Northern Catholic History

No. 22 Autumn 1985

North East Catholic History Society

NORTH EAST CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY

The Society was founded in July 1974 to foster interest and promote research into the history of the Catholic Church in North East England.

A yearly programme of talks and visits to places of Catholic interest is arranged and *NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY*, the Society's periodical, is published twice yearly.

PATRONS: The Rt. Rev. Hugh Lindsay, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, and the Rt. Rev. Owen Swindlehurst, Auxiliary Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.

OFFICERS 1984/85

CHAIRMAN	Rev. W.J. Nicholson, St. Mary's, Whittingham.
GENERAL SECRETARY	Miss E. Swallow, 16 Spittal Terrace, Gosforth, Nc.,3.
PROGRAMME SECRETARY	Miss J. O'Callaghan, 30 Burnopfield Gdns., Denton Burn, Nc., 15.
OUTINGS SECRETARY	Miss M. Davison, 6 Larkspur Terr., Nc., 2.
TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	P. McGuinness, 3 Otterburn Ave., Gosforth, Nc., 3.
EDITORS	R.M. Gard, 21 Larchwood Ave., Wideopen, Nc, 13. M. B. Joyce, 5 The Poplars, Gosforth, Nc., 3.
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	Officers, Mrs. J. Scollen, Mrs. E. Shaw, G. Thornton
Annual Subscription	£2.50 (with *Northern Catholic History*) or £1.50 (membership only).

NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY

Published twice yearly. Annual subscription £2.00 inclusive of internal postage. Copies of Nos 9–21 available from Mr Gard (as above).

© North East Catholic History Society and contributors.
Articles and enquiries welcomed by either editor.

ISSN 0307–4455

NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY

No.22 Autumn 1985

CONTENTS

Editorial Notes		2
Catholic Tyneside, 1600–1800	W.J. NICHOLSON	3
Catholics in Early Seventeenth-Century Tyne Coal : A Re-assessment	E. CLAVERING	13
William, 4th Baron Widdrington of Blankney, c.1675–1743	A. ROUNDING	24
Paris in the Terror: Letter of a French Monk to a Northumbrian Gentleman, 1795	D. BELLENGER	31
Programme 1985–86		End cover

Illustrations

William, 4th Baron Widdrington	p.25
Abbey of Saint Denis, c.1900	p.33

NORTH EAST CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY

There were good attendances at the last two talks pf the 1984/5 lecture season: on 5 February, Mr James Long gave a talk, illustrated by slides, on the Franks Casket, interpreting many of the Christian and pagan carvings for which it is remarkable, and on 5 March, Dr Sheridan Gilley gave an absorbing and scholarly paper on attitudes to Catholicism in early nineteenth-century Durham. The meetings were held, by kind permission of Fr John White, in the comfortable Holy Name Parish Centre in North Jesmond.

The two summer outings, arranged as usual by Miss Molly Davison with her customary care, were once more blessed with fine weather and were thoroughly enjoyed by fifty or so members and friends on each occasion. On 30 June, members went to see the churches of Pickering, with its medieval wall paintings, and Lastingham, with its Anglo-Saxon crypt, the day ending with Mass at Hemsley, while on 14 July the coach travelled west to Shap Abbey and Sizergh Castle, and as well as Mass at Kendal, members received the extra bonus of a drive through the Lakes.

By the time this Autumn issue reaches members, the Society's eleventh AGM on 1 October and probably the talk by Frank Keegan on 5 November will have taken place. The meetings are being held this season in the new hall of St Mary's Cathedral, Clayton Street West, Newcastle, and it is hoped that the central venue will encourage more members to attend. The full programme is printed on the inside end cover.

The articles in this issue, kindly provided by three former contributors and one welcome newcomer, deal mainly with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century subjects. The article by Fr Nicholson, our chairman, on Catholic Tyneside, is the text of his paper to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne in July; next, Eric Clavering reassesses the role of Catholic coalowners in the Tyne Coal Trade in the seventeenth century; then, Dr Alan Rounding gives a biography of William Widdrington, the acknowledged leader of the Catholic community in Northumberland in the early eighteenth century who was haplessly involved in the 1715 Rising; and finally, Dominic Bellenger publishes the text of a letter written from Paris in 1795 describing the sad fortunes of the French Church and clergy during the Terror.

Warm thanks are accorded to these and all former contributors for their articles and an invitation is given to all who have undertaken research into any aspect of the history of the Church in the North East to submit articles for future publication.

CATHOLIC TYNESIDE, 1600–1800

W.J. Nicholson

INTRODUCTION

One of the obvious characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church is its highly organised structure. Popes and cardinals, archbishops and bishops, dioceses and parishes, monasteries and convents and religious Orders of every kind. The question therefore arises, what happens when this structure is destroyed? Can the Church survive? Two interesting and contemporary episodes in the long history of the Church suggest that it can for a time, if only in a single province.

Japan was visited by the great Apostle of the East, St Francis Xavier in 1550 and very rapidly a large number of Japanese became Christian with 250 churches. But, with the rise of the first Shoguns, especially Ieyasus Tokugawa in 1614, great efforts were made to destroy this foreign religion and Japan was closed to all outsiders. Two hundred and fifty years later, when Japan was opened up once again to the West in 1854, it was discovered that the Church founded by Xavier still survived. Persecution broke out once more, but under Western pressure, freedom of worship was granted by the Emperor to the small group that had survived without any of the normal structures of the Church.

A parallel development took place in the British Isles. With the accession of Elizabeth I, the Catholic Church was proscribed: it became illegal simply to be a Catholic; the penalty was death to say the Catholic Mass and very many priests and layfolk were put to death and imprisoned for being 'recusants', i.e. for refusing to conform to the State religion. For three hundred years Catholics existed and survived without the normal structures of the rest of the Church and when at length, in 1850, the ordinary structures of bishops and dioceses were restored in England and Wales, *The Times* thundered, 'We confess that we can only regard this as one of the grossest acts of folly and impertinence which

the Court of Rome has ventured to commit since the Crown and people of England threw off its yoke'. *Punch* produced a series of rather scurrilous cartoons; and Parliament passed the Ecclesiastical Titles Act.[1]

There are two factors which made an important difference in the story of Japan and in that of England. Firstly, Japan had no previous experience of Christianity before 1550, whereas England had been part of the rest of Christendom since the days of St Augustine of Canterbury and before. Secondly, England could not close its ports to trade and traffic with the rest of Europe. Both these factors were vital to the survival of the old Faith in this country.[2] Both are essential to the understanding of the Church on Tyneside.

1600—1640

It was a commonplace of religious controversy in the seventeenth century that the North was 'backward in religion'. In a letter of Sir William Fleetwood to Lord Burghley written in 1575 it is stated: 'The town of Newcastle are all papists save Anderson (the Mayor) and yet is he knit in such sort with papists that *aiunt, aiit, negunt negat*' (what they say, he says; what they deny, he denies).[3] Richard Hodgson of Hebburn, a rank papist, was elected mayor three times, in 1555, 1566 and as late as 1580. The instability of the Border counties meant that it was not until the closing years of Elizabeth's reign that London felt it politic to harass them for their religion. Even then the authorities found it impossible to get any satisfaction. After a long list of Popish Recusants in 1595, Bishop Matthew had to remark, 'Upon the persons indited in Northumberland, no penalties levied and all the said Recusants refuse conference obstinately'.[4] In other words, he was told to get lost. It is true that only a few were prepared to stand up and be counted as popish recusants. But as Aveling remarks, 'the allegiance of so many compromisers and Church papists seems a more striking evidence of the strength and survival of the Old Faith than the heroic resistance of the relatively few'.[5]

Roger Howell, in *Newcastle upon Tyne and the Puritan Revolution*, sums up his account,

> The analysis of the political struggles in Newcastle reveals a society which can be dubbed sub-political, i.e. one in which the conduct of local affairs received the main emphasis, interest in national affairs a secondary one . . . The town followed a policy of drifting with events in its relation with the

> outer world. Their political behaviour more resembled neutralism than anything else. [6]

In religious matters during this period there was a similar pragmatic attitude. In a response of the English College, Rome, of 1602, Matthias Wilson states, 'I was born in Catchburn, Northumberland. No Catholic relations except one uncle; the rest are as most people usually are in England, except my eldest brother who cleaves to heresy'. [7]

Tyneside with its coal trade was in a very special situation. As Howell remarks, 'The frequent coming and going of ships from the continent provided a convenient passageway for Catholic priests, for mass books and tracts as well as bringing into the Newcastle area many seamen who were Catholic in religion'. [8]

The sudden shifts in policy under the early Stuarts must have been very confusing not only for the Catholics who suffered under the penal laws, but also for those in authority. When Lord Sheffield in 1618 condemned the Newcastle priest, William Southerne, to death, the king was very annoyed, since he was in the middle of the delicate negotiations with Spain to arrange a Spanish marriage for his son. He dismissed Sheffield and released over a hundred priests held in prison and not for ten years was a priest put to death in England.[9]

