Northern Catholic History

No. 39 1998

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 yearly, in May.

PATRON: The Rt Rev. Ambrose Griffiths, O.S.B., Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.

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Annual Subscription	£6.00 (with *Northern Catholic History*) or £4.00 (membership only).

NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY

Published yearly (in May) £5.00, postage extra.

Copies of Nos. 10-38 available from Mr Gard (above) at reduced rates.

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Articles and enquiries welcomed by the Editor.

ISSN 0307—4455

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NORTH EAST CATHOLIC HISTORY SOCIETY 1997

Judging from the improving numbers at the talks and outings, the Society is enjoying a revival but, even so, it still reaches too few of the many people who cherish the history of their Faith. Fr Milburn's talk on St Augustine on 5 February and George Thornton's illustrated talk on Lindisfarne on 5 March completed a successful 1996-7 series, and the two Summer outings, to Auckland Castle and Gainford church on 17 May and to Hermitage Castle on 21 June, were fully subscribed. The outings enable members to meet socially and often bring in new members.

The 1997/98 Season began with the annual Mass for deceased members, followed by the A.G.M. on 3 September. Fr Milburn reviewed the events of the previous year, thanked the officers, and conducted the elections, welcoming Mrs Anne Welsh as the new Outings Secretary (see inside front cover for the officers). The September half-day outing to Blanchland Abbey and Warden church on 20 September is described in this edition. The three pre-Christmas talks attracted appreciative audiences. Gerald Bonner gave a fascinating talk on Ireland and Italy in the culture of Christian Northumbria on 1 October, Fr Roland Connelly, who (with Canon Wilfrid Fee) has done so much to keep alive the memory of our heroic martyrs, spoke on 5 November on Women of the Catholic Resistance in the 16th and 17th centuries, and on 3 December Fr Milburn gave his paper on Mgr Thomas Witham of Lartington, the full text of which is printed in this booklet. The talks series will be completed with Mrs Brenda Currer's talk on the Role of the Priest in mid-19th century Catholic Education on 5 February and Fr Paul Fisher's talk on Robert Tate and 19th century Catholicism on 5 March 1998.

Providence has happily played a generous part in this edition. At the outset the larder was bare and spirits were lowered further when one or two prospective articles were postponed, but then several more came unexpectedly, added to which Bob and Cecily Murphy processed and 'disked' some of the articles, thus producing copy ready for the printer, resting the Editor's ageing portable typewriter. Fr Milburn firstly draws attention to a 7th century monastery in Mayo with Northumbrian links and later publishes his extended study of the life of Mgr Thomas Witham of Lartington. Fr Connelly has kindly permitted the reprinting of the biography of Dorothy Lawson from his recent book Women of the Catholic Resistance 1540-1680. Fr Geoffrey Holt, a faithful contributor over the years, writes of William Meynell, a local Jesuit priest, who spent many years as a travelling tutor for young squires in the 18th century. Dr Leo Gooch reveals a curious proposal to establish a northern Archdiocese in the early 20th century, while the very real work of the Catholic Women's League in the Diocese is described by Bernadette Lawson and the late Lyn Gilroy. Finally, George Thornton records many of the interesting details of Blanchland Abbey and Warden church, visited in September.

The Editor has much pleasure in extending the thanks of the Society to the authors of these articles and for all the research and writing involved, gratuitously given for their love of Catholic history and for the greater glory of God. Deo Gratias.

Robin Gard, Editor

MAG NÉO NA SACHSAN

The Rev. David Milburn, D.S.H.

No, the title is not a printer's error. In its translation 'The Yew Plain of the Saxons' it refers to the 7th century 'English' monastery founded near the present hamlet of Mayo (or Mayo Abbey), 17 miles from Knock. It is from this monastery that the very much later County Mayo acquired its name.

Most general histories of the period fail to mention this Saxon foundation, presumably on the principle that it belongs more to Irish history than it does English. Yet it came into being only because of events in our native Northumbria. Those are recorded by St Bede in chapter 4 of Book IV of his *History of the English Nation*. At the Synod of Whitby King Oswy of Northumbria, in his efforts to unite the Church in his kingdom, imposed on it Roman, western, practices. Many of the Lindisfarne monks, of English as well as of Irish origin, found it difficult to give up their old ways. Cuthbert was made prior in order to affect a reconciliation. Some, however, including thirty of English descent, moved away even before that, with Bishop Colman at their head. As he had originally come from Iona, it was natural enough for him to return there with his monks for a short while before settling them on the island of Innisboffin off the coast of Galway.

