal resonances for them. The presence at Caverswall of two plays on biblical themes: 'the Sacred Dramas of Esther & Athalia' [sic] by French playwright Jean Racine, is also revealing.²⁰⁰ *Esther* was commissioned in 1689 for the young ladies of the *Maison Royale de Saint-Louis* at St Cyr in Paris. It was followed in 1691 by *Athalie*.²⁰¹ It is significant that this collection is listed as belonging to the school at Caverswall: possibly the nuns had aspirations to emulate the noble *école* of St Cyr. The plays were suitable for the young ladies both in their religious nature and as part of their French studies and, while it is unlikely that the nuns would have also performed, they may well have enjoyed them as audience.²⁰²

No evidence exists of the nuns' attitude towards play-acting but the early nineteenth century saw widespread discussion of the role of theatre, especially the participation of well-bred young ladies in it.²⁰³ The debate centred on morality, respectability, and the forces of nature and passions. Evangelist (and reformed playwright) Hannah More contributed much anti-theatrical rhetoric to the debate and wrote that the theatre was 'socially pernicious, especially for young, easily-influenced women'.²⁰⁴ No other examples of play-acting exist in the nuns' library lists but it may be assumed that the religious nature of these particular dramas over-rode any

²⁰⁰ DAA, Collected Works (1803) inscribed in the fly leaf: 'School CC 1820'.

²⁰¹ Based on 2 Kings 8:16-11:16 and 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:15.

²⁰² The change in attitudes to play acting, especially among English women, may be contrasted with the popularity of the art in medieval convents: see the SNF-funded research project 'Medieval Convent Drama' which directs critical attention towards the theatrical work and multiple creative, performative activities undertaken by women within medieval convents: <http://medievalconventdrama.org>.

²⁰³ See Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814) as an example of the dialectic.

²⁰⁴ For a discussion on the morality of acting see Anna Lott, 'Staging a Lesson: The Theatricals and Proper Conduct in "Mansfield Park"', *Studies in the Novel*, 38 (2006), pp. 275–87.

scruples experienced regarding the art more generally. The fact that the plays are among the few schoolbooks to be kept and listed in the community property, suggests an enduring popularity beyond the classroom. A taste for Romantic epic literature also suggests a desire for momentary escape from the restrictions of exile. At Cannington this was provided by an 1809 edition of the spurious poems of Ossian by Scottish poet James Macpherson.²⁰⁵ Another revealing title at Cannington is *Sintram and his Companions* by Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte Fouque.²⁰⁶ Fouque's reworking of sagas and the Nibelung legends were precursors for Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle. The Romantic-pastoral is represented in the presence of poetry collections such as *The Seasons* by James Thomson and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*.²⁰⁷

The English nuns always maintained an interest in the world outside the enclosure, where they were free to travel everywhere in mind and spirit. This is manifested in the growth of texts on travel, nature and social sciences. The travel section at Cambrai had been restricted to guides such as *The Kentish Traveller Companion* and the *Margate Guide*.²⁰⁸ The desire for inner freedom to explore grew with the second exile. A total of fifty-seven travel books in the secular studies category were present across the Convent collections. Other subjects included were arithmetic, geography and atlases, ancient and political histories, domestic science, medicine and healthcare, gardening, natural sciences and physics.

The presence of these books shows that the nuns were intelligent, inquiring thinkers and reflects their wider interest in popular trends of the day. An interesting acquisition at Hammersmith is two volumes of *Percy Anecdotes*. Published between 1820 and 1826, in twenty volumes, the *Anecdotes* purported to be written by two 'Brothers of the Benedictine monastery of Much Benton' – the authors were actually radical Scottish patent agent, Joseph

²⁰⁵ James Macpherson, *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books, together with Several Other Poems composed by Ossian, the Son of Fingal, translated from the Gaelic Language*, copac.

²⁰⁶ 1814 edition, wc.

²⁰⁷ 1780 edition in the Caverswall library, ESTC T172125. On the popularity of these works see St Clair, *The Reading Nation*, pp. 114 and 119.

²⁰⁸ 1770 edition, copac.

Clinton Robertson and journalist Thomas Byerley.²⁰⁹ The compilation consisted of ‘anecdotes’ from a wide range of subjects, along the lines of *Elegant Extracts*. The two volumes at Hammersmith were ‘anecdotes of beneficence’ – which was kept in the infirmary, and ‘of youth’ – belonging to the school.²¹⁰ Whether the nuns were aware of the true authors’ identity and political backgrounds or believed the Benedictine credentials of Sholto and Reuben Percy is uncertain.

Catholic Enlightenment and the Nineteenth-Century Developments

Recent scholarship has dealt with many aspects of Catholic Enlightenment but has been largely silent on its reception by women, although a recent volume edited by Ulrich Lehner has begun to redress this.²¹¹ Following the upheaval of the French Revolution, the Catholic Church sought to re-figure itself much as the newly exiled nuns did. Disillusionment with Enlightenment philosophies²¹² had set in and, within the Church, opposition to Gallicanism accelerated. ‘Reform’ was seen increasingly in reactive terms, with the move to greater centralization and the consolidation of power of the papacy. Through the lens of the nuns’ libraries three responses

²⁰⁹ For a wider discussion of popular journals see: Jonathan R. Topham, ‘John Limbird, Thomas Byerley, and the Production of Cheap Periodicals in the 1820s’, *Book History*, 8 (2005), pp. 75–106.

²¹⁰ 1820, wc.

²¹¹ Ulrich L. Lehner (ed.), *Women, Enlightenment and Catholicism: A Transnational Biographical History* (London, 2018). This is the first major work to engage with women’s agency in the Catholic Enlightenment and invites a closer study of the writings of English nuns in this field. See also, Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford, 2016); and Jeffrey D. Burson, and Ulrich L. Lehner (eds.), *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History* (Indiana, 2014).

²¹² When writing of ‘the Enlightenment’, Roy Porter and others have made the point that there was not one single ‘Enlightenment’ and ‘Enlightenment ideas’ cannot be seen as a homogenous whole. This section treats Enlightenment largely within the Catholic expression of social reformation and modernization that developed in the eighteenth century. See Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Modern World* (London, 2000) and Niall O’Flaherty, ‘William Paley’s Moral Philosophy and the Challenge of Hume: An Enlightenment Debate?’, in *Modern Intellectual History*, 7 (2010), pp. 1–31. The Catholic/Benedictine Enlightenment must not be oversimplified: it was as multifaceted as Ulrich Lehner has shown the German phenomenon to be see, *Enlightened Monks*, p.10. A. McClelland discusses the debate with special consideration of the old Catholic position, ‘School or Cloister? An English Educational Dilemma, 1794–1889’, in *Paedagogica Historica*, 20 (1980), pp. 108–28. The point has also been made that Catholic Enlightenment was not ‘a wholesale severance with the past’ and should be understood as an organic development, see Anna Battigelli, ‘Fenelonian Reform, Catholic Jacobites and Jane Barker’s Enlightenment Dramas of Conscience’, in Ulrich L. Lehner (ed.), *Women, Enlightenment and Catholicism*, pp. 202–15, p. 202.

can be identified: the reassessment of theological-political ideology, millenarianism and a return to mystical tradition.²¹³

Theo-political Ideology

The French Revolution brought about a questioning of humanist and Enlightenment teaching which had taken hold in many of the English communities – male and female. As Geoffrey Scott has shown, many of the monks during their priestly studies were exposed to, and enthusiastically embraced, philosophical and intellectual developments at the universities of Paris, Douai and Trier, putting them at the cutting edge of a liberal English Catholic Enlightenment movement in the second half of the eighteenth-century.²¹⁴ Some were attached to Gallicanism while some, like the radical Cuthbert Wilks, spearheaded the Cisalpine movement.²¹⁵

These monks had connections with the Cambrai and Paris nuns as confessors, chaplains and through family links.²¹⁶ A key figure of the transmission was Thomas Welch, chaplain at Cambrai convent from 1775.²¹⁷ Described as ‘*un homme distingué, cultivé et lettré, un vrai bénédictin*’,²¹⁸ Welch had been prior of St Edmund’s in Paris and was an advocate of Enlightenment and humanist ideals.²¹⁹ In one address he encouraged his community: ‘to take reason for their guide in all things that belong to Nature’, to do so not in Latin, but in English,

²¹³ The neo-Scholastic movement, which developed from the 1820s, is not considered here because there is little evidence of its impact on the nuns’ theology. For similar reasons the Romantic Movement is also not included. See above, p. 205.

²¹⁴ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 145.

²¹⁵ MIM 184. See Geoffrey Scott, ‘Dom Joseph Cuthbert Wilks [1748–1829] and English Benedictine Involvement in the Cisalpine Stirs’, *Recusant History*, 23 (1997), pp. 318–40.

²¹⁶ Two of Joseph Wilks’ sisters were Benedictine nuns: Mary Austin Wilks, at Paris, and Bridget (Mary Teresa) Wilks at Cambrai. Neither appear on the WWTN database but are mentioned in CRS, IX, 1911, p. 396. A book given by Mary Teresa to another sister has survived and is at SBAA, *Reflexions et Sentimens [sic] d’un Solitaire en retraite, pendant l’Octave du très-saint Sacrement*, par un Prêtre solitaire (Douai, 1749). During the ‘Cisalpine stirs’, Wilks visited Cambrai in 1792 and stayed with the Brussels nuns in 1793. See Geoffrey Scott, ‘Dom Joseph Cuthbert Wilks’, pp. 328, 330 and 338. Wilk’s confrontation with the EBC Chapter of 1798 would have been relayed to the Woolton nuns by his close friend and chief defender, Bede Brewer.

²¹⁷ MIM 179.

²¹⁸ ADN, *La Semaine Religieuse de Cambrai*, p. 14 (Pictures/Cambrai/DSCF8762).

²¹⁹ Alexander Lock, *Catholicism, Identity and Politics in the Age of Enlightenment: The Life and Career of Sir Thomas Gascoigne, 1745–1810* (Woodbridge, 2016), p. 74. In ‘Dom Joseph Cuthbert Wilks’ Geoffrey Scott describes St Edmund’s at that time as having ‘a reputation for liberal thinking and indiscipline’, p. 319.

‘which has been long neglected amongst us to our dishonour’, and so reclaim ‘the noble and sublime Sciences of Antiquity’.²²⁰ Doubtless, he delivered these sentiments in his sermons to the nuns too.²²¹ Welch’s successor as chaplain at Cambrai was Augustine Walker who was imprisoned with the nuns at Compiègne and died there in 1794.²²² As founding president of the Society of St Edmund he aimed to give Benedictine missionary monks a training in Enlightenment ideals, including the natural sciences.²²³ His interests included science, mechanics, nature and the ‘Romantic movement’, and he had tutored the poet Henry Swinburne.²²⁴

Walker was held in great regard by the Cambrai nuns as their spiritual director and was described as having been ‘an exemplary friend to each of them’. His death was ‘severely felt and long deeply regretted’.²²⁵ Walker’s influence can be seen in some of the books owned by the nuns. The *Travels of Cyrus: To which is annexed a discourse upon the theology and mythology of the ancients* by ‘Chevalier’ Andrew Michael Ramsay, is a revealing example.²²⁶ Ramsey was a convert to Catholicism and a disciple of Fenelon in Cambrai where he befriended several radical EBC monks, including the then president Thomas Southcot[e].²²⁷ Ramsey may have visited the nuns there. As a civic humanist and natural theologian his, ‘central mission [was] to recast the Catholic faith as the friend of “reason”, “liberty”, and toleration and to find a home within its learned institutions for the cause of “true, noble, Christian freethinking”’.²²⁸

²²⁰ Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688–1745: Politics, Culture and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 237.