It was during this comparative lull that Mrs Dorothy Lawson built her house down by the river at St Anthony's which became the headquarters for the Jesuit mission in the North East. When the Bishop of Durham complained of the danger of convicted recusants dwelling by the river (Sir Robert Hodgson at Hebburn, Anthony Berry and John Davel at Jarrow, and Mrs Lawson) the Mayor of Newcastle replied that he and his aldermen 'had made enquiry and could finde no matter thereof but idle reports, other than their keeping of boats for crossing the river', and then added that he 'will take order for the delivery of my lord's coles at Durham-house'. [10] But in 1629 Dorothy Lawson had to compound for £40 and Sir Robert Hodgson for an annual rent of £120 to escape the penalties of the penal laws. [11] When the Jesuit Henry Morse, staying at Mrs Lawson's, was appointed abroad his ship was stopped at Tynemouth and he was taken to Newcastle for examination. When his replacement John Robinson arrived in the river seventeen days later, the collier was searched and he was also taken and both priests were imprisoned in York Castle in 1626. [12] Yet, when Dorothy Lawson died in 1632 she was given a civic funeral. Her chaplain wrote in her

biography,

> We carried the corps in the evening to Newcastle in her own boat accompanied with at least twenty other boats and barges till their arrival at the city. They found the streets shining with tapers, as light as if it had been noon. The magistrates and aldermen, with the whole glory of the town, which for state is second only to London, attended at the landing place to wait on the coffin . . . and carried to the church door where they delivered it to the Catholics who with another priest laid it with Catholick ceremonies in the grave.[13]

1640—1688

The history of government action against Catholic recusants during these fifty years is an extraordinary tale of ups and downs. Throughout the fighting in the Civil War the North endured heavy levies of men, money exactions, enforced billeting, and requisitions of crops and beasts by both sides. The billeting accounts of the Catholic Salvin family of Croxdale in Durham give a vivid impression of the wear and tear caused to this one family.The sequestration policy of the Commonwealth hit many of the Catholic gentry who had fought for the king. Sir Thomas Riddell of Fenham, for example, escaped abroad, as many were forced to do, with a price of £1,000 on his head, and died in exile at Antwerp in 1652.

The campaigns which led to the victory of Marsden Moor and the capture of Newcastle was marked by the depredations of wandering bands of Parliamentary soldiers. One of these parties captured Fr John Ducket as he was travelling to Weardale, another troop took Fr Ralph Corby at Hamsterley. Both were taken to Sunderland for questioning and later sent to London where they were executed in September 1644. Another party of soldiers seized Fr Henry Morse on the Cumbrian borders; he was eventually imprisoned in Newcastle's Newgate (for a second time) and moved to London where he was executed in February 1645.[14]

In the period between 1649 to 1660 there were few executions, though this was a period of severe repression of Catholics. A Jesuit, Fr Whitfield, was seized in Newcastle on 22 April 1654, together with 30 to 40 persons who were at his Mass. Brought before the magistrates he was committed to the Assizes. There the judge, on examining the deposition, determined not to summon the accused party. Immediately after he was released from his bail, Fr Whitfield left the neighbourhood.[15]

The Restoration brought with it high hopes among Catholics for a repeal of the penal laws, or at least some measure of toleration. The Jesuits opened a public chapel some time after 1660. This was in the back buildings of the White Hart in the Flesh Market. In the Jesuit annual letters it is stated that there was 'sufficiently spacious chapel and a well-frequented school'. It seems most probable that a secular priest lived in the town house of the Radcliffe family in Newgate Street.[16] Thomas Riddell regained his father's estate at Fenham and kept a Benedictine chaplain there. The Riddells of Gateshead also kept a chaplain. Robert Riddell O.S.B. was chaplain from about 1682 to 1696, when he was replaced by the nephew William Riddell S.J.[17]

The hysterical outburst of anti-Catholic feeling during the troubles of the Popish Plot of Titus Oates lasted from October 1678 and ended in March 1681. If someone like Pepys could be sent to the Tower accused of being a secret papist and plotting against the State, then there could be little hope of escape for the well-known papists of the North East. Robert Boldron, the chief informer in the North, implicated Thomas Riddell of Fenham in the Plot, though he was acquitted by the magistrates. But a year or two later he, together with sixty-five Northumbrian gentlemen and six Newcastle gentlemen, was in gaol for refusing the Oath of Allegiance and Supremacy.[18]

James II's reign brought the hopes of his fellow-Catholics to fruition — slowly at first and then in his last twelve months far too quickly. He forcibly made a Catholic, Sir William Creagh, mayor of the town and two Catholics, Widdrington and Errington, were appointed aldermen. As Ambrose Barnes stated in his Memoirs, 'Men were at a loss to see how suddenly the world was changed; the cap, the mace and the sword one day carried to church, another day to the Mass-house, another day to the dissenting-house'.[19] On 22 January 1688 there was a public day of thanksgiving for the Queen. The Mayor and corporation attended Mass in the Catholic chapel and the sermon was preached by Father Leigh S.J. For the same occasion the books of St Andrew's, Gallowgate, have the entry, 'Paid for ringing for the Queen 1s.4p', followed almost immediately by another entry, 'Paid for bells ringing for deliverance from Popery 1s.4d'.[20]

The permanent gain of James' reign was the appointment of Catholic bishops resident in England. These were Vicars Apostolic only, i.e. they did not rule in a diocese but over a district. They were

the superiors for the secular clergy, but their relationship with the religious Orders was far from clear. At first there was only one appointed. This was Bishop Leyburn who came to Newcastle in his confirmation tour of 1687 and confirmed 358 persons.

From a historian's point of view 1662 is a useful tag-year in the religious history of this country. The thread of continuity was broken sharply when the Presbyterians were ejected and formed a strong minority religious group of non-jurors. Catholics also found themselves in a similar situation. Before the Civil War they had escaped complete annihilation by the presence of a sympathetic penumbra of compromisers which had prevented the complete enforcement of the penal laws at all times. In the furnace of the Civil War attitudes had crystalised and the surviving Catholics had become a well defined and isolated religious group in the country as a whole.

1688–1760

The period between the arrival of William of Orange and the accession of George III was a dark and long winter for English Catholics. The climate of public opinion had undoubtedly changed. It was strongly opposed to the infliction of the death penalty in matters of religious belief. But this was a long way from any spirit of toleration. The rusty remains of the old penal system were to be buttressed by new measures of repression. The Act of 1700 'for the further preventing of the growth of Popery' introduced new measures against Catholics which was summed up by Samuel Pepys as 'proceeding to a greater degree of severity against our Roman Catholics than their predecessors have ever done'. [21] It had become axiomatic, as Daniel Defoe remarked, 'that an Englishman hates Popery, not knowing whether it is a man or a horse'.

The fears of the government were reinforced by the Derwentwater Rising of 1715. So many of those involved were papists that the whole Catholic community became suspect. In Newcastle the preparations by the authorities produced a state of quiet as all papists and suspected persons were imprisoned. The priest at Stella was remembered to have been seized and hurried to Durham gaol and passed through Winlaton with his feet tied under the horse's belly.[22]

The financial consequences of the 1715 Rising for the Catholic priests in the North are well illustrated by the problems of the Vicar

Apostolic, Bishop Williams. He arrived at Shields in 1727 without even the money to pay off all he owed for his passage. Fr Gibson, the priest at Newcastle, conducted him to Durham to an inn where the local priests came to pay their respects to him. He had nowhere to live so he had to accept the hospitality of the Yorkshire gentry. In reply to his appeal for help from the clergy he was told,

> We are all concerned to hear of your Necessityes. But in good truth by the late misfortunes of the times some of our Funds are entirely lost, many are reduced because the Estates whereon they were settled have been forfeited. The necessities of some Brethren can scarcely be imagined. These poor but zealous labourers live on a mite and have not a mite to spare[23]

The difficulties of the Catholic community in the eighteenth century are well illustrated by the way the Catholic chapels had to shift from one site to another in Newcastle and Gateshead. The secular priest after 1715 had to move from the Radcliffe house off Newgate Street to a house in the Nuns nearby. When the Duke of Cumberland arrived in Newcastle on his way to Culloden this chapel was sacked by the mob. The *Newcastle Journal* stated on 1 February 1746, 'Early on Tuesday morning last some disorderly persons broke into and entered a house called the Nuns in Newgate Street and took away and destroyed several goods. A reward of £50 was offered for information leading to the conviction of the offenders'.[24] The priest, Fr Thomas Gibson, found shelter in the former Radcliffe house, now owned by Mrs Silvertop and her son. This was the Mass-house for fifty years until the coming of Fr James Worswick.

The Jesuits also had to move more than once. It is possible that, after the Revolution of 1688 when they were forced to leave their chapel in the Flesh Market, that there was no Jesuit mission on the Tyne. Then, in 1698, Fr William Riddell S.J. came back from America to Gateshead House just before his father's death. Gateshead House then became the Jesuit centre in Gateshead until 1745. One of the priests who lived in Gateshead was Fr George Brown, alias Pippard S.J. He was the chaplain who attended Lord Derwentwater and others in the Tower and accompanied him to the scaffold. He wrote at the wish of the Countess an account of the last days of the Earl.[25] He was obliged to retire abroad. He may have returned to Gateshead for a brief time, but he died at Pontoise.

Gateshead House was also fired by the mob when the Duke of

Cumberland marched through the town, and was never rebuilt. The Jesuit chaplain escaped with some difficulty and went to live for a few months at Felling with the Brandlings. He then opened another Mass-house in the Close on the Newcastle side of the bridge. In his report of 1750 he said that 'his customers number about 150; no salary from the place, but is maintained by Jesuit Funds'. His death was reported in the *Newcastle Journal*, 'on 29th May 1773; Wednesday died greatly regretted by all his acquaintance, the Rev Mr Walsh, a Popish Priest aged 71'.