Though the Irish and Saxon monks were united in their religious practice, they soon fell out over mundane matters. Back on their home ground the Irish, according to the Saxons, thought nothing of slipping away from the monastery to help their relatives and friends, returning only when the monastic harvest had been gathered in by the rest of the community. The Saxons complained to Bishop Colman, who, in order to resolve the issue decided to move the Saxons elsewhere. To quote Bede's words in the original Latin: 'invenit locum in Hibernia insula aptum monasterio construendo, qui lingua Scottorum Mag éo nominatur'. One translator makes of this: [he] discovered a site suitable for a monastery on one of the Irish Islands which the Scots call Magéo.' The correct translation is surely along the lines: 'he found a place suitable for building a monastery on the Irish mainland called in the Irish tongue Mag éo.'[1]

Bede continues the story: '. . . The monastery is still occupied by English monks, and has grown from small beginnings into a great place. It is usually called Muigéo, and being now much larger and in better order than it used to be, houses an exemplary community of monks drawn from

England who live chastely and singlemindedly[2] by the work of their own hands under a canonically elected abbot.'

The land which Colman purchased from a local chieftain was Mag nÉo, the Plain of the Yews, only later becoming known as Mag nÉo na Sachsan, the Yew Plain of the Saxons. Twenty or so years later these English monks were praised by Alcuin for 'the light of their knowledge which is spread through a wide area of England.[3]

Mayo's later history is difficult to disentangle from legend. A pamphlet by Rev. T. Brett, *Mayo of the Saxons: Brief History of an Old See*, Dublin, 1923, prints fact and fiction side by side. Nora K. Chadwick, an undoubted scholar in this field, suggests in her *Bede, St Colman and the Irish Abbey of Mayo* that the English monk Egbert who spent most of his long life in Ireland [Bede III, 27] may have been based in Mayo and even helped to found the monastery.[4] She also puts forward the possibility that Egbert and Adamnan, the biographer of St Columba, may have worked together from Mayo to convert the northern part of Ireland to Roman practice. Mayo would therefore have had a 'a pivotal role in the reform movement . . . [being] the key to its status in the 8th century Irish and English churches.'[5]

Though it has been suggested that a contrary view is taken by Kathleen Hughes in her *Evidence for Contacts between the Churches of the Irish and the English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age*,[6] she does not actually contradict Mrs Chadwick's view. She is concerned rather with Bishop Colman and the implausibility of his becoming an exponent of Roman practice. In any case she agrees that by 730 Mayo supported a bishop who seems to have regarded himself as subject to, or in close communion with, the metropolitan of York.

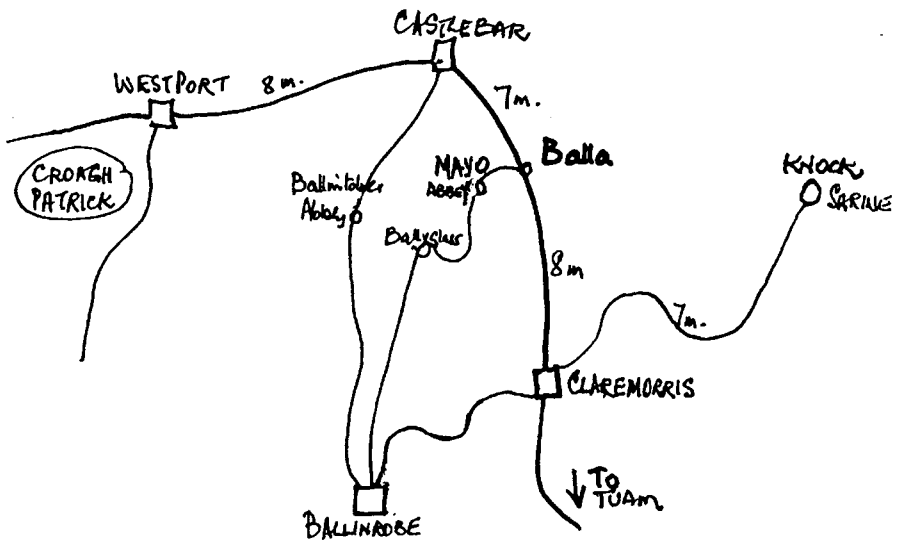
About the turn of the 12th century the monastery was rebuilt in stone by which time its importance was such that it a new diocese had been created round it. In 1370 the monks adopted the Augustinian rule. At its dissolution in 1569 Mayo was a great abbey with buildings occupying about thirty acres.