²²¹ Welch dined with Dr Johnson on his visit to France in 1775 and was intimate with the Strickland party which included Mrs Thrale. See Tonya Moutray, *Refugee Nuns, the French Revolution and, British Literature and Culture* (London, 2016), p. 44.

²²² MIM 175.

²²³ See Scott, *Gothic Rage*, pp. 155–8. For a discussion of German Benedictine learned societies see Lehner, *Enlightened Monks*, pp. 81–3.

²²⁴ See Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 161.

²²⁵ Scholastica Jacob (ed.), *A Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray and Two Hairs and a Dish of Tortoise*, from the writings of Dame Ann Teresa Partington (Stanbrook, 2016), p. 32.

²²⁶ Published in multiple editions between 1728 and 1800.

²²⁷ MIM 164.

²²⁸ Gabriel Glickman, ‘Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743): Catholic Freethinking and Enlightened Mysticism’, in Jeffrey D. Burson and Ulrich L. Lehner (eds.) *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe*, p. 391–410.

As a writer who believed that the greatest enemy was ‘monarchical tyranny and absolutism’ the presence of his book in the (Young) Ladies’ Library at Salford provides insight into their education.²²⁹

Another influence at Cambrai came through the Hooke family. Dublin-born priest Luke Hooke, renowned scholar and theologian at the Sorbonne, was brother of Cambrai abbess, Christina Hooke.²³⁰ His humanist theology and teaching that all men were possessed of natural benevolence led to his being dismissed from post in 1753, although he was later reinstated. Hooke was a close friend of many of the English Benedictine monks who were responsible for his book’s distribution to Catholic booksellers in England.²³¹ His *Religionis Naturalis et Moralis Philosophia Principia* was in the Cambrai library.²³² Letters in the *Archives du Nord* from Christina to President Augustine Walker in Paris, in the late 1780s, make frequent mention of her brother who was a regular correspondent: the nuns were familiar with his reputation not only through his writing, but also through close family and monastic networks.²³³ Hooke was Parisian mentor of Bede Brewer, Benedictine, theologian, Gallican and ‘Doctor of the Sorbonne’ (a title bestowed on him in 1774) who, according to Geoffrey Scott, read ‘books of a liberal tendency in Paris’,²³⁴ and edited a revision of *Religionis Naturalis* in 1774.²³⁵ Although *Religionis Naturalis* was not repurchased in England, Hooke’s influence through Brewer and the older nuns would have been remembered. Brewer was also chaplain to the Paris nuns from 1771–1777 and maintained contact with them after arrival in England. They rejected his offer of a home in Lancashire, ostensibly because of the location but they may have wished

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 394.

²³⁰ WWTN CB096.

²³¹ Thomas O’ Connor, ‘Luke Joseph Hooke (1714–96)’ in Jeffrey D. Burson and Ulrich L. Lehner (eds.) *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe*, pp. 371–87. Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, pp. 145–70.

²³² Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres*.

²³³ ADN, Lille: 18 H 39 (*Bénédictins Anglais de Douai*). The collection also includes letters from Hooke to Walker concerning Christina Hooke’s last illness in 1792.

²³⁴ MIM 203. Brewer added chapters on papal primacy, and conciliar and episcopal authority, see O’Connor, ‘Luke Joseph Hooke’, p. 376. See also Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 165.

²³⁵ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 6.

to distance themselves from his radical reputation. The Cambrai nuns were more receptive and accepted Brewer's patronage in the house and school at Woolton, maintaining a good relationship with him until his death.

The Cambrai-Salford and Paris-Cannington libraries suggest more liberal influences than the other houses, due possibly to their location and on-going relationship with Benedictine monks. The Cannington nuns read 'enlightened' books such as *Catholic's Prayerbook* by reforming priest and co-founder of the Catholic Committee, Joseph Berington – 'the doyen of English Cisalpinism'²³⁶ – and *Instruction sur les atteintes portées a la religion* (1798) by sometime Bishop of Boulogne, Jean-Rene Asseline – suspected of unorthodoxy. Asseline had taught Cuthbert Wilks at the Sorbonne and was a friend of Abbé Premord, chaplain at Cannington, which may explain the presence of his work there.²³⁷ Two manuscripts of *Discourse on the Religious Life* copied (and possibly translated) by Dame Mary Joseph Butler in the Hammersmith collection shows the nuns there were engaging with Asseline.²³⁸ Salford and Cannington both had copies of *Devout Miscellany, or the Sunday's Companion to the holy mass and vespers* (1790) by Gregory Gregson, one of the monks who helped bring the Enlightenment from Europe to the English mission.²³⁹

The Catholic Church in early nineteenth-century England was at a crisis point in authority and political identity.²⁴⁰ The nuns, grappling with their own issues of identity, followed contemporary debates on orthodoxy, religious polemics and emancipation with close interest. The *Critical and Historical Review of Fox's Book of Martyrs* by Catholic polemicist and editor

²³⁶ Peter Phillips, *John Lingard, Priest and Historian* (Leominster, 2008), p. 129. Berington had been educated at Douai and was a founding member of the Catholic Committee, 1782. He was suspended by vicar apostolic, John Douglass in 1797 and 1801.

²³⁷ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 165–6.

²³⁸ Mary Joseph Butler, 1797–1864, professed at Hammersmith, 1820.

²³⁹ MIM 096. See Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ After the Relief Acts, there were growing divisions between Cisalpinists and Ultramontanists; seculars and regulars; 'Old Catholics' and newer immigrants. See: Bossy, *English Catholic Community*; Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984); Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976) and Phillips, *John Lingard*.

of the *Orthodox Journal*, William Eusebius Andrews, was owned by four of the five communities.²⁴¹ At Cannington many pamphlets representing both sides of current debates were present. Most notable is the literature on Scriptural authority and textual criticism, as tackled in exchanges between Catholics – led by Peter Gandolphy and John Lingard – and the controversial Anglican bishop, Herbert Marsh.²⁴² Other leading polemicists being read, included Frederick Husenbeth,²⁴³ Edward Jernigham,²⁴⁴ William Talbot,²⁴⁵ Anglican reforming bishop, Beilby Porteus,²⁴⁶ and John Lingard.²⁴⁷ Catholic polemical books included: *The grounds of the old religion or some general arguments in favour of the Catholick, Apostolik, Roman communion, Collected from both ancient and modern controvertists. By a convert*²⁴⁸; *The unerring authority of the Catholic Church*²⁴⁹ and the controversial *England's Conversion and the Reformation Compared [Or The Young Gentleman Directed in the Choice of His Religion]* by Robert Manning – secretly printed in England with a false imprint of Antwerp, which had led to the arrest of bookseller, Thomas Meighan, in 1726.²⁵⁰

²⁴¹ In 1824 and 1829 editions. Only Salford did not have a copy.

²⁴² The pamphlet *Strictures on Dr Marsh's 'Comparative View of the Churches of England and Rome'* by John Lingard, 1815, was at Cannington as was Peter Gandolphy's exchange with Marsh, *Congratulatory Letter to the Rev. Herbert Marsh, D.D. on his judicious Inquiry into the consequences of neglecting to give the Prayer-Book with the Bible. Together with a Sermon on the inadequacy of the Bible to be an exclusive Rule of Faith, inscribed to the same* (London, 1812). This elicited a reply from Marsh, and several exchanges ensued. Gandolphy followed up with *A Second Letter to the Rev. Herbert Marsh confirming the opinion that the vital principle of the Reformation has been conceded by him to the Church of Rome* (London, 1813).

²⁴³ *Discourses Delivered in the Catholic Chapel, Norwich, 1827, and Defence of the creed and discipline of the Catholic Church, 1826.*

²⁴⁴ *Mild Tenor of Christianity, 1803.*

²⁴⁵ *Protestant Apology for the Roman Catholic Church, 1809.*

²⁴⁶ *Beneficial Effects of Christianity, 1808.*

²⁴⁷ *Examination of Certain Opinions advanced by Dr Burgess, Bishop of St David's* (1813) and *A Review of Certain Anti-Catholic Publications, viz a Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Gloucester [...] to the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln [...] and Observations on the Catholic Question, by the Right Hon. Lord Kenyon* (1813).

²⁴⁸ Richard Challoner, 1742. ESTC T95748.

²⁴⁹ Challoner. ESTC T145006 and W2439.

²⁵⁰ ESTC T78047. See F. Blom, 'English and Irish Catholic Books and Convents in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: The Link with the Low Countries. The Cases of Peter Wadding, Lady Lucy Herbert and James Peter Coghlan', *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies*, 26 (2016), pp. 169–82.

Both William Poynter²⁵¹ and John Milner²⁵² were followed as they presented different aspects in the Emancipation debate. The emerging issue of the Irish question was also considered in works by Sir John Throckmorton²⁵³ and Milner.²⁵⁴ While not a Jesuit-inspired house, the nuns at Cannington nevertheless also had five titles by Denis-Luc Frayssinous, French minister for public worship, who supported the ex-Jesuits in their attempt to return to France in 1824.²⁵⁵ Inscriptions suggest these works were mostly acquired by chaplain Abbé Premord and that current religious affairs formed part of his preaching and discussions with the nuns.

Millenarianism

Another theological reaction to Enlightenment tendencies, which gained momentum after the excesses of the French Revolution, was Millenarianism.²⁵⁶ Slightly at odds with his Enlightenment tendencies, Thomas Welch likely introduced Millenarianism at Cambrai. Geoffrey Scott mentions Welch's appreciation of the 'fiery sermons' at Cambrai Cathedral given by an ex-Jesuit, and records that he read the signs of disasters such as the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, similar quakes in Italy in the 1780s, and doubtless the French Revolution, which he just lived to see, as having made 'more impression in my mind than all the sermons on the last judgment I ever read'.²⁵⁷ As chaplain, Welch may have repeated the 'fiery sermons'

²⁵¹ *Declaration of the Catholic Bishops*, 1826.

²⁵² *End of religious controversy* Parts I, II, III, 1818 and *Parting words to the Rev Richard Grier*, 1825.

²⁵³ *Considerations arising from the debates [...] of the Irish Catholics*, 1806.

²⁵⁴ John Milner, *Inquiry into Certain Vulgar Opinions Concerning the Catholic Inhabitants and Antiquities of Ireland*, 1801, copac. For a discussion of Milner's position see Cadoc Leighton, 'John Milner, History and Ultramontaniam', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 63 (2010), pp. 346–74.

²⁵⁵ *Chambre des pair de France. Session de 1824, Les vrais principes de l'Eglise Gallicane*, 1818, *Resume du discours prononce 19 Janvier 1827*, and *Discours prononce par M. L'Eveque d'Hermopolis*; two copies published 1826 and 1827.

²⁵⁶ This movement was widespread among all Christian traditions, see Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford, 1974). For its Benedictine impact see Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, pp. 61–6.