His successor moved once more to the foot of Westgate Road. Fr William Warrilow was the last of the Jesuits to serve on Tyneside. He remained here from 1773 until his death in 1807. But when he died there was no one left to succeed him, so the Jesuits had to close their Newcastle mission.

1760—1800

The long reign of George III saw the beginning of the end of the laws against Catholics. The penal laws had been so far successful in their purpose that English Catholics now formed a tiny minority numbering about sixty thousand for the whole country. The House of Lords demanded a census of Papists in 1767 and from it we have a picture of the numbers on Tyneside. In Newcastle there were only 209 Catholics. South of the river, Gateshead had 58, Jarrow 40, Shields 29. Up river was Ryton which had the largest Catholic congregation centred on Stella. It had 457 persons, the men listed as being keelmen, staithsmen, pitmen, all in the coal trade. This was the low water mark of the Catholic community in England. At the end of the eighteenth century the numbers begin to grow very slowly at first.

Two developments show clearly that there was a change in the climate of opinion. The first is the series of Catholic Relief Acts which granted some toleration, though far from restoring their civil rights which had to wait for the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The first Relief Act for England was introduced by Sir George Saville (of Saville Row) and repealed several provisions of the old penal laws. It was followed by the Gordon Riots which terrorised London for several days. In Newcastle the effect was less disturbing as the authorities prevented the mob sacking the Catholic chapel. The second Relief Act of 1791, introduced by Lord Redesdale, went very much further and was a great

gain for English Catholics. At last they were granted freedom of worship. It became possible to build Catholic chapels and open schools for Catholic children. Fr James Worswick was quick to take advantage of the new freedom. He sold the former chapel in Bell's Court and in 1798 erected a new public chapel with a school in the basement off Pilgrim Street.

The second development was forced upon us by the French Revolution. Everyone knows that Henry VIII suppressed the monasteries. But a little known chapter in English Catholic history is the establishment abroad of some fifty English monasteries and convents of nuns which preserved the old religious traditions. These were all destroyed by the French Revolutionaries, and the communities, after several months' imprisonment, returned to their own country for the shelter they had lost so long ago. At the same time the French emigré priests fled the fury of the Terror and on landing on English shores were paid an allowance by the Government. On 5 October 1796 three transports under the convoy of the sloop Serpent arrived in the Tyne with 295 French priests on board. These were dispersed throughout the North East and as one Northumbrian priest remarked, 'by their presence removed much prejudice against Catholics'.

One last word on archive material. There is very little documentation that has survived which would give an adequate picture from the Catholic side of the religious changes of these 250 years. The Catholic libraries and archives kept abroad, except for some precious fragments smuggled into England, were destroyed by the French Revolutionaries. In this country for obvious reasons very few records were kept until late in the eighteenth century. St Andrew's Catholic registers, for example, only begin in 1765. There is much that we would love to know, but never will know about the lives of those priests and people who survived for so many years the great pressures against their religious faith and principles.

NOTES

Talk given to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, 31 July 1985. A great deal of the material for this paper is taken from Fr W. Vincent Smith's *Catholic Tyneside* (1930) and his unpublished notes on Catholic history at Ushaw.

1. Quoted in Gordon Albion's 'Restoration of the Hierarchy 1850' in *English Catholics 1850,* Burns & Oates, 1950.
2. The parallel and contrast between the story of Japan and England is one of the points made by A.D. Wright in 'Catholic History North and South', an extended review of John Bossy's *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850, Northern History,* Vol. XIV, 1978, pp.126–151.
3. R. Welford, *History of Newcastle and Gateshead,* 1884–87, Vol. II, p.481.
4. *Catholic Record Society,* Vol. 55, p.58. A Book of Recusants. Cecil Papers.
5. J.C.H. Aveling, *Handle and the Axe,* quoted in Wright, *op.cit.*
6. R. Howell, *Newcastle upon Tyne and the Puritan Revolution,* 1967, p.337 *et seq.*
7. *C.R.S.,* Vol. 54, p.122. Responsa Scholarum of the English College, Rome.
8. Howell, *op.cit.* p.73.
9. For William Southerne, see A.M.C. Forster in *Recusant History,* April 1958.
10. *Life of Mrs Dorothy Lawson,* 1855, Introduction, xvi.
11. *C.R.S.,* Vol. 53. Northern Book of Compositions, pp.338, 339.
12. P. Caraman, *Henry Morse,* pp.46–50.
13. *Life of Mrs Dorothy Lawson,* by her chaplain, William Palmer S.J.
14. Bishop Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* (1924), pp.457, 461, 467.
15. H. Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus,* Vol. III, p.127.
16. W.V. Smith, *Catholic Tyneside,* p.48.
17. W.V. Smith, 'The Riddell family of Gateshead and Fenham', *Northern Catholic History,* 3, pp.10–16.
18. W.V. Smith, *Catholic Tyneside,* p.47.
19. Memoirs of Ambrose Barnes, *Surtees Society,* Vol. L, p.175.
20. W.V. Smith, *Catholic Tyneside,* p.49.
21. *Pepys Diary and Correspondence,* ed. Braybrooke, as quoted by H. Thurston S.J., *Darkness before the Dawn* (C.T.S.).
22. Notes by Rev. Thomas Eyre, chaplain at Stella, 1775–1792.
23. Basil Hemphill O.S.B., *The Early Vicars Apostolic of England,* p.127 *et seq.*
24. W.V. Smith, *Catholic Tyneside,* p.53.
25. F.J.A. Skeet, *Life of James Radcliffe, Third Earl of Derwentwater,* 1929, p.100 *et seq.*

CATHOLICS IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY TYNE COAL : A RE-ASSESSMENT

Eric Clavering

(i) Religious polarisation among the owners

The importance to the pre-Commonwealth northern Catholic community of the sunrise industry of coal, and that of Catholic merchants to economic growth, has been seriously underestimated. In an attempted outline of the community's involvement in the Tyne staple (*Northern Catholic History* 16, Autumn 1982), the present writer suggested that from the revision of Newcastle's charter in 1600 and the consequent loss of control by an old, predominantly Catholic, oligarchy their participation was condemned to an inevitable decline. This civic reform formalised the monopoly of the trade in the hands of a Guild, the Company of Hostmen: a closer look at its membership, and at such statistics as have survived and been published, shows that for the first quarter of the century, at least, Catholic enterprise in coal was remarkably dynamic, and that before 1640 little of its momentum had been lost. Decline was not inevitable, and it must be admitted that no sufficient explanation for its rapid occurrence in the second half of the century can yet be given. [1]

The threads of the relationships which bound the Hostmen one to another and to northern society at large weave together to form an evident pattern. Two well-formed closely-knit webs are joined by cat's cradle of criss-crossing leads with many loose ends: at one pole there is a Catholic microcosm, at the other a smaller, more loosely, woven Puritan counterpart, and in between a lack of clear orientation. The strongest threads supporting the two webs are faith-constrained marriages; apprenticeships, mutual support in institutions, loans and transfers of property offer successively weaker links; the handling of coal on the other hand, and even partnerships, link together the whole Company rather than groups.

At the centre of each of the two webs lies religion, and it is the network of individual relationships which carries it outwards and across,

but they must not be looked upon as communities of committed believers; the three groups are socio-economically, and not ideologically, defined, and though for convenience they may be labelled respectively Catholic, pro-Establishment, and Puritan, yet each contains at least one member — notably Davison, Draper, and Shafto — whose probable belief makes his attribution problematic. Even so, no juggling with borderline cases destroys the overall pattern. Expediency and degree of faith too, must be borne in mind; of two leading coalowners, Sir Thomas Riddell and Sir George Selby, both conforming, an enemy could say 'the one, his wife is a professed recusant, and the other of the religion the King is, whatsoever that may be', yet that they were equally bound to a community suffused with Catholic belief cannot be doubted. [2]

Marriage, the strongest of the bonds, has been much underestimated by economic historians. Catholic domination of Tyne coal had arisen in the first place from intermarriage between five Newcastle merchant families, those of Lawson, Hodgson, Selby, Tempest and Riddell. However, whereas in the seventeenth century the much less affluent Puritan group was still at the stage of in-breeding, rising wealth had sent the five families out among the Catholic landed gentry and ever further afield. Such unions were not a matter of status-consciousness, as Mervyn James suggests in his sensitive study of Durham loyalties, but a visible policy of great consequence.[3] It prefigured, and perhaps originated, the post-war strategy that Christopher Hill described as calling in the gentry to redress the balance of the town. It negated the Company of Hostmen's fundamental rule that entry into the coal trade must be denied to all but freemen of Newcastle, since these marriages gave ownership of coal not only to unfree competitors, such as Sir Francis Brandling of Alnwick and the Delavals of Seaton, but also to complete newcomers, like the Yorkshire Wrays who acquired Beamish; indeed, for a century all successful intrusions into coal-ownership may be traced back to this policy.

The immediate effect of gentry marriages, however, was to stiffen Newcastle merchant Catholicism. The impact of the re-evangelising work of the seminary priests of earlier years had been greatest among the women of the gentry; Sir Thomas Riddell's 'recusant wife' was Elizabeth Conyers of the Durham landed family. Her children all tightened the links with other like families, and carried a new militancy.