Chance visits to Mayo Abbey by English pilgrims to Knock in 1992 soon stimulated an intense interest the English connection. A report on the feasibility of a heritage centre for the village completed in June in 1994 led to a four-day investigative tour of Northumbrian monastic sites by delegates from Mayo in the autumn of that year, and was quickly followed by the first international workshop at Mayo Abbey in February 1995, chaired

by our own Professor Rosemary Cramp. To this were invited representatives from north east England and from the island of Iona. It was so successful that a second workshop was held in the April of the following year, again chaired by Rosemary Cramp. As a result of all this, interdisciplinary work is now well under way to establish the position of Mayo Abbey in Irish monasticism.

The eagerness of the Mayo people to put Mag nÉo na Sachsan back into the history books is now evident enough, and their efforts to unearth the lost history of our 'twin' monastery deserves our support as well as our admiration. To wish them well is not sufficient. We need to match their enthusiasm by our own interest, for it is in a way our own self-interest, closely linked as we were with the original foundation at Mayo Abbey. Whatever we do to draw attention to this connection is therefore likely to benefit us as well.

It goes without saying that a visit to Mayo Abbey is *de rigeur* for any of us who tour north west Ireland. In the Ireland of the Welcomes there will always be from now on a particularly warm welcome for visitors from our own region. A map is provided courtesy of Mr Bernard Connelly of Middlesbrough who has done so much to promote good relations between Northumbria and Mayo Abbey.



NOTES

1. Bede, IV, chapter 4. Sherley-Price, Penguin Classics, 1960, p.208 and McClure and Collins, World's Classics, p.179.
2. Bede uses the phrase 'in continentiae and sinceritate'.
3. *Survival or Salvation: A Second Mayo Book of Theology*, ed. E. McDonagh, Dublin, 1994, p.27.
4. In *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early English Border*, Cambridge 1963 Cf. *Survival or Salvation*, p.27.
5. *Ibid.* p.28. I have taken the liberty of substituting 'English' for 'British'.
6. In *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes, Cambridge, 1971. Cf. J. M. Wallace Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: An Historical Commentary*, Oxford, 1988, p131.

DOROTHY LAWSON (1580-1652), NEWCASTLE HEROINE OF THE CATHOLIC RESISTANCE IN ENGLAND

The Rev. Roland Connelly, SM

Dorothy Lawson was born in 1580 at Wenge, the ancestral home of the Dormers in Buckinghamshire and was the second daughter of Sir Henry Constable of Burton Constable in the East Riding of Yorkshire and his wife, Margaret Dormer. She was therefore sister to Henry Constable, the first Viscount Dunbar and sister also to Catherine Constable, whose husband became the first Viscount Fairfax of Gilling and Emly. Dorothy herself was married on 10 March 1597 and the husband chosen for her was Roger Lawson, the eldest son of Sir Ralph Lawson of Byker in Northumberland and his wife, Elizabeth Burgh, in whose right he had inherited Brough Hall in Richmondshire.

The wedding ceremony was given great importance and was celebrated at Wenge with no little pomp and circumstance. Afterwards, the young couple and their entourage made a stately progress across country to Dorothy's home at Burton Constable Hall, where as Father Palmes reported, 'all Holderness came to congratulate them, some as friends and allies others as servants and vassals'. Next day, bride and bridegroom moved on their triumphant way towards Brough Hall but six miles short of the end of the journey, Sir Roger Lawson with a hundred horsemen was waiting to welcome his new daughter-in-law to his home. He lifted her from her horse and put her on:

> a snow white steed he had brought for her, caparisoned with crimson velvet, embroidered with swans and martins of pearls; these the arms of Lawson, those of Brough . . . After the performance of those sweet mutual addresses, (Sir Ralph Lawson) applied himself to her father, of whom yet he had so much as taken notice, and the rest of her honourable train with the highest rhetoric of civil respect, that the sharpness of his wit, improved by the best breeding of England could advance . . . Between the two knights, her own father on the right hand, her father-in-law on the left, she rode more like Esther or a princess than a subject or esquire's spouse until arriving at a fair green before Brough Hall, she met with a second encounter or volley of ceremonies given by her mother-in-law, the Lady Lawson, who greeted her with the salutation of the most welcome guest that ever her house had received.