²⁵⁷ Scott, Geoffrey, *Gothic Rage Undone*, pp. 143–4.

to the nuns. Their devotion to the Sacred Heart may also have been intensified at least in part by apocalyptic fears.²⁵⁸

One of the chief proponents of the movement was monk and vicar apostolic, Charles Walmesley.²⁵⁹ Under the *nom de plume* Signor Pastorini he drew on apocalyptic visions from the Book of Revelations in his *General History of the Christian Church* (1770) which, when it was re-published in 1799, seemed by some to have come to fulfilment.²⁶⁰ Two copies had been owned by the nuns at Cambrai and two appear in the book lists at Salford. One copy, the republished 1798 edition, is inscribed to ‘RLA Blyde²⁶¹, the gift of Rd W Pembridge’.²⁶² An engraving of Walmesley has been inserted before the title page, together with a printed note about him. The inclusion of a receipt for items of furniture, dated 1801, suggests the book was well studied. There were two copies at Winchester and three at Cannington. The apocalyptic sentiments appear to have spoken to the nuns, possibly as a reflection of their perception of their exile which viewed the Revolution and its aftermath, as a precursor of the end of the world – or at least the world as they knew it. Abbess Christina Chare used apocalyptic imagery in her conferences showing that the experience of second exile continued to be perceived as cataclysmic.²⁶³

Walmesley and many other Benedictines were fascinated by the ‘holy beggar’, French mendicant Franciscan, Benedict Joseph Labre.²⁶⁴ Labre was venerated immediately after his

²⁵⁸ Daniele Menozzi has described the Sacred Heart as a symbol of resistance to Revolutionary oppression and means of counter-revolution, see *Sacro Cuore*, pp. 77–89.

²⁵⁹ MIM 177.

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of the contents of the work and its place in post-Enlightenment writings see, Shaun Blanchard, ‘The “Fifth Vial”: Charles Walmesley’s Ultramontane Apocalypticism’, in Cormac Begadon and James E. Kelly (eds), *British and Irish Religious Orders in Europe, 1560–1800: Conventuals, Mendicants and Monastics in Motion* (Durham, 2021), pp. 222–44.

²⁶¹ Lucy Blyde, WWTN CB013.

²⁶² Possibly Benedict (Michael) Pembridge, author of several manuals of prayers. MIM 563.

²⁶³ SBAA, Box 455, she wrote of ‘the Babylon of this world’ (Conference 3, 1824) and urged the nuns, through their prayers, to ‘make some reparation for the increasing wickedness of the world’ (Conference 21, 1 December 1828).

²⁶⁴ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 144.

death in 1783.²⁶⁵ For many he represented a lone voice crying in the wilderness of modern society: the ‘prophet of uncertainty’. The presence of copies of his biography by G. L. Marconi²⁶⁶, in all the libraries, testifies that the nuns were also affected by his life – and demonstrates their contemporary reading.²⁶⁷ Interest in Labre was shared by other religious, for example the Jesuit, John Thorpe, who wrote frequently about the recently deceased Franciscan in his correspondence with the Carmelites at Lierre.²⁶⁸ The saint quickly became part of the Brussels nuns’ tradition: they believed that a beggar who prayed in their chapel was Labre himself.²⁶⁹ While publisher James Peter Coghlan’s contribution to the spread of Labre’s devotion in England has long been recognised,²⁷⁰ it is evident that the nuns’ also helped popularise the cult through their networks and schools.

The Mystical Tradition

The nuns at Cambrai and Paris were formed in traditional contemplative practices of the desert fathers and mystical writers. Benedictine monk, Augustine Baker, was a seminal influence on the Cambrai nuns, and his tradition was passed on to the Paris foundation in 1651. He wrote numerous treatises for the nuns on the contemplative way which were copied and circulated by them. The Cambrai nuns thus became the principal source of distribution of mystical texts among English Catholics in the seventeenth century.²⁷¹ The 1657 compilation of Baker’s writings, made by Dom Serenus Cressy and published as *Sancta Sophia*, was read widely in

²⁶⁵ Benedict Joseph Labre, 1748–83, was beatified in 1860 and canonized in 1881.

²⁶⁶ Giuseppe Loreto Marconi, *Life of the venerable Benedict Joseph Labre who died at Rome, in the odour of sanctity on the sixteenth of April 1783*, English translation published by Coghlan, 1785, ESTC T129404.

²⁶⁷ The two copies at Cambrai may well have been the gift of Thomas Welch, an ardent promoter of Labre’s cult. Inscriptions in the English collections show that the book was read in early editions: at Hammersmith, probably from Dunkirk, inscribed: ‘Mary Martin 1785’ (probably a schoolgirl). Other marks suggest the book’s continuity to Hammersmith. Caverswall copies are dated 1805 and 1811.

²⁶⁸ Kelly, ‘Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity’, p. 349.

²⁶⁹ Anon, *Chronicles of the First Monastery Founded for Benedictine Nuns 1597* (Bergholt, 1898), pp. 198–9.

²⁷⁰ Francis Blom, Jos Blom, Frans Korsten and Geoffrey Scott (eds), *The Correspondence of James Peter Coghlan (1731–1800)* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. xxxi.

²⁷¹ See Placid Spearritt, ‘The Survival of the Medieval Spirituality among the Exiled English Black Monks’ in Michael Woodward (ed.), *That Mysterious Man: Essays on Augustine Baker OSB 1575–1641* (Abergavenny, 2001), pp. 19–41. Baker’s treatises have been edited and published through the dedicated work of John Clark and the *Analecta Cartusiana* press.

the convents during the following 150 years, but so too were his original treatises.²⁷² Jan Rhodes concluded that: ‘more than a century and a half [after Baker’s death], the contents of the nuns’ collection suggests the abiding influence of Fr Baker’.²⁷³ Alban Hood considered that while the practice of contemplative prayer was in decline amongst the monks, the mystical, ‘spirit of Baker continued to be passed on through the new post-revolution generation of nuns’.²⁷⁴ Evidence from the nuns’ libraries in the early nineteenth century however, offers a rather different perspective, challenging this long-held perception: there is less evidence of the enduring influence of Baker at that time.

Baker produced reading lists for the nuns at Cambrai which included English mystical works by Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and William Fitch, the *Cloud of Unknowing*, as well as patristic writers and European women mystics – Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden and Angela of Foligno.²⁷⁵ Of the forty-three authors recommended by Baker only twenty-two appear in the post-migration lists. These include perennial classics by St Teresa, Francis de Sales, Lorenzo Scupoli, Alphonsus Rodriguez,²⁷⁶ St Gregory the Great and Thomas à Kempis, all in multiple volumes and copies.²⁷⁷ The medieval mystics around whom the Baker-Cambrai tradition is based however, are less well represented. There is no copy of the

²⁷² David Lunn, ‘Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and the English Mystical Tradition’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 3 (1975), pp. 267–77 has argued that *Sancta Sophia* was a filter of Baker’s teaching through Cressy’s lens. The term ‘Bakerism’ has been used to describe this filtered spirituality, see Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 69–70. The Cambrai and Paris nuns had access to Baker’s original texts. It seems likely from the Hammersmith catalogue that the Dunkirk nuns were also reading ‘unfiltered’ Baker: DAA T VII A h5 (142629).

²⁷³ See Jan Rhodes, ‘What the Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai were Reading’. An unpublished paper given May 2013.

²⁷⁴ Hood, *From Repatriation to Revival*, p. 69–70. See also Alban Hood, ‘Belmont and English Benedictine Further Studies 1860–1901’, a paper given to the EBC History Commission 1997. Hood comments on the later return of the monks, to the English mystical tradition in the 1860s and 70s, p.5. One reason for the slower uptake of Baker studies by the monks was his advocacy of the contemplative life over the mission, for this reason, he was still considered ‘dangerous’ by some in the EBC in the nineteenth century.

²⁷⁵ For a synthesis of Baker’s various reading lists for the nuns see Jan Rhodes: ‘Dom Augustine Baker’s Reading Lists’, *Downside Review*, 3 (1993), pp. 157–73.

²⁷⁶ Although Baker mentioned the Jesuit Rodriguez in his recommended reading, he also complained that Rodriguez was too much used at Cambrai: see Jaime Goodrich, review of Jan Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres Provenant des Religieuses Angloises de Cambrai: Book List of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai, c.1793*, 2014, <https://historyofwomenreligious.org/books-reviews-n-s/>.

²⁷⁷ Continual reading of a 1765 edition of *Imitation of Christ* can be seen at Ghent/Caverswall where three copies show use in the infirmary, noviceship and *ad usum*, a variety of names.

Cloud of Unknowing in any of the second exile lists, neither do the works of Rolle, Henry Suso or Harpius feature. Neither is there a copy of English Capuchin, William Fitch, alias Benet Canfield, whose sixteenth-century *Rule of Perfection* was dedicated to the Brussels Benedictines. Dominican mystic, Johannes Tauler, appears once at Winchester and twice at Hammersmith. Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* appears once at Caverswall and Hammersmith, with three copies at Cannington.

Although Julian of Norwich is not specifically mentioned in Baker's lists, we know a manuscript of her *Revelations* was at Cambrai and influenced the tradition there.²⁷⁸ Neither manuscript nor Cressy's 1670 edition was present later at Salford. Cressy's *Revelations* was at Hammersmith, showing continuity with Dunkirk. A copy was also at Cannington, probably having survived from Paris.

Benedictine abbot and mystic Louis de Blois – Blossius – was recommended by Baker, who quotes him frequently in his treatises. The library at Cambrai had twenty-three copies of Blossius' various texts. Back in England however, only one copy of *Certain Devout Prayers* (1663) is recorded at Salford although this shows considerable use. At Cannington, there were six titles in total and at Hammersmith, a copy of *Priers de Louis de Blois* (1750) was treasured. This apparent decline may be due to lack of availability in England, but Blossius had always been less popular among the nuns than Spanish Dominican, Louis de Granada – recommended only once by Baker for his *Love of God*.²⁷⁹ Jan Rhodes discusses the greater popularity of Granada among English readers as being due to his emphasis on more 'active' ways of living

²⁷⁸ It probably formed the basis for Serenus Cressy's 1670 edition of Julian's *Revelations*. See Scholastica Jacob, 'Julian of Norwich', *Stanbrook Benedictines* (Wass, 2017), pp. 24–7. See also Elizabeth Dutton, 'The Seventeenth Century Manuscript Tradition and the Influence of Augustine Baker', in Liz Herbert McAvoy *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* (Cambridge, 2008) pp. 127–38 and Jaime Goodrich, "'Attend to me": Julian of Norwich, Margaret Gascoigne and Textual Circulation among the Cambrai Benedictines', in James E Kelly, and Susan Royal (eds.) *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 105–22.

²⁷⁹ See Jan Rhodes, 'Blossius and Baker', in Geoffrey Scott (ed.) *Dom Augustine Baker 1557–1641*, pp. 133–52; Alexandra Walsham, 'Luis De Granada's Mission to Protestant England: Translating the Devotional Literature of the Spanish Counter-Reformation', in Teresa Bela, Clarinda Calma and Jolanta Rzegocka (eds.), *Publishing Subversive Texts in Elizabethan England and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 129–54.

the spiritual life, while Blossius was firmly focussed on cultivation of the interior life. This could explain why Granada was more widely read amongst the nuns in England as they juggled the contemplative with an enforced activism. Each community possessed at least one copy of Granada. At Caverswall a copy of *Memorial of a Christian Life*, printed secretly in England in 1599, shows continuity between Ghent and Caverswall and appears well-read.²⁸⁰ The Caverswall copy *Of Prayer and Meditation*, belonged to Dr John Milner, and includes his notes on the author.