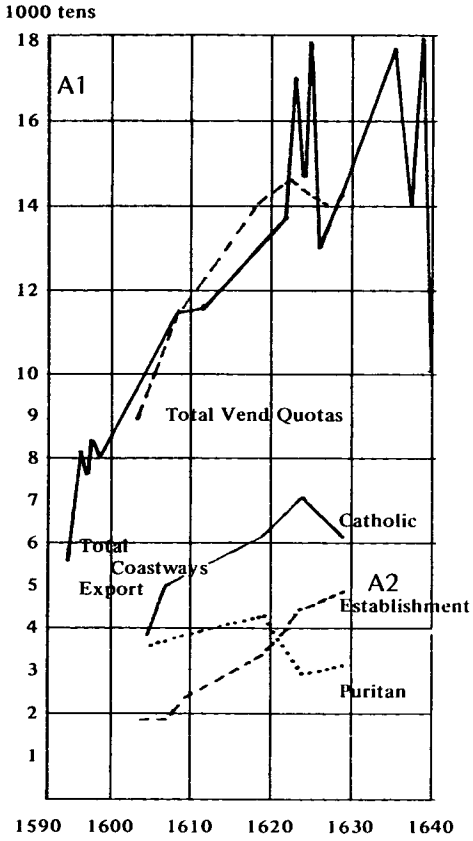
One, Anne, was the occasion of a notable conversion, that of the previously Protestant Claverings of Callaly. Similarly, under the influence of his wife, Margaret, and sister-in-law, Elizabeth Errington, the successors of the Erastian Sir George Selby adopted a recusancy which led to sequestration. Elsewhere, however, women were producing an opposite polarisation. The pro-Establishment Protestant families of the town oligarchy, Anderson, Chapman, and Liddell of Ravensworth, had much in common with the Catholic group, and their re-absorption by it was never beyond the bounds of possibility. But the first two declined sharply, and the successful Sir Thomas Liddell had for an heir a grandson of the same name whose mother had been maid of honour to the Queen of Bohemia. In the Winter Queen's circle the spirit of Sir Philip Sydney still moved strongly; he was a Puritan, and, under the Commonwealth, Ravensworth was to change camp.

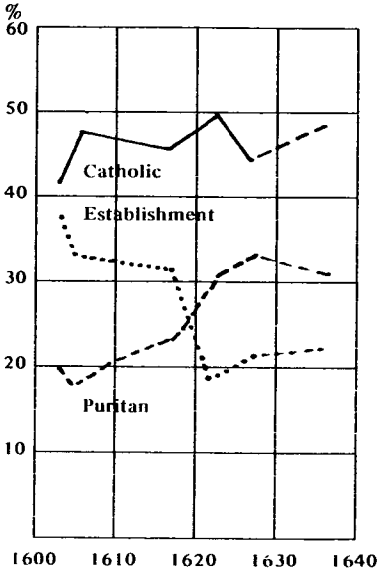
Second in importance to marriage was apprenticeship, since it opened the doors not only of a Hostman's Company but also his home. John Matfin was a Hostman who never succeeded in establishing himself as an independent producer, and consequently was of too little wealth for his belief to have been recorded by authority, but when we see that he was indentured to George Selby, that his own first apprentice was a Lawson, and that his half-sister, Mary Surtees married Sir Peter Riddell, there can be little doubt of his adherence at least.

To find access to coal and the capital to exploit it, the new freeman would turn to his own group and, in general, loans, mortgages and leases seem to have been negotiated preferentially between co-religonists. It was prudent to do so. River Wear coal was dominated by the aggressively expansionist partnership of the Puritans, George Grey and George Lilburn, but there was a major Catholic-owned colliery at Harraton (on the site of the present Lambton Castle) and it had been leased to a Conyers, who unwisely accepted a loan from a London financier associated with Grey and Lilburn. This allowed the Puritans to take over his coal when he ran into difficulties. Similarly, the father of the Puritan George Beadnall mortgaged his coal estate at Lemington on the Tyne, and lost it to George Wray, when two Catholic coalowners transferred the bond to Wray, who thus obtained a foothold in the trade.

In contrast, partnership between equals suffered no such inhibitions. The most impressive of the Catholic group was Sir Nicholas Tempest, not of Stella but of Flatworth, a younger son of the Thornley

DATA 1 COASTWAYS COAL EXPORTS FROM THE TYNE, 1590–1640





A *Quantities*

1 The solid line represents Customs returns; the dotted line, the total of vend quotas.

2 Group totals of vend quotas. The lines here merely distinguish the three groups.

B *Proportions*

Group shares as a percentage of the whole vend. The pecked lines indicate the evolution suggested by the Ship Tax assessments.

Sources:

Nef, Appendices D and I; SS.,105 (All quantities are in *tens*, a measure of volume, not weight, roughly 21 tons).

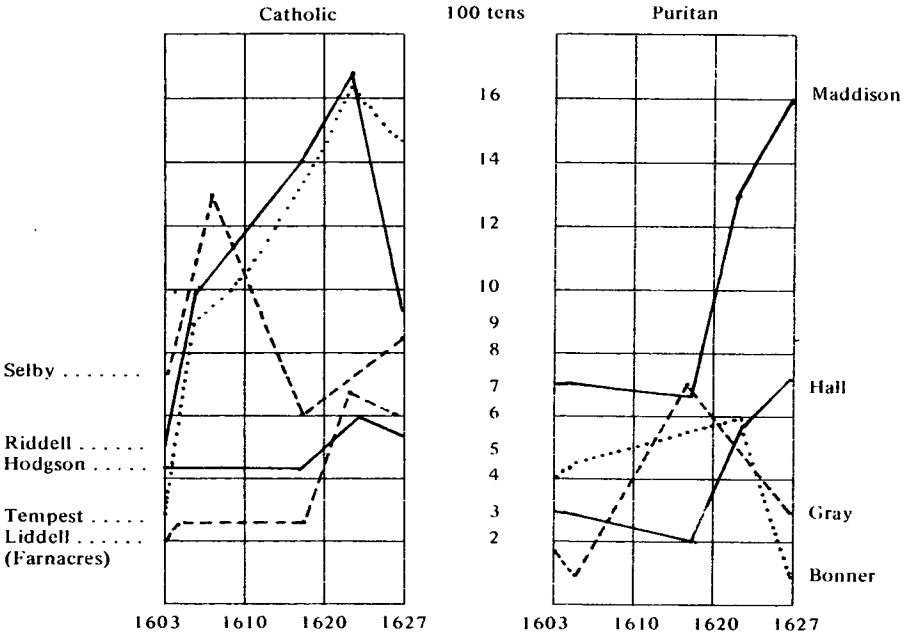
branch of that active family. He worked in a Catholic partnership at Benwell, with a pro-Establishment Liddell at Blackburn, east of Marley Hill, and with Puritans in east Whickham. Even after the first Civil War, Blackburn Colliery saw the co-operation of all three groups in the persons of Thomas Surtees, the father of John Matfin's half-sister, Sir John Marley, the fire-eating royalist ex-mayor, and James Clavering, an elder of the Presbyterian Church. The non-Catholic Robert Shafto was a member, like Tempest, of both the Benwell and the Whickham enterprises. There was nothing at all unusual in this openness of mining operations. What was remarkable, on the other hand, was the impartiality, or intrepidity, of Shafto's daughter, Ann, who by marrying firstly Robert Tempest of Thornley and then the Puritan John Clavering of Whickham acquired, in William Tempest, a brother later sequestered for recusancy and, in Mary Butler, a sister of rigorous fundamentalism.

(ii) The economic vigour of the Catholic owners

The Company of Hostmen damped conflict and upheld prices, even in the seller's market of the first quarter-century, by the Regulation of the Vend, a mechanism which controlled output by allotting agreed export quotas to its productive members. Figures have survived for 1603, 1605 (in an altered form), 1617, 1622 and 1627; they allow us to judge the relative economic success of the three groups (see Data 1). Quota coal did not necessarily arise from the hostman's own pits, and indeed the Company was forced to battle endlessly against the 'colouring' of 'unfree' coal produced by outsiders by its being passed off under a hostman quota; in 1622, Sir Francis Brandling, who was not a freeman and had no right to sell on the Tyne, even seems to have managed to acquire the quota rights of pro-Establishment Ralph Cole, a man who would sell anything. Brandling's 500 tens have not been credited to the Catholic group, but might be. The very allocation of a quota to an outsider demonstrated where economic power lay, and it was clearly and constantly with the Catholic owners.

What was remarkable, and must have given strength to their bargaining, was their ability to expand production in line with increasing demand. The failure of the pro-Establishment families, on the other

DATA 2 HOW FAMILIES FARED: CATHOLIC AND PURITAN FAMILIES MAINTAINING A QUOTA IN EVERY VEND REGULATION, 1603–1627



Note

From 1617 the Puritan group had two sizeable additions, those of Bewick and Clavering, in 1627 just above and below that of Hall.