(Father William Palmes SJ, *The Life of Mrs Dorothy Lawson,* (1646), p. 12.)

After such adulation, it is noteworthy and quite typical of Dorothy Lawson that 'she stole the time before she reposed, for evensong and examen of conscience, which since she was capable, she never as much as once in her whole life omitted.'

And so Dorothy Lawson set up house at Brough Hall under the tutelage of Lady Lawson, who was herself a formidable Catholic and in fact had been one of the Catholic ladies put in prison at Sheriff Hutton Castle in 1592. Neither Sir Ralph Lawson nor Roger wished to be known as Catholics and both, at this time, seem to have been Church Papists, but courteously and diplomatically they spent much time in London on business so that their wives were free to make all the religious arrangements for their joint household.

Before the arrival of Dorothy Lawson, Lady Lawson had been accustomed to journey forth every month in search of Mass. Dorothy however made different arrangements. Knowing that the Jesuit Superior, Father Richard Holtby lived only four miles away and that he was the brother of Sir Ralph Lawson's steward, Mr Anthony Holtby, an immediate message was sent demanding his presence. As a result of that meeting, Father Holtby agreed to come to Brough and lead Mrs Lawson in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and he agreed also to send a priest every month for Mass. From these beginnings Brough developed as a recusant Mass centre with its own chapel, its own priest's hiding hole and its own resident priest for over three hundred years.

In this Catholic atmosphere Dorothy Lawson reared her children. But by 1605 the house at Brough Park was too small for the growing family and it was necessary to move back to Northumberland where the Lawsons had originated, and where Sir Ralph Lawson was in possession of an old manor house at Heaton near Byker on the north bank of the River Tyne. In this house, Dorothy Lawson and her children took up residence but the father of the family continued to spend much time in London at his legal work in the Inner Temple.

It was here, in late 1613 or early 1614, that Roger was taken seriously ill and an urgent messenger was despatched northwards to summon his wife. Despite the fact that she was at the time well advanced with another child, Dorothy set out at once on the difficult journey to the south. She arrived in time to comfort her husband and at her entreaty he called for a priest to hear his confession and reconcile him to the Catholic Church. He

died, fortified by all the rites of the Church and with his wife by his side.

In seventeenth century England, the speedy remarriage of a widow was expected as a matter of course, especially if that widow were an heiress and endowed with many children. Dorothy was certainly not short of money. Her husband had made ample provision for her in his will and her father and her father-in-law were ready to offer generous help. Of course, she needed much help. Heaton was a large establishment and she had many children. Her biographer says she had twelve; Sir William Lawson maintained in 1855 that 'she seems to have had fifteen children in all, though the family pedigree says nineteen.' All in all, a second marriage seemed inevitable. But to the surprise of her family and friends, Dorothy Lawson refused to contemplate such a step and insisted that she wished to lead a single life in the service of the Gospel.

That her motives for this determination were strictly religious has been confirmed by her chaplain and biographer, Father Palmes. He refers to her vow 'to pass the remainder of her days in angelic chastity', (p. 24) and he explains also how 'she intended to expend the rest of her life like a solitary sparrow in the holes of a rock, or mourning turtle, that never had mate but one, and vowed never to know another.' (p.23.)

Dorothy Lawson returned home at once to apply herself to the needs of her children. Now for the first time in her life she was completely in charge of her own household and could make all her own decisions without reference to any man. She obtained the services of a resident Jesuit priest and what had formerly been designated as the 'children's prayer room', now became the chapel where the priest was able to celebrate daily Mass. The religious education of the children was entrusted to the priest and in due time all these children, with the exception of the heir, were sent to colleges and religious houses overseas in the hope that religious and ecclesiastical vocations would be nurtured.