Francis de Sales, the ‘Bishop of Geneva’, was also recommended by Baker. De Sales was popular at Cambrai, with forty-six copies of his works in the 1793 *Catalogue*, and this popularity continued in England. Altogether there were fifty-two copies across all five communities. Many, such as the seventeenth-century edition of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* at Hammersmith, show continuity from the pre- to post-Revolution communities and remained popular.²⁸¹ He continued to be read, especially by the lay-sisters. At Salford a seventeenth-century edition of *Devout Life* is bound with another Baker recommendation, *The Communication of Doctor Thaulerus with a Poor Beggar* and inscribed: ‘For the use of Sister Magdil [...] given her by the Poor Clares at Gravielling [sic] 1795. *Prier pour moi*’, ‘*ad usum* Sister Monica’.²⁸² Both Sr Magdalena and Sr Monica were lay-sisters. They preserved the book through the dark days, but it was passed on, possibly when the mystics became fashionable again, to choir nun, ‘Str. M Clare Crilly Salford Dec 1833’.²⁸³

Baker’s most famous *dirigée*, Dame Gertrude More, is not well-represented in England even in her own community.²⁸⁴ After her premature death in 1633, Baker collected her writings and

²⁸⁰ Inscribed in the inside cover ‘D.S. Hall’ and ‘Ds. Clementina’. This suggests ownership by the Hall family through Paula (Barbara) Hall, WWTN GB092. Clementina Adcroft, GB001 may have brought the book from Ghent to England.

²⁸¹ DAA, T VII h2. 1662.

²⁸² A loose note identifies Magdalena Kimberly, WWTN CB11, and Monica as Sr Monica Crookall (1777–1833) It records that Kimberly had been given the book by a Poor Clare of Gravelines.

²⁸³ Clare (Theresa) Crilly, 1772–1851.

²⁸⁴ WWTN CB137.

prayers, and published them together with his biographical *Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More*. Four copies of *The Spiritual Exercises of the most Vertuous and Religious D Gertrude More* and *Ideots Devotion* were at Cannington and one at Hammersmith, showing multiple use.²⁸⁵ Baker himself does still appear in both published form and in manuscripts, but his influence was much less than in earlier years. Only one copy of Cressy's *Sancta Sophia* was held at Salford: the copy had survived from Cambrai and shows continuous use up to 1896 (with an inserted recipe for a laxative).²⁸⁶ At Caverswall two copies show continuity back to Ghent, with continued use in England, one volume being kept in the abbess' library.²⁸⁷ Cannington had four copies with Paris provenance, and Hammersmith one complete copy showing continuity with Dunkirk, and separate volumes of Treatises I and III, with numerous inscribed names.²⁸⁸ The absence of any Baker at Winchester may reflect the spiritual-historical dissonance between Brussels and Cambrai or the loss of their books in the 1960s.²⁸⁹

Evidence from the nuns' libraries in the second exile period suggests that the claim that Baker remained central to their teaching, should be reassessed. While they did preserve Baker manuscripts, he was no longer the main source of inspiration. Loyalty to Bakerite teaching seems to have remained strongest among the lay-sisters. A seventeenth-century edition of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, listed at Hammersmith,²⁹⁰ is shown to have been passed from choir nun Scholastica Jones²⁹¹ to lay-sister Mary Winifred Tobin, who professed at Dunkirk and died at Hammersmith. Tobin is reported to have hidden the community's money

²⁸⁵ Inscribed: 'Dame M Xaveria Pearse' WWTN DB123; 'Sr Mary Winefrede' [Winifrid Tobin] DB174.

²⁸⁶ Margaret Truran, 'The Needs Father Baker was Trying to Meet' in M Woodward (ed), *That Mysterious Man* pp. 70–81, suggests this shows the book was 'not gathering dust on a library shelf' but was 'readily to hand and well used, without scruple'. It could equally be argued that the forgotten recipe reflects lack of use – or a wry comment on the contents.

²⁸⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests that by the nineteenth-century in some communities (male and female) Baker was considered inappropriate for novices and often kept in the superior's library, largely because his insistence that no teacher or book should be preferred to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was considered to undermine monastic obedience in the understanding of the young.

²⁸⁸ DAA, Hammersmith Box T VII A h5, Book Lists and Reading Catalogue of MSS (143415).

²⁸⁹ See above, p. 190, note 19.

²⁹⁰ DDA, T VII A h5 (143415).

²⁹¹ WWTN DB088.

in a dustpan during their imprisonment at Gravelines; possibly the book was of such value to her that she guarded it in a comparable manner.²⁹² Tobin's name also appears in a seventeenth-century copy of *The Spiritual Exercises of the most Vertuous and Religious D. Gertrude More* which was subsequently passed on to another lay-sister, 'Mary Austin' (Abbot). Similarly, the *Revelations of Mother Julian* at Hammersmith was brought from Dunkirk and kept *ad usum* by lay-sister Agnes Bend.

The nuns' reading evolved and was particularly influenced by Continental authors. Geoffrey Scott observed: 'There is evidence that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Fenelon's teaching was infiltrating into strongholds of Bakerism like Cambrai'.²⁹³ Fenelon was in many ways the natural successor to Baker. The archbishop of Cambrai was a staunch defender of female mystical tradition, supporting Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon against accusations of Quietism.²⁹⁴ He was certainly read at Cambrai although his *Maxims of the Saints* (1688), placed on the Index, was not among their collection and neither was *Les Aventures de Telemaque* – a work seen as challenging monarchical absolutism and a call for religious tolerance.²⁹⁵ In England Fenelon was represented in four of the five communities' libraries.²⁹⁶ Possibly his popularity had waned or editions were more difficult to obtain.

The controversy surrounding Quietism in the late seventeenth century saw Fenelon defending the interior, contemplative way against Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, who viewed it as undermining traditional Church authority and practices. If Fenelon represented 'meditative interiority' and Bossuet 'Church-based devotional practices',²⁹⁷ the nuns drew from both and

²⁹² WWTN DB174.

²⁹³ Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone*, p. 129.

²⁹⁴ One copy of *L'ame amante de son Dieu, représentée dans les emblems* by J-M B de la Motte Guyon is listed at Cannington. A *Short and Easy Method of Prayer* by Madam de la Mothe Guion [Motte-Guyon] was also at Caverswall.

²⁹⁵ There were twenty-one volumes of Fenelon's works at Cambrai as well as two copies of Alexander Ramsay's 'Life', see Rhodes, *Catalogue des Livres*.

²⁹⁶ Six at Cannington (including *Education of a Daughter*, 1805 edition) and one each at the others. Winchester may well have also had copies before the loss of their books, see fn. 18 above. Chevalier Ramsay's *Travels of Cyrus* based on Fenelon's *Tales of Telemachus* was at Salford.

²⁹⁷ Anna Battigelli, 'Fenelonian Reform', p. 202.

thus steered away from charges of Quietism. There were fourteen volumes of Bossuet at Cambrai, but only three copies in England – all at Cannington. That may indicate the return of the nuns to the mystical tradition. Fenelon has been described as ‘one of the iconic figures of the French Enlightenment’²⁹⁸ and yet his role in the revival of the medieval tradition of contemplative mysticism must also be recognised and counted alongside that of Baker and the Cambrai nuns. Evidence from Benedictine reading in England challenges the assumption that Enlightenment was ‘a wholesale severance with the past’,²⁹⁹ and shows it to be a more multivalent phenomenon.

The Nuns’ book lists reveal that by the mid-eighteenth century the French school of spirituality – with authors such as Henri-Marie Boudon and Louis Bourdaloue – abounded. A recurring theme of the school was that the search for God requires detachment from all creatures – ‘God Alone’ was Boudon’s motto – which, in essence, differed little from the teaching of Augustine Baker a century earlier.³⁰⁰

Comparison of Nuns’ Reading

There is a high degree of coherence between the English nuns’ libraries and those of other women religious, once again demonstrating the convents were transnational textual communities. While some differences between Orders are apparent, the book collections contain similar works.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 203

²⁹⁹ Ibid p. 203.

³⁰⁰ See Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, p.11.

Popular Authors Pre-and Post-Migration in English and French Book Lists³⁰¹

Author	Cambrai 1793.	All Benedictine Nuns Lists in England c. 1840	Augustian Canonesses' Lists c. 1840	<i>Bibliothèque des Filles du Coeur de Marie</i> 1849	At St Edmund's, Paris
Gother, John	90	64	1	0	25–30
Avrillon, Jean Baptiste	90	34	0	2	0
de Sales, Francis	78	52	4	6	15
Thomas à Kempis	55 ³⁰²	51	4	1	30+
Augustine St	51	33	9	0	30+
Challoner, Richard	45	42	5	0	3
Thomé de Jesus	30	23	4	3* ³⁰³	6
Granada, Luis de	30	14	2	2	25–30
Teresa of Avila	29	23	10	0	5
Puente, L (du Pont)	24	4	6	1*	9
Crasset, J	19	16	11	2*	3
Rodriguez, A	19	30	11	3*	14
Scupoli, L	18	42	0	0 ³⁰⁴	6
Boudon, H M	14	10	6		4
Bourdaloue	9	42	2	6*	1
Caussin, J	7	7	4	0	12
Nepveu, Francois	6	4	4	7	1
Ignatius	0	3	4	0	0

In this comparison only the Cambrai convent has a significant surviving catalogue but it is taken as representative of all the Benedictine convents for the pre-1795 period. The authors chosen are those who were most popular across all the collections. The table shows that the traditionally read titles by Gother, Challoner, Augustine, Teresa of Avila were still popular in England. A growing interest in Continental spiritual writers is reflected in the acquisition of

³⁰¹ These have been selected because they represent different Orders, nationalities and spiritualities. The Liège Canonesses' book collection is held in Special Collections, Palace Green Library at Durham University. I am grateful to Cormac Begadon for a copy of the list and to Sarah Barthélemy for making the *Filles du Coeur de Marie* catalogue available to me.

³⁰² Several entries are listed as 'in many editions'.

³⁰³ Two are mentioned in *le Manuel à l'usage des filles de la société du Coeur de Marie*, 1818, see Barthélemy, 'Lectures de Religieuses de la Contre-Révolution', p. 29, but do not appear in the actual catalogue.

³⁰⁴ One mention in *le Manuel à l'usage* but no copies in catalogue.

more copies of Rodriguez and Scupoli. The books of the English Augustinian Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre (Sepulchrines) from Liège, who arrived England in 1794, reveal a rather different emphasis. Their Ignatian charism is reflected in the books which include four copies of the complete *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. In contrast, there were no complete copies at Cambrai³⁰⁵, only two at Cannington, one at Caverswall and none at the other Benedictine houses. Francis Xavier also features prominently in the Augustinian list, with twelve copies of *An Instruction to Performe with Fruit the Devotion of Ten Fridays in Honour of S Francis Xaverius* and three copies of *Manner of Performing the Novena or, the Nine Days Devotion to St. Francis Xaverius*. While there is no record of the former in any Benedictine possession, there were four copies of the *Nine Days* at Caverswall, which appear to have been well used: one was kept in the abbess' library and the others contain inscriptions and show continuity of ownership. *Lives* and *Exercises* of another popular Jesuit, Aloysius Gonzaga were present among the Canonesses' list (thirty volumes in total), but only two in the Benedictine collections.³⁰⁶ The Sepulchrines showed little interest in Benedictine spirituality, although they did have a copy of the *Rule*, Baker's *Sancta Sophia* and *Spiritual Exercise of the Most Vertvovs and Religious D. Gertrude More*. That devotion to the Sacred Heart was present among English nuns before its more general popularity in England in the nineteenth century is demonstrated by twenty-one books on the devotion (including office books) at New Hall, the oldest of which is dated 1765. There were eighteen in the Benedictines' collections, mostly from the mid-eighteenth century, although the earliest, a manuscript, is dated 1733.