In the Establishment group (not shown) only Liddell of Ravensworth and Chapman have a continuous presence. The latter, like Anderson which disappears after 1622, declines sharply. The Coles enter modestly in 1605 and reach equality with Hall in 1627. There is a very large number of transients in this group, several of them royal officers such as Customers.

hand, was not even offset by the appearance of a motley collection of small-scale opportunists in 1617, and the entire middle ground might have been partitioned had it not been for the appearance at the end of the period of the group of plebeian royalists. The Puritan producers in general had insufficient resources to profit fully from the boom; only one family, the Maddisons, among them could compare with Tempests or Selbys, and the Maddisons themselves stemmed from the old oligarchy; after 1617, however, they were well launched.

The marked Catholic downturn in 1627 might be thought to be the beginning of a decline induced by the ending of the boom years around 1625 and by difficulties caused by a slump, but this is unlikely to be so. The recession, though noted by the economists, was purely relative; overall consumption continued to rise to the eve of the first Civil War. It is true that demand and prices became highly volatile, but large concerns are better cushioned than small ones, and the possession of land was the best defence against uncertainty; in that, only Revensworth could compare with the four families' holdings.

Again, the downturn may have nothing to do with the market, but have been due to production problems. In mining there was a kind of leap-frog effect, with jumps at twenty- to thirty-year intervals, when new enterprises were opened as established producers struggled with the approaching exhaustion of existing pits. Much of the production of the early century had come from north of the Tyne where in Benwell, Denton and Elswick Catholics owned a great deal of ground. In the second decade the centre moved south of the river, giving an advantage to the new royalists in southern Gateshead, the Liddells of Ravensworth, and, above all, to Henry Maddison and other Puritans of Whickham. Yet, even here, there were Catholic Liddells, of Redheugh and Farnacres, Riddells in northern Gateshead and Bensham, which stretched inland as far as Kells, and, west of the River Derwent, all Winlaton was Hodgson and Selby ground, while much of Ryton belonged to the Tempests. Even in Puritan Whickham, the Erringtons, small producers of Denton, secured a toehold in the Gellifield, and east of that, Sir Nicholas Tempest, with Thomas Surtees and Sir Peter Riddell, opened a large colliery before 1629.

In the long term the outlook was even more promising for Catholic coal-owning families. As production moved inexorably southwards, it was to enter a broad swath running from the Derwent across Marley

Hill, which belonged in the main to the recusant Blakistons of Gibside, and south of this again Catholics, notably Albert Hodgson, were active in acquiring land. Decline in the 1620s would inevitably be compensated in the 1640s, and within half a century it might be confidently expected that most production would be taking place in Catholic estates.[4]

It was possible, of course, that the landowner marriage alliances of the five families, which had already led to an almost complete withdrawal of the Lawsons from the industry, might have resulted in their abandoning their key position among the Hostmen. But this was not in fact happening. Of the original forty-eight Brothers (and four Sisters) of 1600, one quarter can be identified with some confidence as Catholics; in the 133 new enrolments before 1642, the proportion remains the same. After 1656, the taking of Catholic apprentices was forbidden. Known Puritans gained slightly, but not significantly, rising from 15 per cent to 17 per cent. There was, in short, every sign of great stability in the industry, and a financial editor of the 1620s could certainly have advised investors to go for growth and invest in 'Catholic' coal. In practice, of course, this could be done only through marriage, and in this way religion acted as an economic safeguard.

It might be urged against this that the edifice was built on a morass of debt into which it would sink. Recusant depositions certainly leave an impression of widespread indebtedness. But were these debts, like those of Francis Bowes, 'sperate and dangerous', or necessary capitalisation? The six non-Catholic royalist Tyne coal compounders for whom figures are available (of whom Bowes is one) average £2,136 per head of debt; for the only five recusants who are comparable the figure is less than a half of this, £914, and that includes assumptions about mortgages not applicable to the royalists; loans not secured on land average only £402. If we compare commitments with resources, the recusants appear even more prudent; the profit on a ten of coal was very roughly of the order of £1; at that rate the average annual output of the recusants could have liquidated these debts in well under two years; for the non-Catholic royalists seven years would have been needed. A seven-year burden was, if not desperate, at the least dangerous and at the limit of profitability; if George Beadnall's mortgage was for capital to work his own coal, amortisation would, on a likely calculation, have taken more than eight years' profits, and he lost land

and coal. Catholics, on the contrary, seem well within safety limits; these debts, after all. were the outcome of seven years of warfare and a complete stoppage of the trade for a year or more.

Two much more serious cases of Catholic indebtedness, however, can be found before hostilities ever began. This is not surprising; seventeenth-century mining was more hazardous than contemporaneous military operations. The first case was that of Alderman Robert Anderson who was the last of his family to maintain the old connexion with Catholicism. He worked in Winlaton and Ryton, as well as in Jesmond, producing between 300 and 400 tens a year, and at his death in 1640 left debts of £3,940.

The second case is much better known, having been widely cited as an example of the Hostmen's monopoly. William Selby died in 1636 leaving, according to his father Sir William, the brother of Sir George, debts to the extent of £11,000. A man who is killed on a racecourse, and what is more in a duel, may expect a poor press, and William has been seen as a spendthrift who ruined his family. Yet it would require much less effort to lose a sum of this order in mining than in dissipation. Alderman Anderson owned an eighth share in Winlaton coal, and he lost proportionately more. It was not an easy colliery; the Selby quotas suggest recurrent production difficulties, and under the Commonwealth those who took on the lease of the sequestered Selby coal found their product of too poor quality to sell on the London market and wanted only to abandon the colliery, since 'they will be undone by the charge of keeping it from destruction'. [5] Moreover, in the year of William's death, Winlaton was assessed as worth £2,200 a year, making it the second largest colliery on the Tyne, surpassed only by Whickham, and indicating an output probably 50 per cent higher than the best achieved in the previous decade, and this would have entailed a considerable capital input.

There is yet another reason why it is likely that William Selby has been traduced. As the pits moved steadily farther and farther from the river, transport problems increased, and the use of waggonways, wooden-railed ancestors of the railway, on which a single horse could draw three times the three-quarter ton load of the wains used on roads, had to be considered. But taking decisions on building them was not easy; on the one hand they reduced the cost of horsepower and manpower to a third, on the other they were costly to build and to maintain, and,

if they failed to generate sufficient traffic their owners too were soon 'undone by charges'. The two earliest to be built on Tyneside both involved Catholic coalowners.

One served Whickham pits. It dates from some time between 1629 and 1634, and Sir Nicholas Tempest and the Riddells were involved in it. However, it was also used by Henry Maddison and his Puritan partners working to the south of them, and this guaranteed its success; the line, running from Dunston probably to somewhere near Sunniside, may have carried a quarter of all the coal produced at that time on Tyneside. It therefore survived, the first form of what a century later became the Tanfield Way.[6]

The other line was the property of William Selby, and can be dated to before 1632. It may well have been unprofitable; Winlaton's production was less than half that of Whickham, there were fewer entrepreneurs to share the cost, and the lie of the pits was less favourable; it did not survive, and its course is not known.[7] William's father, anxious to sell his son's collieries, would not find it politic to explain such technical problems — caveat emptor. But the £15,000 apparently lost on the Winlaton Colliery testifies to the vigour, not to the decline, of Catholic mining, if this hypothesis is correct.

The Ship Tax return of 1636 is in any case sufficient proof that there has been no such decline. Figures have survived only for the south side of the river, which, given Catholic coalowners' strength in Benwell and Denton, may tend to under-represent them. Since assessment was by colliery, and not by individual, we are not able to compare the returns with the Hostmen quotas, for that would require an exhaustive list of the partnerships working in such a huge entity as Whickham. However, sufficient is known about ownership to be sure that a movement west into Catholic territory had taken place, and that consequently the Catholic share of production cannot have been very much less than half. Much depends on the size of the Tempest workings in Whickham; if they reached a third of that Colliery's output there would be a high probability that the Catholic owners had in fact achieved more than 50 per cent of the Tyne vend. It is therefore not surprising that it was the Catholic coalowners with Tempest foremost, who took the lead in refusing to pay ship money on their freeholds.[8] Even after forty years, they were still the leaders of the trade.

What evidence there is, therefore, suggests that in the late 1630s

the prospects of the Catholic coalowners were no less promising than they had been a decade earlier. Half a century of Elizabethan repression, penal taxation, and popular opposition had done little to halt the economic growth of Tempests, Riddells, Selbys and Hodgsons, and they were on the verge of being joined by a fifth family, the Gibside Blakistons. There is perhaps nothing very surprising in this, since they represented the beginning of the concentration of coal capital, and such accumulations of economic power as theirs, with their attendant technical infrastructure and commercial superstructure still contained within the Company of Hostmen, acquired an inertia of their own. The Catholic Hostmen, of course, were only the apex of an industry, perhaps at most half a hundred families, and we do not know whether it rested on the base of a like-minded labour force — James sees recusancy as an upper-class elitism — so that their collective import for the Catholic faith — back-sliding George Selby and saintly Dorothy Lawson alike — is hard to judge.[9]

NOTES

1. Almost all the material used comes from cross-referencing three publications of the Surtees Society; since all are admirably indexed it has not been thought necessary to indicate precise locations. They are: No.105, *Extracts from the Records of the Company of Hostmen of Newcastle-upon-Tyne,* ed. F.W. Dendy, 1901; No.101, *Extracts from the Records of the Merchant Adventurers of Newcastle-upon-Tyne,* Vol. II, ed. F.W. Dendy, 1899; and No.111, *Records of the Committees for Compounding, etc. with Delinquent Royalists in Durham and Northumberland,* ed. R. Welford, 1905.
   Other sources cross-referenced are: J.U. Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry,* 1932, 1966 (*Nef*); R. Welford, *Men of Mark 'twixt Tyne and Tweed,* 1895 (*WMM*). R. Welford, *History of Newcastle and Gateshead,* Vol. III, 1887 (*WNG*).