As the English nuns' fidelity to the traditional English mystical writers appears to have waned so their devotion to, and consumption of, contemporary French spiritual texts, developed. That this was a transnational trend is confirmed by Sarah Barthélemy's study of the

³⁰⁵ A manual by Villacastin 'drawne for the most part out of the spirituall exercises of B. F. Ignatius' was present and another book of 'extracts'. There were also two 'lives' of Ignatius.

³⁰⁶ *S. Aloysius Gonzaga proposed as a model of a holy life* by P de Mattei, 1751, at Cannington.

library of the *Filles du Coeur de Marie*.³⁰⁷ This community was founded in Paris in 1791 to defend the faith against the onslaughts of Revolution and Enlightenment, and thus has resonances with the English convents' *raison d'être* and spirituality. A comparison between the Benedictine book lists, pre- and- post 1795, and the *Bibliothèque des Filles du Coeur de Marie*, 1849,³⁰⁸ reveals significant similarities. In all three collections, French authors from the Counter-Reformation period dominate, with Francis de Sales being most popular followed by French Jesuits Louis Bourdaloue, Thomé de Jesu, Jean Crasset and Henri-Marie Boudon. Crasset was favoured at Hammersmith with a translation of his *Christian in Solitude* made in 1835, by Sr Agnes Philipe, and two French manuscript copies, with signs of good usage, including retreat notes, from the 1820s.³⁰⁹ Bourdaloue was prescribed reading for aspirants to the *Filles du Coeur de Marie*. His writings were introduced to England in the eighteenth century by missionaries and became popular transnational texts. Mary Clare Callaghan of the Presentation Convent, Cork wrote to Teresa Shuttleworth at Caverswall in some detail on Bourdaloue's teaching on the interior life, the Sacred Heart and prayer.³¹⁰ The ubiquitous Luis de Granada, Alfonso Rodriguez and Thomas á Kempis also shared popularity across the collections. Richard Challoner and John Gother do not appear at all in the French list.

A slightly different prioritisation may be seen in the book list of the monks of St Edmund's. This reflects the university education of the majority of the EBC monks.³¹¹ The most popular authors in the St Edmund's list, with more than thirty entries, are Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Bellamine, Thomas à Kempis and Augustine.³¹² While Cicero appears thirty-five times at Cambrai, with a further five mentions in collected works, he only features twice in the English

³⁰⁷ Barthélemy, 'Lectures de Religieuses de la Contre-Révolution'.

³⁰⁸ Now kept in the old library of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary in Paris.

³⁰⁹ Agnes Philipe, 1794–1853. DAA, T VII A h5 (143443).

³¹⁰ DAA, BO IV D Box 2, General (151341). The letter dated 1812, is apparently part of on-going communication revealing links between Irish and English communities, although the Presentation archives at Cork do not contain any other correspondence. I am grateful to Sisters Rosarie and Mary O'Brien, PBVM, for their assistance.

³¹¹ See Hood, 'Belmont and English Benedictine Further Studies', p. 1.

³¹² St Edmund's Abbey Book Collection: <http://www.douaiabbey.org.uk>.

nuns' lists – both at Cannington. Aquinas only gets one mention in England and none at Cambrai. The next most popular at St Edmunds, between twenty-five and thirty mentions, are Becanus, none in England, one at Cambrai; Gother; Granada; Aristotle, one at Cambrai, none in England; and Erasmus, none in Cambrai or England. Not surprisingly, given the monks' formal theological education, patristic authors are also more prominent, as are scholastics such as Peter Lombard.

A full list of the Irish Dominican nuns' library at Bom Sucesso in Belém, Lisbon, founded 1639, is available online and shows a preponderance of biography, history and devotion/prayer books, followed by catechisms, manuals and liturgical books.³¹³ It has not been included in the table above, as its different construction would require separate analysis.³¹⁴ It holds a significant literature section with the majority of authors from the last two hundred years, reflecting the wider acceptance of secular reading in the later nineteenth century.³¹⁵ While English predominates, French is also well represented and other languages include Portuguese, Italian, German and Spanish. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is apparent with six *Lives* of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, as well as manuals. Differences in spirituality are noticeable: Francis de Sales, the great favourite among the Benedictines, appears at Bom Sucesso only in later editions. Unsurprisingly, Dominican St Thomas Aquinas is well represented, whereas there was only one – possibly not complete – *Summa Theologica*, at Winchester. Perhaps more unexpectedly, Rodriguez only appears in the Lisbon list in editions from the mid-nineteenth century. All five volumes of Jesuit Nicholas Caus[s]in's *The Holy Court* (1663),³¹⁶ are in the Bom Sucesso list and the work remained popular with the Benedictines in England, with copies

³¹³ <http://35.180.65.126/Pacweb/Search.aspx>. I am indebted to Mary O'Byrne, OP, Congregational Archivist, who compiled the list with colleague, Maria Manuela Costa, for her advice and information on this detailed resource. See in particular, her 'Overview of the Bom Sucesso Archival Library' on the website. The Irish nuns left Lisbon in 2016 and their book collection, of over 3,000 volumes, is now housed in the library of the Dominican friars in Benfica, Portugal.

³¹⁴ It also covers a significantly longer period.

³¹⁵ The Benedictines' libraries for the later period reveal a similar growth as discussed above.

³¹⁶ ESTC R226890.

at Salford, Caverswall and Cannington. The Caverswall edition, 1663, came from Ghent and was kept (and presumably read aloud) in the refectory. Granada's *Libro de la Oracion y Meditacion* was at Lisbon and Winchester, Cannington and Caverswall (from Ghent). The latter contains notes on Granada in the hand of Bishop John Milner suggesting he donated it, and possibly taught from it, during his visits to the convent.³¹⁷

A comparison of the Benedictine collections and these two Continental libraries from different religious traditions, shows that the English Benedictines, in their *lectio*, were firmly set in a contemporary, transnational Catholic *milieu* which transcended national identities. They participated fully in the evolving cultural and spiritual climate of post-Revolutionary, post-Enlightenment Europe. In England they continued to identify themselves not only as English but as part of the Universal Church through their reading and writing. On the Continent the convents had been transnational textual communities which, although they were 'self-consciously English, [...] operated within a European Tridentine culture'.³¹⁸ This continued to be the case after migration to England; their self-awareness was firmly located in Continental Catholic identity. Book lists reveal a growing adherence to Continental devotional practices and an initial shift to more activist and discursive prayer, reflecting the nuns' enforced need to live a less contemplative way of life in the second exile.

Gender

Books and Manuscripts by or about Women in the Collections

Category	Volumes by or about Women ³¹⁹
Liturgy	4
Lives	53
Manuals	3
Devotional & Spiritual	33
Monastic	10
Other	16
Total	119

³¹⁷ 1612 edition.

³¹⁸ Bowden, *Building Libraries in Exile*, p. 350.

³¹⁹ This is the actual number of copies held, it may include numerous copies of a single title.

As communities of women, many of whom produced their own writings and translations, there are few books by or about women in their collections. Of the 119 titles, the majority are classic lives popular in all religious houses, male and female. Major Counter-Reformation saint Teresa of Avila is well-represented, with multiple copies of all her works.³²⁰ Catherine of Genoa, Catherine of Siena, St Clare, St Margaret of Scotland, St Elizabeth of Hungary and St Bridget of Sweden are also represented. The enduring influence of Gertrude the Great is seen with various copies of her *Exercises* and *Insinuations de la divine piété* (1671)³²¹ and J G Ryckel's *Historia S Gertrudis* (1637).³²² Martyrdom features as a theme again with two copies of the *vita* of Welsh virgin martyr St Winefrede,³²³ and the anonymous *Histoire de la Conversion de Ste Pélagie* (1705) at Hammersmith.

Counter-Reformation hagiographies of enclosed women would have resonated with the English nuns and volumes reflect their adherence to the contemporary French school of spirituality, focusing on abandonment of the will to 'God alone' as the road to sanctity. Titles include lives of 'Ste Agnez de Monpolitien',³²⁴ 'Soeur Marguerite du S. Sacrement',³²⁵ Marie Angélique de la Providence ou l'amour de Dieu³²⁶ and Michel-Ange Marin's aspirational texts for women: *Agnez de Saint Amour, ou la Fervente Novice* and *La Parfaite Religieuse*. The 'Life' of Benedictine nun Catherine de Bar, otherwise known as Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament, was read at Cannington and Hammersmith, both of which communities were to adopt Perpetual Adoration in the nineteenth century.³²⁷

³²⁰ As well as Richard Challoner's 'Life' and John Milner's compilation *Meditations: The Exclamations of the Soul to God, or the Meditations of St Teresa after Communion* (London, 1810).

³²¹ 1671.

³²² At Hammersmith, Cannington and Caverswall.

³²³ J. Falconer, 1635.

³²⁴ J Roux, 1735.

³²⁵ D Amelotte, SJ, 1655.

³²⁶ Henri Boudon, 1760.

³²⁷ *Vie de la vénérable Mère Catherine de Bar, dite en religion Mechtilde du S Sacrement, Institutrice des Religieuses de l'Adoration perpetuelle* by abbé Dunquesne, 1775.

As already noted, the *Life of Princess Louisa of France, a Carmelite Nun* by Abbé L B Proyard, was also extremely popular among the nuns.³²⁸ This account of an exemplary woman who relinquished a life of riches to seek God before all else in the enclosure, which is highly critical of Revolutionary and Enlightenment ideas, would have resonated with the English nuns' experience on many levels. The preface echoes the migration narratives as it recounts the 'most unexpected events' of recent years, and comments that 'in a single day we seem to have lived more than a century'. It continues to reflect on the 'precarious existence of communities of women in France' and to decry the 'so-called equalities of the "Rights of Man" [which are] proclaimed with emphasis through the French empire' but which are 'denied to all religious'. It goes on to cite the promulgation of 'laws which promise liberty to all' in contrast with 'a law which deprives many people of their liberty.'³²⁹ These observations echo the personal experience and sentiments of the English nuns' accounts of, and reaction to, the Revolution.

Inspirational English women's lives which paralleled the nuns' experiences were of particular interest, as illustrated by manuscripts of the 'Life' of English discalced Carmelite, Catherine Burton, Mother Xaveria of the Angels (1668–1714), who travelled from Suffolk to the Spanish Netherlands to enter the Antwerp Carmel. A collection from her writings was made by Thomas Hunter SJ in 1723, but remained in manuscript until 1876 when it was edited and published by Henry James Coleridge, SJ.³³⁰ At least one copy of Hunter's manuscript was at Hammersmith and was copied by Thaise English in 1838.³³¹ Burton's life, reflecting that of the Benedictine foundresses, was clearly inspirational for the nineteenth-century nuns. Another example of total self-giving which inspired the nuns, was Edward Scarisbrick's *Life and History of Lady Warner*, printed secretly in 1691, which continued to be widely read by English

³²⁸ Above, p. 216. See also Kelly, 'Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity', p. 349–50.

³²⁹ Proyard, *The Life of Madame Louise*, pp. ix–xii.

³³⁰ (London, 1876). The edition was published from a manuscript at Laherne Carmel, Cornwall (formerly Antwerp) but this Hammersmith manuscript reveals these nuns also contributed to a revival of interest in Burton.

³³¹ DAA, T VII A h5 (142729) and T IV 4 (134226).

religious.³³² Geoffrey Scott has commented: ‘To a Protestant readership, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the story must have been shocking and disturbing’.³³³ Scott is writing about the Glorious Revolution, 1688–9, but the sentiments may equally be applied to the French Revolutionary period a hundred years later. Another English convert’s story is recounted in Ann Bedingfeld’s *A Short account of the life and virtues of the venerable and religious mother, Mary of the Holy Cross, abbess of the English Poor Clares at Rouen*.³³⁴ This tells of her journey to the Continent, as companion of a Protestant lady, and subsequent conversion following a visit to a French monastery. As already noted, the Bedingfeld/Jerningham family were intimately linked with the English convents on the Continent and in England.

Continuing the theme of female agency exercised through prayer and innocence is *Trois Heroines Chretienne* with copies at Salford and Cannington.³³⁵ The work is an early example of the French genre of lives of holy children which was to become popular later in the century. It details the lives of ordinary young women who died at an early age after living holy but uneventful lives. On a more proactive level, from Brussels/Winchester, *Relations sur la Vie de la Reverende Mère Angélique de Sainte Magdalaine Arnauld* by Arnauld, D’Andilly, celebrates the life of the reforming Port Royal superior who took on the ecclesiastical authorities in the Jansenist controversies.³³⁶ This however, was held up not as a model but rather a warning to the nuns and a note inside cautions: ‘A Jansenistical book, to be heartily anathematised by all Catholics but may be read as a study and lesson! Francis de Sales’ “Letters” should be read at the same time’.³³⁷ That the volume was preserved and brought to

³³² ESTC: R22893, R21474, R29623, T167610. Warner and her husband converted to Catholicism, separated, and both entered religious life on the Continent.

³³³ Geoffrey Scott, ‘Cloistered Images: Representations of English nuns, 1600–1800’, in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham, 2013), p. 199.

³³⁴ 1767, ESTC T69975. Copies of the text were at Winchester, Caverswall (novitiate) and Cannington.

³³⁵ G. T. N. Carron (Paris, 1801).

³³⁶ It was never placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

³³⁷ Although the nuns at Paris had links with the Port Royal community, there is no record of a Brussels connection. See Ruth Clark, *Strangers and Sojourners at Port Royal* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 68–74.

England suggests the nuns were aware of the pitfalls of error, particularly in the English exile, and used this text to teach key theological issues. Conversely, its presence may suggest an expression of solidarity with women whose views were suppressed. Another ‘dangerous’ book was *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* by Madam de la Mothe Guion [Motte-Guyon] at Caverswall, which contains the inscribed warning: ‘This book is believed to contain Quietism and is better not read’. It is significant that, while noting their unorthodoxy, the nuns preserved these works by women who challenged the theological status quo.³³⁸ As the nuns would have recognised, there is nothing in Motte-Guyon’s work which is at odds with Baker’s teaching.³³⁹

Secular, proto-feminist, literature is absent from the collections. There is no Mary Wollstonecraft or Helen Maria Williams, although two books by Mary Astell had been in the Cambrai collection.³⁴⁰ These were not re-acquired in England, probably because the priority was for replacing religious texts, their presence at Cambrai however, reveals the nuns’ progressive interest in educational and social opportunities for women. Their activities in England testify that this commitment continued.

Language

Convents were ‘transnational textual communities’ and this is reflected in the languages represented in their libraries.³⁴¹

Breakdown of Volumes by Language

SECTION	Winchester	Salford	Caverswall	Cannington	Hammersmith	Total
Liturgy						
French	2	1	3	12	5	23

³³⁸ DAA, Rare books, Oulton 5, Thomas Digby Brooke (trans.), *A short and easy method of prayer*. Translated from the French of Madam J. M. B. de la Mothe Guion (London, 1775). Motte-Guyon, was imprisoned on first publication in 1695 but released after issuing a retraction of certain statements in the book, which prevented it being placed on the Index. The revised version was in the nuns’ collection.

³³⁹ See above, pp. 239.

³⁴⁰ *A serious proposal to the ladies for the advancement of their true and greatest interest by a lover of her sexe*. (London, 1697), ESTC R213568 and *Reflexions upon marriage* (London, 1706), T150007. See Alice Sowaal and Penny A Weiss, *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell* (Pennsylvania, 2016).

³⁴¹ Bowden, *Building Libraries in Exile*, p. 350.

SECTION	Winchester	Salford	Caverswall	Cannington	Hammersmith	Total
Latin	24	2	26	33	33	118
Latin & French	1	1		2	5	9
Lives						
French	17	2	22	53	12	106
Latin	13			3		16
Italian				8		8
Scripture						
French	15	1	19	13	2	50
Greek				1		1
Hebrew					1	1
Latin	3 ³⁴²	2	6	12	3	27
Manuals						
French				12	1	13
Gaelic & Latin			1			1
Latin				3		3
Devotional & Spirituality						
French	12	19	17	372	92	512
Greek				2		2
Italian				8	2	10
Latin	2		1	25	7	35
Latin & Greek		1				
Latin & Gaelic			1			
History (Church & Secular)						
French	8		8	45	3	64
Italian			1	2		2
Latin	1			3		4
Monastic Rules						
French	7	5	10	15	2	39
Italian			1			1
Latin	2		3	3	1	9
Literature						
French			1	14		15
Italian				2		2
Latin			1	6		7
French Revolution						
French				4	1	5
Natural history, Sciences						
French			1	21		22
Italian			1	2		3
Latin			2	2		4
Portuguese				1		1
Dictionaries						
French			1	10		11
French & Latin				2		2
French & Spanish					1	1
Italian			2			2
Latin			1	1		2
Spanish					2	2

³⁴² Multiple copies of psalters not included.

Reflecting the national make-up and culture of the convents, English is the predominant language in all subjects.³⁴³ Nonetheless, the book lists reveal that the communities continued to embrace transnational Catholic texts in their reading in England: French being the second most represented language. As Caroline Bowden has pointed out, knowledge of French was not a requirement for English women joining the convents on the Continent, although some did teach the language in their novitiates.³⁴⁴ Altogether there are 571 French volumes listed at Colwich, 118 at Hammersmith, eighty-eight at Caverswall, sixty-one at Winchester; and twenty-eight at Salford.³⁴⁵ The high number at Colwich reflects not only that they have the most surviving books but also that long-term chaplain, French émigré priest Abbé Premord, had a large library which he shared with the community. Moreover, being based in Paris, they may have had access to more books and been the most Francophone community. Their French books are largely devotional subjects, followed by exemplary lives and history. Volumes include *Théologie de l'amour ou la vie de Sainte Catherine* (1691) with a note: 'donated by a French Countess'.³⁴⁶ They also possessed fourteen volumes of literature including a French translation of Cervante's *Histoire de l'admirable Don Quichotte* and Fontaine's *Fables*. The Colwich and Hammersmith nuns appear to have done much of their *lectio* in French. Titles include such classics as the *Exercices de Ste Gertrude*, the *Conferences de Cassian*, works by Louis Blosius, Francis de Sales, Crasset, Fenelon, Boudon and French versions of Teresa of Avila, Bernard, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyprian and John of the Cross.

³⁴³ For discussion of the subject of language, see James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe c.1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 10–12. The monks of St Edmunds had a rather different linguistic breakdown with nearly half their 'Libri Pi' category being in French; one quarter in Latin and one quarter in English. www.douaiabbey.org.uk/st-edmund/summary-description-and-analysis.

³⁴⁴ See Bowden, 'Building Libraries in Exile', p. 650 and 'Convent Schooling for English Girls in the Exile Period 1600-1800', *Studies in Church History* 55 (2019), pp. 177–204 especially pp.182–3; Emilie Murphy, 'Language and Power in an English Convent in Exile, c.1621–1631', *The Historical Journal*, 62 (2019), pp. 101–25. Although recent work has shown the greater permeability of the enclosure walls, there is no evidence that the Benedictines sent their postulants to French convents to learn the language as the Bruges Canonesses did.

³⁴⁵ These figures do not include bi-lingual texts. The figures are for actual books listed not titles.

³⁴⁶ CAA, volume inscribed 'STC' (Teresa Cook), WWTN PB023.

Latin is represented in many of the categories and seems adequately read at all the communities, although little data survives for Winchester. Texts include pastoral letters, Augustine, Blosius, and Teresa of Avila. A *Bona Mors* at Salford shows good use, as do Latin copies of *De Imitatione Christi*. Latin appears under-represented in the Liturgy section. This can be explained by the fact that, while the nuns recited the Office and heard Mass in Latin, their choir books would not be included in the library lists. That Latin was becoming less widely read by the nuns of the late eighteenth-century is suggested in a letter from Margaret Burgess at Cambrai to EBC president Augustine Walker in 1784: ‘were I as young as I have been I should have no greater pleasure than learn my Latin Grammer, however thank God I understand this: *melior est obedienciae quam victoria* which I may perfectly practice’.³⁴⁷ Levels of Latin scholarship fell further after arrival in England and, later in the century, Laurence Shepherd had to conduct Latin classes for the nuns at Stanbrook Abbey to enable them to participate in the revival of monastic observance.³⁴⁸

Other languages which appear in the reading lists are Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek and Hebrew (a Bible at Hammersmith). The practice of nuns proficient in languages making translations available for their sisters continued in England.³⁴⁹ Despite having very few Irish members, Gaelic appears at Caverswall in a Latin-Gaelic catechism: *Suim bhunudhasach an teaguisg*, and a Latin *De Imitatione Christi*, with Gaelic notes and inscriptions.³⁵⁰ The range of language texts reveals the communities’ on-going connectedness with global Catholicism and their Continental roots in the new exile.

³⁴⁷ ADN, Lille Folder 1 031. MIM 175. WWTN CB022.

³⁴⁸ Dom Laurence Shepherd, 1826–85, was chaplain at Stanbrook Abbey from 1863–1885, see, Anon, *In a Great Tradition*, pp. 116–17.

³⁴⁹ See Bowden, ‘Building Libraries in Exile’, p. 350.

³⁵⁰ The book is *Suim bhunudhasach an Teaguisg Chriosdaidhe* and was published by the Franciscans in Louvain (1667). It is a summary of basic doctrine and was written for priests and friars engaged in catechizing/preaching. There were two nuns of Irish origin at Ghent who may have been responsible for acquiring the books. My thanks to John O’Brien for help in identifying the book.