2. *WMM*, I, 75.

3. M. James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society,* 1974, 139.

4. *Nef,* I, 24–29, and passim.

5. *SS,* III, 287.

6. William Selby, *Nef,* II, 22, *WNG,* 343; Dunston Waggonway, M.J.T. Lewis, *Early Wooden Railways,* 1970, 94–95 and n., in part confirmed by *S.S.,* III, 321, but *S.S.* 142, 242 (will of Henry Maddison) and Ellison Colln. (Gateshead), C. 15/1, fix dates as earlier and must modify Lewis' conclusion.

7. Winlaton Waggonway, Lancs. R.O., LRO/DDTO/E13. It is possible that Selby's waggonway might have run in the Horsecrofts and persisted as the Winlaton or Brockwell waggonway, but the earliest reliable date we have for the latter is 1677 (Northumberland Record Office, ZBG.4/16). I am grateful to Dr Alan Rounding for this and other information on the Winlaton way.

8. *Nef,* II, 415–416.

9. Much of the wealth turned to spiritual uses by Dame Dorothy Lawson came from Byker coal, but no Lawson owners of it were members of the Company of Hostmen.

WILLIAM, 4th BARON WIDDRINGTON OF BLANKNEY, c. 1675–1743

Alan Rounding

Much has been written about the tragic and idealised hero of the Fifteen Rebellion, James Radcliffe, the Earl of Derwentwater, but much less about Lord Widdrington, partly because he escaped the martyr's crown but principally because of the 'bad press' he received at the hands of the chaplain to the rebel forces, the Rev. Robert Patten, Perpetual Curate of Allendale, who had turned King's evidence. Lacking the romantic qualities of the Earl of Derwentwater, Lord Widdrington was certainly not the unmitigated reprobate depicted by Patten.

The Widdrington family had been established at Widdrington, in Northumberland, since as early as 1140. In 1655, the estate of Blankney, in Lincolnshire, was settled upon Sir William Widdrington and his wife, Mary, by Mary's father, Sir Anthony Thorald, and when Sir William was created a baron by Charles I in 1643 he had taken the title, Baron Widdrington of Blankney, in anticipation of this, ignoring the centuries old association with Widdrington.

The eldest son of William, the third baron, was also called William. Born about 1675 into a devout Catholic family, he would have had vivid recollections of the raid on Widdrington in 1691, when the French landed on the Northumbrian coast and sacked the village and castle there, apologising for having destroyed a Catholic home. Young William received his early education at Morpeth Grammar School and, in 1693, like many other Catholic noblemen's sons, went to France to receive his higher education — in his case, at the Jesuit College of St Louis le Grand in Paris.

On 10 February 1695, his father died and William succeeded to the barony as 4th Baron Widdrington of Blankney. While at the Jesuit College he was friendly with Sir Francis Tempest, baronet, of Stella in Durham, and there is a record of a joint trip to Brussels in 1697, the year before Sir Francis died.[1] On 7 April 1700, in a Catholic ceremony, not recorded in any of the registers of the Established Church, Lord

Widdrington married Sir Francis's sister and heir, Jane Tempest. The marriage bond is dated 13 April 1700. [2]

After Sir Francis's death in 1698, the baronetcy had passed to his father's cousin, Nicholas Tempest. The new baronet was by no means a rich man, and one of Lord Widdrington's first acts after his marriage was to allow an annuity of £240 to Sir Nicholas, to make life a little more comfortable for him.[3]

WILLIAM, 4th BARON WIDDRINGTON

Following his marriage, Lord Widdrington was content to run his estates and bring up his family, residing chiefly at Stella and Blankney, his Widdrington home having been destroyed by the French. He was early recognised as the principal Catholic nobleman of the north, a position he held undisputedly until the arrival from exile in France of James Radcliffe, Earl of Derwentwater, one to whom he was very willing to yield first place. All the time he gave encouragement to those who professed the Catholic faith; he took a great interest in the Jesuit mission in Northumberland, acting as a trustee for a legacy given by Lady Jane Haggerston, by her will dated 16 September 1710, signing a declaration of trust in 1712 that the gift was for the assistance of the Jesuits in the Northern District.

Lady Jane bore him three sons and five daughters in the years between 1701 and 1713, and, her health destroyed, she died at the age of about thirty-four on 9 September 1714. This is the date recorded in the Widdrington parish registers, where it has been entered between the marriage of John Patteson and Catherine Hayning on 21 October 1714, and the burial of John Briggs of Widdrington on 15 November 1714. Lady Jane's anniversary, however, is kept at Stella on 20 December. After the death of his wife, Lord Widdrington appears to have deserted Stella, preferring to live either at Blankney, or at Widdrington itself.

There now followed a traumatic and catastrophic period in Lord Widdrington's life. Queen Anne had died on 1 August 1714, and the Jacobite supporters of her Catholic half-brother let slip the chance of seizing the throne, and the Protestant, George, Elector of Hanover, was proclaimed king. Schemes were laid in France for the invasion of Britain and the restoration of the Stuarts, and, at the beginning of August 1715, two conspirators landed in Newcastle, Col. Oxburgh, an Irishman in the service of the Old Pretender, and the Scottish Earl of Mar. Oxburgh proceeded to Dilston, where he made contact with the Earl of Derwentwater, while the Earl of Mar, on his way to Scotland, called at Widdrington, where Lord Widdrington was in residence. Neither Derwentwater nor Widdrington greeted the intriguers with any sort of enthusiasm, but events soon overtook them. Rebellion broke out in Scotland under the Earl of Mar, and the Hanoverian government reacted with alacrity, ordering the arrest of all suspected sympathisers, who thereby were driven into open rebellion. Early in

October, Derwentwater and an armed force rode north to Rothbury and then to Warkworth, where the Pretender was proclaimed as King James III.

Lord Widdrington, with his brothers Charles and Peregrine, was at Widdrington when the Earl and his force arrived at Warkworth. There he joined them, and the die was cast. In evidence at his trial, Widdrington claimed that although he had met with public rumours and reports of intended invasions from abroad, and insurrections at home, he came unawares into this sudden and unpremeditated action. He went on to say (very much with tongue in cheek) that he never knew, or any way heard of, any formed design against the government until he was told, the night before, of an intended meeting at Plainfield, in Northumberland, on 6 October, and being soon after informed that almost all his neighbours and acquaintances had met there in arms he took a hasty and inconsiderate resolution of joining them. He was not in any sort prepared for such an undertaking, having only some of his own family with him, and having no arms but his common fowling pieces and wearing swords, and fewer horses than he usually kept. He continued that nothing but the report of so many of his friends being engaged could have hurried him on to an enterprise so unaccountably rash and unjustifiable. Despite all his protestations, Lord Widdrington must surely have been privy to the plot, such as it was, and the operative words in his statement were 'formed design', for Mar, on his way to Scotland must have made him fully aware of the intention.

Foiled in their attempt to take Newcastle, the rebels marched north, but were persuaded by Widdrington to turn south-west to Lancashire, where he hoped for help from his relatives, the Towneleys, and other Catholic gentry there. At Preston, however, the rebel force was trapped between government troops approaching from both north and south, and after a brief skirmish the rebels sought terms. Lord Widdrington does not seem to have played any spectacular part in the fiasco at Preston, but then neither did anyone else. He himself gave as the reason why he did not expose himself as he ought to have done an indisposition, occasioned by the gout. But Patten, uncharitably and having no high opinion of him, wrote,

> . . . 'tho the family of Widdrington be famed in history for their bravery and loyalty to the English crown, yet there is little of it left in this lord, or at least he did not shew it, that ever we could find, unless it consisted in his

early persuasions to surrender; for he was never seen at any barrier, or in any action, but where there was least hazard. He was wonderfully esteemed at home by all the gentlemen of the county, and it had been happy for him, and so we thought it would have been better for us (i.e. the rebels) if he had stayed at home. I heard a gentleman say, 'he was vexed to be under the command of an officer that could not travel without strong soup in a bottle; for his officer never wanted (for) strong broth wherever he came, both before and after he was a prisoner'.

Lord Widdrington was among the first to urge surrender and, with the other noblemen involved, was taken to London, where he was imprisoned in the Tower. On 9 February 1716, he was attainted of high treason, and at his trial pleaded guilty, but appealed for mercy on the grounds that, as he was the last who took up arms, so he was the first to persuade the rebels to lay them down. The death sentence was passed, but he was one of those reprieved and, on 22 November 1717, was granted a pardon so far as life and liberty were concerned. His estates and other property, however, were confiscated and, for a short time, held by the Crown.

The Earl of Derwentwater was less fortunate, and was beheaded on Tower Hill, the horrible sentence of hanging, drawing and quartering having been commuted to simple beheading. The hour before his execution, the Earl was in a room in the Transport Office on the west side of Tower Hill, with Lord Widdrington, whose reprieve had been announced, and a Catholic priest, Father Pippard, also known as Brown. The party prayed together, Lord Widdrington very much overcome with emotion, and, after he left, the Earl of Derwentwater expressed his gratitude to Father Pippard, saying that Lord Widdrington was a man of greater experience than himself, and thought a wise man by most people, therefore could serve his king and country better than he could.

In 1717 and 1718, claims were made on behalf of Lord Widdrington's children, by Thomas, Earl of Carlisle, as their guardian, and in February 1719, Lord Widdrington himself petitioned Parliament, explaining that his paternal estates, worth £3,000 p.a., had been forfeited. This he accepted, but went on to say that he was also seized, as tenant by courtesy, of the estate of Stella, worth about £800 a year, which he had obtained in marriage, and that it had been decreed by the commissioners and trustees for the public to descend after his death to his children. He therefore prayed that a sum not exceeding

£700 p.a. be applied out of Stella towards the support and maintenance of his children. Although the king did not object to this, the petition was refused by the Commons.

Lord Widdrington's Blankney estates had been purchased for £32,400 in 1718, by the member of Parliament for Grimsby, Joseph Banks of Revesby Abbey, Lincolnshire. On 11 June 1719, Banks purchased, for the sum of £6,936 16s. 2d., Widdrington's life interest in Stella and Winlaton, half in his own right, and half as trustee for William Cotesworth of Gateshead (who later demised half his interest to John Ord of Newcastle), but the conveyance by the Commissioners for Forfeited Estates was not dated until 8 August 1721. The estates at Widdrington were purchased by trustees for the Governor and Company of Undertakers for Raising the Thames Water in York Buildings, for the sum of £57,100.

Widdrington married a second time in July 1718, his wife being Lady Catherine Graham, daughter of Viscount Preston and a relative of the Earl of Carlisle, hence the Earl's interest in the affairs of the Widdrington family.

In 1727 King George granted a special bounty of £12,000 to Widdrington with, although this was not specifically stated, the intention of allowing him to recover his late wife's estates. On his behalf, Charles, Earl of Carlisle, entered into negotiations with the then holders, Joseph Banks, Robert Cotesworth and Thomas Ord. Banks agreed with alactrity and, on 8 April 1727, transferred his moiety to the Earl. Cotesworth and Ord refused to deal, proclaiming loudly and long that the late Lord Widdrington and his son, Henry Francis, were both of them persons professing the Popish religion from birth, and as such absolutely debarred from purchasing any lands whatsoever in England, by an Act of Parliament of the reign of William III. Awkward to the end, rather than deal with the Earl, in September 1728, Cotesworth and Ord sold their shares to the Grand Allies, Sir Henry and George Liddell, George Bowes and Edward Wortley, who in 1731 transferred them to the Earl.[4]

On 27 February 1733, a further petition to the Commons that the incapacities occasioned by his attainder — his ability to sue in a court of law, and to inherit any estate that might fall to him — be removed, and that any relief which the House should think fit be granted, was successful, meeting with the House's approval and receiving the Royal Assent on 17 May 1733.

Despite the recovery of his first wife's estates, and the fact that his second wife had manor houses at Nunnington in Yorkshire and at Netherby in Cumberland, Widdrington does not seem to have returned to the north, but passed his life quietly in the south of England. He remained strong in his Catholic faith, and his name is to be found, as a witness to marriages, in the register of the Catholic mission at Winchester in each year from 1727 to 1730.

He died at Bath on 17 April 1743, and was buried at Nunnington, where his widow, who died at Brook Street, London, on 11 December 1757, was also buried.

Lord Widdrington emerges from this as a true and sincere Catholic, respected, trusted and held in high esteem by his neighbours and friends — a nobleman of his times with the faults, but also the virtues, typical of his age.

SOURCES

Hedley, W.P., *Northumbrian Families,* Vol. II, 102.

Patten, R., *The History of the Late Rebellion.*

Skeet, F.J.A., *A History of the Families of Skeet, Somerscales, Widdrington, Wilby, and others,* 1906.

Welford, R., *Men of Mark 'twixt Tyne and Tweed,* Vol. III, 615–621.

NOTES

1. *Royal Comm. on Historical Manuscripts,* Cowper, Vol. II, p.370. 1880.
2. Durham Marriage Bonds; Hodgson, J., *History of Northumberland,* Vol. II, Pt. II (1832), p.238.
3. Northumberland Record Office, Bell (Alnwick) MSS. 366, Tempest pedigree in Towneley folder.
4. Lancs. Record Office, DDTo/E/13; North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers MSS., Shelf 18, Minutes of the Grand Allies, 1727.

PARIS IN THE TERROR: LETTER OF A FRENCH MONK TO A NORTHUMBRIAN GENTLEMAN, 1795

Dominic Bellenger

The text of the letter which forms the centrepiéce of this communication is a translation of a French original preserved among the Ridley Papers in the Northumberland Record Office (ZRI. 30/5). It bears the signature of a Benedictine monk, Dom Sebastien Lepiceau,[1] and seems to have been addressed to Sir Matthew Ridley.[2] It is an eye-witness account which reflects, in a very direct and often moving way, the religious disturbances of the French Revolution, and shows how detailed reports of events in France made their way to England. It cannot be doubted that such vivid descriptions as the one provided by Dom Lepiceau persuaded men like Sir Matthew (who became head of the Newcastle Committee for the relief of the French refugee clergy in 1796) that the attack on the French Church was a sinister undermining of the foundations of society.[3]

Sir,

I take advantage of an opportune moment to renew the honour of your acquaintance. I do not believe for an instant that you could have completely forgotten me. On the contrary, I imagine that you have thought of me more than once on account of the Revolution and the suppression of all the religious orders in France. You are well aware that I was very attached to the religious state in which I lived in happiness and contentment; you can appreciate, Sir, the pain I have suffered in being torn away from the religious life having lived it for fifty years. I left my monastery on 2 October 1792, the very date fixed for the closure of all monasteries. Since then I have continued to reside in Paris, but not without great and remorseless suffering, which has adversely affected my health and good cheer. Our poor general (Dom Chevreaux[4]) who was prior of St Nicolas[5] when I was subprior and you were at the academy has not fared as well; he died at the massacre of the Carmes (2 September 1792) along with one of his nephews, also a religious and

former prior of Saumer. Both were of our order. Since that terrible day for so many priests, monks and others, twelve Benedictines have been guillotined, among them the superior (the Vicar General) of Cluny. Thus, of the three congregations of our order two have lost their superiors; one in the massacre, the other on the guillotine.

I would be obliged if you were to remember me to Messers. Romsey, Balfour, Stuart, Caldron and other academists of your time and your friends, if you chance to see them. I trust you are well and in good spirits. Mr de Pignerolle probably died of despair, this assasin having killed more than those murdered during the massacre and by the guillotine.

Yours most respectfully, Sir.

Your most humble and devoted servant,

S. Lepiceau

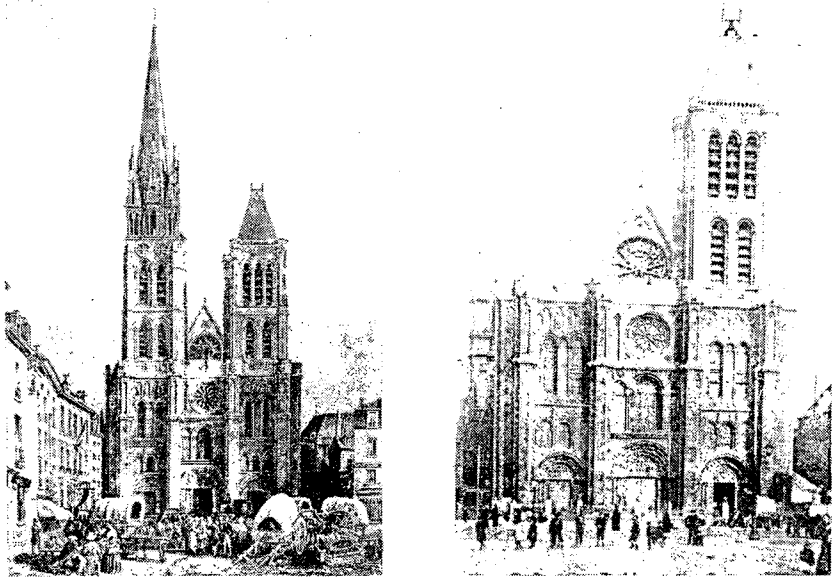
Paris, 8 August 1795

If there is peace or if you find a suitable occasion please do me the honour of replying. My address is 223 rue St Jacques.

P.S.

Sir,

Your newspapers must have spoken of the exhumation of the bodies formerly in the church of St Denis, but they probably didn't say what was found.[6] The body of Henry IV was as entire and well preserved as if he had died yesterday. His flesh was not at all sunken or dessicated. The colour of his skin was natural, his facial features intact and quite recognizable. He had a long beard and short hair, in the style of his period. The shroud in which he was placed was also well-preserved, and his shirt as white as when it had been put on him. His head had not been opened. In order to see better his sleeves and the front of his shirt was torn open . . . He was left exposed, quite naked, for two whole days in order to satisfy public curiosity. The body showed no signs of decay. It was placed afterwards in a small burial-ground adjoining the northern door of the church where a great pit had been dug. His body was put in first and then all his successors, and predecessors, not excluding Madame Louise whose body was translated from the Carmelites (where she had been buried). She was the last to be thrown in the



ABBEY OF SAINT DENIS, c.1800 AND EARLY 20th CENTURY

second pit, the first not being big enough for all the bodies. This sad operation took place on 14 October 1793. No mausoleum, tomb or epitaph was left in the church. Even the lead was taken away. Then this beautiful monument, the Westminster of France, was exposed to the ravages of time. What a calamity!