Copying/Writing by the Nuns

For Benedictines writing was as much part of *lectio divina* as reading. Copying, translating, and writing their own meditations continued in the new exile, despite the constraints of time and space: the cell became the scriptorium. In the new exile the nuns composed, translated and transcribed for their own spiritual nourishment, although their work has not yet reached a wider audience.³⁵¹ That the texts were shared with, and became treasured possessions of, the wider community can be seen from the ‘Catalogue of Manuscripts’ from Hammersmith.³⁵² The first half of the catalogue is given over entirely to manuscripts – the majority scribed by the nuns. It is divided into sections headed ‘Aesthetic Reading’ (twenty-two), ‘Retreats’ (five), ‘Meditations’ (eight), ‘Biography’ (seven), ‘Devotions’ (ten) and ‘Miscellaneous’(five), although manuscripts also appear in other sections with printed works. Each of these sections contains a mixture of translations, transcriptions and, apparently, original works. Sermons and retreats were valued, copied and circulated: for example, ‘Sermons by the Rev. Joseph Beck, written up by Dame M Gertrude Sweeney’³⁵³; ‘On Purgatory’ [copied by] Dame Mary Joseph Butler³⁵⁴; ‘On Miracles – Extracts of Sermons by Fr Collingridge’ [copied by] Dame Mary Michael Little.³⁵⁵ Interestingly, in this Jesuit-influenced house, Augustine Baker’s works were preserved with copies of ‘*De Custodia Cordis*’, ‘The Mirror of Patience and Resignation’ ‘Directions for Contemplation’ and ‘Spirit of St Benedict’s Rule Upon the 12 Degrees of Humility’ being attributed to him. Perhaps reflecting the change of educational ability and lack of French literacy in the community, translations were made of Crasset’s ‘Christian in Solitude’ (1836),³⁵⁶ Pissamonte’s ‘The Nun in Solitude’ (1839),³⁵⁷ ‘Meditations from Various Authors

³⁵¹ All the collections contain a range of original compositions, poems, theological reflections and translations which are worthy of further historiographical, literary and spiritual attention.

³⁵² DAA T VII A h5.

³⁵³ Gertrude Sweeney, 1819–59.

³⁵⁴ Joseph Butler, 1797–1864.

³⁵⁵ Bernadine Collingridge died in 1829, but his teaching continued to be valued and copied.

³⁵⁶ By Agnes Philipe, 1794–1853.

³⁵⁷ By Stanislaus Spencer, 1781–63.

for the Feast of Our Holy Father and for that of Our Holy Mother'³⁵⁸ and, reflecting popular devotions, 'Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, translated from the *Annee Eucharistique*' and 'Devotion to the Sacred Heart'. The nuns were also penning original meditations: 'Meditations written by Dame M Gertrude Sweeney', in English and Latin; 'Meditations, the letters and the writings of Dame M Stanislaus Spencer' (two copies) and composing their own prayers: 'Prayers by M. Agnes', 1773³⁵⁹ and 'Prayers by Dame M Placida Shea'.³⁶⁰ Not all these manuscripts have survived.

At Caverswall meditations and retreats were copied out by hand, and many had been brought from Ghent, e.g., a manuscript of Blosius' 'Rule of a Spiritual Life' copied by Flavia Tempest³⁶¹ which seems to have had continual use.³⁶² These were read aloud to the sisters in the evenings for reflection overnight a practice which, according to Veronica Buss, continued until recent times.³⁶³ The Colwich archives hold a significant collection of manuscripts.³⁶⁴ While the majority date back to the pre-migration period we can see a revival of interest in these older texts: a nineteenth-century copy was made of versions of Dame Pudentiana Deacon's *Mantle of the Spouse*.³⁶⁵ More recent tradition was preserved in 'Prayers and devotions of Mother Mary Joseph Clare Bond'.³⁶⁶ The Rule continued to be studied and Dame Austen Welch copied a 'Commentary on the Rule of our Holy Father St Benedict, literal, historical & moral by Dom Calmet'.³⁶⁷ Contemporary meditations and translations were made by Dame Teresa Johnson who helped preserve the mystical/contemplative practices at

³⁵⁸ By Joseph Butler.

³⁵⁹ Probably lay-sister Agnes Morgan, WWTN OBO80.

³⁶⁰ Placida Shea, 1808–61.

³⁶¹ WWTN GB219.

³⁶² DAA, BO IV A Box 3. Inscribed 'Library Caverswall Castle 1819'.

³⁶³ DAA BO V d5 (095834 & 095729). Dame Veronica Buss, notes on history of Caverswall.

³⁶⁴ These have been examined and listed by Dr Jan Rhodes.

³⁶⁵ CAA MS 44, WWTN BB058. She also translated Francis de Sales *Delicious Entertainments of the Soul* (1632).

³⁶⁶ CAA, MSS 65 and 66 dated 1779 and 1762. Manuscript commonplace books containing a mixture of her own prayers and copied texts. They have been examined and partly transcribed by Jan Rhodes.

³⁶⁷ CAA, MS 61B. Austen Welch [Welsh], professed 1826. This practical guide contains references to EBC practice, the writings of the Fathers and Lady Warner's *Guide to the Mass*. It was well used and includes a loose drawing of St Benedict inscribed 'to Str M. Stanislaus from Str Teresa Gertrude Tempest, 1840'.

Cannington.³⁶⁸ A fragment provides insight to adjustments needed in the new exile, an envelope addressed to Str M. Austin [Welch] reads:

That ven/ble internal liver Rev Fr Baker says that among women there can scarce be any recreation if the tongue is too much stinted. He then gives direction how to keep the tongue within the bounds of moderation. He was so kind to his Nuns as to compose verses occasionally for their recreation hours of which the inclosed is a sample.³⁶⁹

The composition of verses, following the model of Baker's doggerel, continued in some of the houses. A manuscript from Caverswall reveals the voice of exile in a book of extracts with continuity from Ghent.³⁷⁰ The final page chronicles the first and last days at Ghent with the words: 'The first Mass was said in our Convent in GHant [sic] on the 18th Day of January 1624. Left Ghant June 23rd 1794'. Scribbled around the page are the following prayers:

God and myself
nothing els
I bid adieu
to all the rest

And, in a different hand:

My Hart is thine, its powers then fill
Consume what ere resists thy will.
Think Little Speak Little
 Love Much
Do Much Suffer Much³⁷¹

These sentiments, in their simplicity, give the impression of being scribbled in a moment of crisis. They sum up the deep renunciation and acceptance that represents the second-exile spirituality of the nuns. Earlier in the manuscript a 'Preparatory Meditation' intensifies this

³⁶⁸ CAA, MSS 67 and 75.

³⁶⁹ CAA, Fragment MS 8/1.

³⁷⁰ The meditation may have been written while still in Ghent or shortly after the nuns' arrival in England. DAA, BO IV A Box 4, G63 (162405ff).

³⁷¹ DAA, BO IV A Box 4, G63 (163301).

trope. It is cited at length as it uses powerful metaphors for the exile experience: longing expressed in terms of a journey through the desert and the purifying fire of the bush. The author urges the reader/herself to:

Enter into the Desert at Sinai [...] with the dispositions of humility [...] obedience and fidelity [...] there are trials to be undergone, combats to be sustained, difficulties to be surmounted, temptations to be overcome and passions to be rooted out. Silence, solitude, mortification, continual prayer [are the only tools] to help master these. Then you will hear (as Moses did in the bush) ‘the voice of your heavenly spouse who speaks unto your heart’.³⁷²

Biblical imagery of the Exodus was also used by the Winchester chronicler to describe the second exile as ‘a Red Sea of suffering’.³⁷³ The language of captivity and release – and the differing inter-generational perceptions – can be seen in the Caverswall annalist’s description of the move from Preston, and comparison of the response of the new sisters, who ‘delighted’ at the: ‘change from the crowded town house to the comparatively spacious residence at Caverswall’ with that of the older ones who complained that: ‘the whole castle might stand in the refectory at Ghent’. She concludes: ‘It was like the young Israelites after the Babylonian captivity rejoicing at the erection of the second temple, while the old men wept at the recollection of the first’.³⁷⁴

The second-exile writings reveal a different experience of persecution which, from the 1790s, was articulated by a distinct self-perception and mode of relatedness; less directed to active outreach and commitment to preserving Catholicism in England, and more towards a personal expression of collective suffering and displacement. Acceptance and self-renunciation were widely prayed for by the nuns. A poem, ‘On Holy Indifference’, by Sr Mary Agnes of Rome, written in 1820, sums up the exilic disposition of acceptance of suffering for God:

³⁷² DAA, BO IV A Box 4, G63 (162405).

³⁷³ Anon, *Chronicles*, p. 229.

³⁷⁴ Anon, *Annals*, p.103.

“Let me suffer or die” did a holy soul cry
“Let me suffer not die” did another saint sigh [...]
I shall live without joy, I shall die without pain
What is sent by my Lord I equally take [...]
Bereft of all comfort in Thee I rejoice
For dead to this world I shall live to my God [...]
‘Let me live, let me die this will I advow
If His will but be done – I can ask for no more.’³⁷⁵

A note in the poet’s hand explains that the first voice is that of St Teresa and the second of her fellow Carmelite St Magdalen of Pazzi.³⁷⁶

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that reading sustained the nuns in their religious life and provided them with spiritual nourishment necessary to embrace the vicissitudes of their new exile. Books were an important means by which they cemented the link with their tradition, and paved the way for later revival in England.

In the early years in England the communities were dependent on what they managed to salvage or were given and this is particularly true of their reading matter. Library collections were significantly reduced in size, but growth over the period reveals the continuing centrality of reading in the monastery. We have seen that surviving books show good use and divulge much about the nuns’ appropriation of what was available. Material evidence indicates there was a continuation of traditional reading habits and considerable effort made to preserve and hand on precious volumes. Space was limited in the second exile monasteries, and this influenced reading and attitudes to ownership. The collections indicate the extent and variety

³⁷⁵ DAA, BO IV D Box2 (144852). Agnes Young, 1793–1889.

³⁷⁶ See Clare Copeland, *Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi: The Making of a Counter-Reformation Saint* (Oxford, 2016).

of the nuns' interior lives. Devotional works continued to dominate the collections, but new genres of literature and secular studies also expanded. Caroline Bowden has identified the propensity of Ignatian meditations in most English convents on the Continent³⁷⁷ and these continued to be popular in England, with the greatest store at Caverswall and Hammersmith. While the content of their libraries, in some respects, was not substantially different from other Congregations – especially in key Counter Reformation texts – neither was it identical to them and there are signs of distinct spiritual identity, particularly in the monastic/mystical tradition. This tells much about the nuns' interior lives as well as their engagement with contemporary themes of Enlightenment, revolution, and transnational Catholic devotions.

The nineteenth-century reaction to Catholic Enlightenment, especially through the rise of Millenarianism, and a return to mystical/contemplative ways, is perceptible in the nuns' libraries. Scott and Hood have made the case for a revival of interest in mysticism in nineteenth-century England where the search for authentic English writers led to revived reading of Augustine Baker among Benedictines.³⁷⁸ The nuns' role in this revival was more nuanced than has previously been understood and a study of their reading suggests that even the Cambrai and Paris houses had to reclaim this tradition. The nuns' engagement with texts extended to copying, translating, and composing their own works. Examples of these show that devotional texts drawn from Scripture and inspirational lives were the main sources of sustenance in the second exile, and scarcity of material resulted in a revival of the tradition of copying through the scriptorium.

The 'second spring' myth,³⁷⁹ that implies English Catholic practices had been lost during the penal years, is unsubstantiated. English religious had maintained these traditional practices of

³⁷⁷ Bowden, "'A Distribution of Tyme'", pp. 99–116.

³⁷⁸ Geoffrey Scott, 'Baker's Critics' and Alban Hood, 'Baker in the Nineteenth Century English Benedictine Congregation', both in Scott (ed.) *Dom Augustine Baker 1557–1641* (Leominster, 2012), pp. 179–92 and pp. 193–202.

³⁷⁹ See Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, pp. 296–7 and Heimann, *Catholic Devotions*, pp. 5–10.

faith on the Continent and, after arrival in England, were the bridge for their resurgence. They provide evidence that devotions such as the rosary, Sacred Heart and Benediction, far from being lost, had continued to be practiced in English houses. The nuns were key players in the transmission of the English recusant tradition and provide a vital link between Continental Catholicism and the rise of Catholic devotion from 1850s in England. They were both the repository of tradition and the channel for its revival.