I also saw the body of Mr de Turenne, reasonably well-preserved, but not like that of Henry IV. I saw none of the others. They say that Louis XIII could be identified by his moustache and Louis XIV by his big features, but they were as black as ink and the flesh was not in a good state of preservation. All the others had decomposed and were mere skeletons. The abbey library, which you must have seen, once probably second only in its richness and size to that of the King, fell victim to flames last year along with the natural history room. Certain antiquities and rare and precious manuscripts were saved as they were kept in a separate department.

As I was about to finish my letter I learnt that Mr de Pignerolle has been dead since November 1793. He died at Douai, in Flanders, where he had been arrested and imprisoned trying to emigrate.

NOTES

I am grateful to Mr Robin Gard who sent me a copy of the letter, to Dom Boniface Hill who assisted in its translation, and to Mr Richard Sharp who provided me with information on the Ridley family.

1. Dom Sebastien Lepiceau, born at Sille-le-Guillaume, in the diocese of Le Mans, on 25 April 1725, was professed as a Benedictine monk of the Maurist Congregation on 26 October 1746 at Saint-Evroult in Normandy. He was resident at Saint-Germain-des-Pres in Paris by 1790 (G. Charvin, 'Les religieux de la Congregation de Saint-Maur pendant la Revolution V', *Revue Mabillon* 57 [1967], p.198).

2. Matthew Ridley II (1745–1813), a member of a leading Newcastle family, attended Westminster School and completed his education in France. Several of his letters to his father from this time survive (ZRI.30/3). They are dated March–August 1766 and were written in Angers (where he must have come into contact with Dom Lepiceau), Aix, Bordeaux and Lyons. With this collection is a single page account (n.d.) for 'Expenses of the Academy' – dancing, fencing and language masters mentioned, but no names given. Ridley became M.P. for Morpeth in 1768 and sat for Newcastle from 1774 to 1812. He was Governor of the Merchant's Company of Newcastle for thirty-five years and mayor for three terms (1774/5, 1782/3 and 1791/2). He was commander of the Newcastle Armed Association in 1803. He was buried in St Nicholas' Church, Newcastle, where there is a classical full-length monument to him. For full biographical details see R. Welford, *Men of Mark 'twixt Tyne and Tweed,* Volume 3 (Newcastle 1895), p.321.

3. For the relief of the French clergy see D. Bellenger, 'The French Exiled Clergy in the North of England', *Archaeologia Aeliana,* 5th Series, Volume 10, (1982), pp.171–177. The text of 'An Address to the Public' (NRO. 452/C3/52) from the 1790s reveals the sympathy shown to the exiled priests and the problems involved in their succour.

> "In order to obviate errors, and to refute misrepresentations, concerning the history and situation of the FRENCH ECCLESIASTICKS who were landed some time ago at Sunderland in the county of Durham – A Friend to Truth and Charity wishes to lay before the candid and generous public of the Counties of Northumberland and Durham the following statement of the case of these unfortunate and respectable exiles.
>
> Their number is near 200 consisting of parochial Clergy of the same province, Normandy, and, excepting a very few, they belong to the Diocese of Coutances, the bishop of which, a prelate highly esteemed and revered, now resides in London, and is ready to attest their situation and characters. His principal representative, or vicar general, is with them, knows them all, presides over them, enjoys their esteem and confidence, and though he has been fortunate enough to save a little property, and therefore for the present declines receiving any subsistance from the government for himself;

yet he is content to share with his brethren the extreme hardships and inconveniences of their present deplorable condition, in which he is determined to remain till every one of them shall be better accommodated.

At the time of the acceptance of the new Constitution, 1789, the alternative was tendered to them of taking what was then called the constitutional oath, or renouncing their preferments. They did not hesitate to offer this costly sacrifice at the shrine of religion and conscience; but flattered themselves, that, having made this choice, they should be permitted to remain in a passive and quiet submission to the then prevailing powers, and in the enjoyment of the consolations and succours of their relations and friends. The well known and unrelenting persecution of them, under the unjust appelation of refractory priests, soon deprived them of these imagined comforts. At that time of extreme distress, at the imminent hazard of their lives, and from the merciless slaughter of their brethren, they escaped to the neighbouring island of Jersey, the inhabitants of which received them with tender compassion, and generous hospitality. In this valuable asylum they passed three years; and when the government of this country found it necessary to remove them from it, their separation from their generous hosts occasioned mutual regret and lamentation. They were then, after a tedious voyage, and at the approach of winter, landed in this northern climate, and lodged in an old wooden barrack at Monkwearmouth, which had for some time past been given up as unfit for the reception of soldiers, being open to the air in many parts, and in a state of general, and nearly irreparable decay. In this wretched habitation they passed their nights on shelves placed one above the other, and so crowded, that had not their number been somewhat diminished by the charity of some neighbours, who accommodated a few of them elsewhere, the most fatal consequences might have been justly apprehended. To add to their misfortune the allowance made them by government was by some accident so much in arrear, that their pittance of food was alarmingly reduced, until, within these three weeks, a part of that arrear was fortunately paid them. Their great want now is of clothing and such habitations as may defend them against the rigour of a climate in the best seasons colder than their own, and unfortunately now more inclement than is usual at this early period of the winter. By the advertisement of the general committee at Newcastle it will appear, that lodging for 45 will be ready by the middle of this month. Other dwellings, that are reparable with some expence, are offered, and under consideration. a vacant brick building at Sunderland may afford a better temporary shelter for the remainder, and is now fitting up for that purpose, but as circumstances may require their removal farther from the coast, the search after more distant empty houses is still pursued. A large order for clothing has also been sent to Leeds.

It is obvious that the infant subscription at the foot of the advertisement is utterly inadequate to these objects and that the gentlemen of the committee engage in the business far beyond the fund they have now in

hand This they do in perfect confidence that when this truly lamentable case shall be fully understood, the inhabitants of the two opulent counties of Northumberland and Durham will cheerfully contribute to the alleviation of such extreme and unmerited distress. The case of men so certainly and advantageously known will surely be considered by the discerning candour of British benevolence, as perfectly free from those suspicions which too naturally attach themselves to promiscuous, unconnected and unvouched for adventurers. The merciful and humane will regard these sufferers, not only with compassion but esteem. Their number cannot be deemed a burdensome proportion of the total amount of such unhappy strangers now in this kingdom, and when it is considered that the occasional dereliction of pitmen's houses, and other circumstances afford some peculiar advantages for placing these poor exiles, there is every reason to hope that the sum wanted for so truly charitable a purpose will not exceed either the will or the power of those many persons in the two counties, whose hearts are touched with the miseries of their fellow-creatures".

4. Dom Ambroise Augustin Chevreux, a native of Orlean (where he was born on 13 November 1728), was professed at Saint Florent de Saumur on 14 May 1744. He served as Superior of the abbey of Saint Nicolas, Angers from 1763 to 1766, and held a number of administrative appointments until 1783 when he became Maurist Superior General. In 1788 he attended the meeting of the Estates General as a 'depute' for Paris, and in 1790 he declared his willingness to remain attached to the religious state. He was murdered at the monastery of the Carmes in Paris during the September Massacres of the First Terror of 1792. He was beatified in 1926 (Charvin, *Revue Mabillon* 56 [1966], p.64).

5. The abbey of Saint Nicolas at Angers was one of three Maurist monasteries in a town which was one of the great provincial centres of learning in France. Saint Nicolas, a medieval foundation, had been provided in the eighteenth century with a handsome new set of buildings, but by the end of the old regime the community consisted of only nine members. Saint Aubin, the richest and oldest of the three monasteries, had only fifteen permanent residents by that time (J. McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Regime. A Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 1960), p.78. It is possible that Ridley was a boarder at Saint Nicolas; it is known that Saint Aubin's monks accepted a few students 'to share their lodgings and their table for the duration of the university course' (ibid., p.74).

6. For a description of the spoliation of Saint Denis and a discussion of its context see J. McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 353–355. 'The violators of the tombs of Saint-Denis were helping the war effort, and showing their contempt for monarchy, hereditary rank . . . and religion' (p.355).

PROGRAMME 1985/86

All lectures will be held in the New Hall of St Mary's Cathedral, Clayton Road West, Newcastle upon Tyne, on Tuesdays, at 7.00 p.m.

1 October 1985	Annual General Meeting. Rev. W.J. Nicholson (Chairman), *St Henry Morse (1595–1645) : his work in the North of England.*
5 November 1985	Frank Keegan, B.A., *'Bias in History?' : a glance at the two Northern Rebellions, 1536 and 1569.*
3 December 1985	Rev. Peter Hiscock, B.A. : *St Bede and Jarrow.*
4 February 1986	David Crane, M.A. : *Catholic Hymns of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.*
4 March 1986	Dr Alan Rounding : *'A House Divided' : the Hodgson Family, 1635–1662.*

Coach Excursions

5 October (Sat)	Hulne Abbey, Alnwick.
May 1986	Raby Castle and Escomb Church, Durham.
June 1986	Naworth Castle and Dacre Castle, Cumbria.

Printed at Darlington Carmel