This exploration of the Benedictine nuns' spirituality and reading habits maps their significant contribution to the devotional history of the nineteenth century. Evidence from their libraries demonstrates that they were influenced by English and French traditions in a reinvigoration of existing practices. More fundamentally, the book collections illustrate how reading habits empowered them in the vicissitudes of second exile.

Conclusion

In this thesis it has been argued that for the Benedictine convents the first forty years after arrival in England were a struggle for survival – a second exile rather than a glorious home-coming. During this time the nuns grappled with their identity as Catholics and English women, and faced many challenges comparable to what their foundresses had encountered two hundred years earlier on the Continent.

This perception of their return as an enforced exile is evident in the compromises imposed on the nuns' monastic observance, their continued privation, aging populations and the long-lasting impact of trauma on their physical and mental health. The debilitation of the survivors, the high deathrate, the shortage of new entrants and the concomitant difficulties of passing on contemplative traditions, inhibited the convents' development to such an extent that it was not until the 1820s that any coherent attempt to restore monasticism was possible. The nuns experienced conflicts of identity and efforts to resettle in England were hampered by the desire to return to their old monasteries, thus intensifying the instability of the period.

This thesis provides an historiographic intervention. It fills the near void in scholarship on the history of women religious which lies between the early modern work of Caroline Bowden, James Kelly, Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Claire Walker¹ *inter alios*, and later exploration of nineteenth-century religious congregations by Carmen Mangion, Susan O'Brien and Barbara Walsh.² This space of approximately forty years is a vital one: it is less a gap and more a bridge

¹ Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham, 2013); James E. Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe c.1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2020); Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester, 2017); Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, 2003).

² Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Manchester, 2014); Susan O'Brien, "'Terra Incognita': The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England", *Past and Present*, 21 (1988), pp. 110–40 and Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800–1937: A Social History* (Dublin, 2002).

between the monastic and apostolic communities. The roots of the latter must be seen in the soil of the former, and neither what went before nor what happened later can be adequately understood except in the light of this intervening period. This is particularly evident in the Benedictine schools which were established immediately on arrival in England and paved the way for the teaching orders later in the century.

As well as providing a bridge between the history of Early Modern women religious and the Victorian era, this research throws new light on women's reading habits in the period and reveals the nuns as a significant group of female readers whose literary culture has been hitherto overlooked by scholars. The study of the convent libraries contributes to the historiography of the Book, validating the preservation of texts and appropriation of the book as a means of cultural self-identification, among a hitherto unconsidered group. It also exposes a lacuna in the wider field of gender studies, particularly the position of religious women as educators and sufferers of mental ill-health.

Vocations were slow to come in the early nineteenth century and, when they did arrive, they came from varied socio-cultural backgrounds and with different expectations, relative to the Continental period. This brought further challenges and deepened the generational divide common in refugee communities.³ Inter-generational tensions and mental health issues, affecting both newcomers and survivors, increased instability in the houses and had long-lasting consequences. Viewing this period of the nuns' history as one of second exile highlights an omission in historical refugee studies, particularly those incorporating religious persecution, which have not yet recognised the nuns' migration experience as one of rupture, trauma and

³ Recent studies discuss this experience: Alice Bloch and Shiran Hirsh, 'Inter-generational transnationalism: the impact of refugee backgrounds on the second generation', *Comparative Migration Studies*, 30 (2018) and Alice Bloch, Milena Chimienta, Laurence Ossipow and Catherine Wenden, 'Second Generations from refugee backgrounds in Europe', *Comparative Migration Studies* (2019). Also, Sewite Solomon Kebede, 'The struggle for belonging: Forming and reforming identities among 1.5 generation asylum seekers and refugees', Refugee Studies Centre, Working Paper Series, 70 (2010).

exile that it undoubtedly was.⁴ We have seen that despite the relaxation of the penal laws against Catholics in the late eighteenth century, deep-seated prejudices were not so easily overcome. Some initial mitigation of hostility through sympathy for the plight of the refugees was later reversed and backlashes, such as the ‘nun-baiting bill’ of 1801, threatened the nuns’ security. A snap-shot of the state of the convents on arrival shows ageing and exhausted communities debilitated by suffering and, in some cases, experiencing what today would be identified as post-traumatic stress disorder.⁵ Poverty was experienced not only in monetary terms, but also in impoverishment of suitable living conditions. Lack of appropriate space for monastic observance hit at the central tenets of Benedictine contemplative life: enclosure, the wearing of the habit, and the solemn celebration of the monastic horarium. Curtailment of these vital elements made the loss of identity in the early years more acute and deprived the women of much consolation and purpose in their new location.

Dependence on charity is frequently the lot of refugees and the nuns had relied on the generosity of benefactors in their first exile too. That dependence however, brought different burdens and demands in the second exile back in England. While Catholic culture was considered ‘essentially un-English’,⁶ some of their compatriots were fascinated by the nuns, enabling them to become potential channels for ecumenical *rapprochement*. Their friendships with the Duke of Clarence and the Marquis and Lady Hertford are examples of personal encounter, transcending prejudice and political persuasion, which adds a new dimension to the study of Catholic-Protestant relations. As English women of good birth, the nuns represented an – albeit romanticised – past and old-English values; the outrages they had valiantly endured aroused a patriotic support which over-rode doctrinal prejudices. Through patronage and

⁴ Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Kroeker, Chares H Parker and Jonathan Ray (eds.), *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe: Strategies of Exile* (London, 2014).

⁵ Dan J. Stein, Matthew Friedman and Carlos Blanco, *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Oxford, 2011).

⁶ Colin Haydon, “‘I love my King and my Country, but a Roman Catholic I hate’”: Anti-Catholicism, Xenophobia and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century England’, in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity Britain and Ireland c.1650–1850* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 33–52, p. 39.

patriotism, the nuns opened a way to informal dialogue in which they contributed quietly to acceptance of, and ultimately to emancipation for, Catholics. Their ameliorating role in softening Protestant-Catholic relations in the years prior to emancipation requires more recognition. Engagement with wider Protestant society, moreover, also expanded the nuns' perspectives. We have noted the metamorphosis of loyalty undergone by the Dunkirk nuns who, on arrival in England, were still predominantly Stuart in sympathy. Intermediaries such as lady boarder Lady Bedingfeld and the arrival of new members from a wider cross-section of society, facilitated transition from Stuart to Hanoverian allegiance.⁷

Exile went to the heart of the nuns' lives and prayer, both liturgical and personal. Traditional Benedictine practices of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer were key means by which the nuns mediated their second exile experience, enabling them to exercise agency and remain connected with the wider transnational Church. In treating the nuns' second exile experience as a spiritual history, this study provides a new context for Mary Heimann's innovative work on English Catholic devotions.⁸ Her devotional history begins in 1850, but we can see that the nuns preserved pre-Reformation practices, as well as pioneering new devotions in the half century, prior to that date. The centrality of the Sacred Heart to their observance, for example, predates the rise of its prominence as charted by Heimann. Moreover, it questions Susan O'Brien's contention that the spread of Sacred Heart devotion owed 'its dynamism' to the French congregations.⁹ The contemplatives were also in the vanguard with new practices such as Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which has been seen as a response to the violence of the Revolution and new exile conditions. Evidence suggests that the contemplatives anticipated the popularity of these devotions in England. The bridging point highlighted above

⁷ Mildred Murray-Sinclair, 'Hammersmith: A Bridge' given at the EBC History Symposium, 1994, p. 2.

⁸ Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1995).

⁹ Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 154 (1997), pp. 142–80, especially pp.169–73.

is once again apparent. The apostolics may have extended the dissemination, but the practices were well established by the monastics in the areas they served earlier in the century.

An examination of their libraries has thrown new light on, and demands revision of, the oft-repeated narrative that the nuns preserved the medieval mystical tradition and the teachings of Augustine Baker through continual apophatic practice. This adds a new dimension to studies on Benedictine spirituality. A close study of the nuns' prayer-life and textual immersion shows the position to be more nuanced than has been portrayed. It confirms Benedict Rowell's contention that, by the nineteenth century, other influences had taken over from the Baker tradition in the Benedictine convents.¹⁰ While the nuns led in the revival of these traditions in the nineteenth century, and were ahead of the monks in doing so, they themselves had to rediscover their mystical roots. It was the desert of new exile that provided the ground for this rediscovery. Significantly, it was the lay-sisters who had largely maintained that tradition and it was not the last survivors who provided the impetus for its restoration but new arrivals, notably Christina Chare at Salford and Clare Knight at Cannington who had, despite many challenges, been able to reclaim the old values.

Material poverty was especially felt in the loss of the nuns' libraries, while lack of space for the practice of *lectio divina*, study and writing, imposed further hardships. An examination of their book collections has revealed much about the nuns' perception of second exile and provided an insight into the spiritual nourishment they required. While bearing in mind the pitfalls of simplistically drawing conclusions from catalogues and bookshelves, shifts in reading habits can be discerned: from English recusant writers, through continued adherence to the classic Counter-Reformation texts; to expansion of Continental, especially French, spiritual writers. Comparison with library lists of other Orders shows expected differences in

¹⁰ Benedict Rowell, 'Baker's Continuing Influence on Benedictine Nuns' in Woodward (ed.), *That Mysterious Man*, pp. 82–91.

spiritual adherence – Thomas Aquinas, for example, prominent in a Dominican collection, is largely absent from Benedictines’ collections – but clearly positions the English nuns’ reading firmly within the culture of the transnational Church.

The convent libraries have also provided new insight into English religio-political developments in the post-Enlightenment period. Far from being immersed solely in medieval mystical reflections the nuns explored contemporary responses, such as the apocalypticism of Benedictine Charles Walmesley, and the debates between Cisalpinists and Ultramontanists, liberals and traditionalists. While it may be argued that the influence of male mentors, whether the liberal Bede Brewer at Salford or the conservative John Milner at Caverswall, affected the contents of their libraries, they did not necessarily determine the nuns’ views. They were not passive followers: their libraries show they read as widely as their restricted circumstances allowed and used the experience of renewed exile to shape both their reading and writing.

Return to England for the Benedictine nuns was a second exile: demanding, painful and sometimes traumatic. It imposed unavoidable compromises on the way of life they aspired to restore which impacted on the formation of new vocations. If the quality of some new entrants left something to be desired, it was, nonetheless, from their ranks that new leaders emerged who enabled the rediscovery of professed, contemplative life in England, and the later emergence of other congregations. The new exile demonstrated the centrality of reading in the Benedictine life: reading, writing and study were key to how the nuns exercised agency from their enclosure. This thesis intervenes in the historiography of English women religious to interrogate the regularly repeated assumption that the spirituality of these Benedictine women was primarily a revival of medieval spirituality through continuation of Bakerite interiority. It was less a revival and much more a renewal: a slower and more painful return to the sources, pruning much that had accumulated on the way, before reflowering was possible. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of the place of the nuns in English religious history in the

nineteenth century and as such, is a vital interposition in the prevailing narrative of professed female religious life. Traditionally, that has broken off at the French Revolution, picking up only later in the nineteenth century with the apostolic orders. This thesis has shown that this intervening period was not a void but a crucial bridge in a continuing narrative: one in which the role of the enclosed contemplatives deserves greater recognition. The years 1795–1838 comprised a second exile for the English Benedictine nuns but, during this period of exile, seeds were sown which were eventually to lead to the full flowering of the much-fabled second spring in English Catholic religious life.

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