Mrs Lawson's first personal chaplain was a Father Legard SJ, about whom very little is known but the influences of this obviously holy priest were profound and he took his duties as spiritual director very seriously indeed. The Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus pay tribute to them both when they note that by his 'continual advice and assistance, she daily improved not only in her own perfection but became visibly more active towards her children and neighbours. When she first arrived at Heaton there was but one Catholic family in the parish or circuit.

At her death there was not one heretic family and six altars were erected for divine service.' (vol. V, p.717.)

Mrs Lawson relied heavily on her priests. Professor John Bossy relates with some amusement how at times she over-emphasized this reliance and he quotes the manner in which she insisted on taking advice on agricultural problems from her priest, William Palmes, who knew nothing whatever about them and had hastily to consult others.' *(English Catholic Community,* p. 258.) What a contrast to Charlotte Jerningham who expressed her regret that 'these good priests cannot confine themselves to spiritual matters.'

But Mrs Lawson was always concerned about spiritual matters and consulted not only her own chaplain but also her great friend, Father Richard Holtby SJ, who made his more permanent residence with her and absented himself only to attend to his wider duties as the Jesuit Superior for the north of England. It was Father Holtby who provided Dorothy Lawson with her chaplains and it was Father Holtby who organized the religious affairs of the district so well that his network of secret altars and hiding places has never been discovered.

Heaton Hall, however, was not intended to be a permanent Catholic centre. At the request of her father-in-law, Sir Ralph, the Hall was sold and steps were taken to build a new house for Dorothy and her extended family not far away on the banks of the Tyne at a place called St Anthony's. The Records of the English Province relate that 'her reasons for choosing that locality were: first, because the place was holy, dedicated in Catholic times to Saint Anthony, his picture being decently placed in a tree near the River Tyne for the comfort of seamen; secondly, for that it was more private than Heaton and free to frequent her chapel.'

In planning and building this new house, Dorothy Lawson was fortunate to have Father Richard Holtby at her side because the Jesuit Superior had much experience in devising such buildings and was himself a very skilled craftsman with a reputation second only to that of Saint Nicholas Owen, the Jesuit brother, as an ingenious and successful designer of hiding holes for priests.

The house was large. It was intended to be a family home for many children as well as a Mass Centre, a Jesuit Headquarters and a resting place for itinerant priests. Father Holtby was invited to bless the first stone and in the Biography of Dorothy Lawson it is recorded (p. 30) that:

at the end of the house, opposite to the water, she caused to be made the Sacred Name of Jesus, large in proportion and accurate for art, that it might serve the mariners instead of Saint Anthony's picture: and when the fabric was ended, she dedicated the whole to Saint Michael and Saint Anthony, and each room, (the chapel excepted which was consecrated to the Mother of God) was nominated and publicly known by the name of some particular saint.

Shortly after the construction of this magnificent house, Dorothy Lawson lost her chaplain. Father Legard had served her with devotion and distinction for several years but died in either 1623 or 1624. His place was taken by Father Henry Morse, then a Jesuit novice but later to achieve heroic stature as the priest of the Plague and one of the Forty English Martyrs. Within twelve months, Father Morse was arrested in Newcastle upon Tyne and after some little time in prison there was transported to London. Father Holtby then appointed Father John Robinson SJ to be the Lawson chaplain but he was captured on his ship in the river before he had even set foot on shore. And so Father William Palmes (or possibly Palmer) was appointed chaplain and he stayed with Dorothy Lawson until her death.

It is this Father Palmes who has left for posterity the detailed biography of Dorothy Lawson which is the major source of information about her life and works. He stayed with her about seven years and knew her intimately as priest, friend and spiritual director. He does not hesitate to profess his belief in the extraordinary sanctity of his spiritual child and he endeavours to explain her heroic attachment to the Gospel and her unceasing efforts to proclaim the Catholic Faith to the people of the district. At first the burden on Father Palmes was very heavy. Mrs Lawson expressed to him her desire to become a recluse in her own house but after consultation with Father Holby it was decided that this would not be conducive to the greater service and glory of God and permission was refused. Mrs Lawson accepted the decision humbly and willingly and applied herself to a more active religious life which was centred on her own house but spread outwards to help all who lived in the vicinity. This work was much more congenial to Father Palmes and he worked with great zeal to further all the spiritual projects of his mistress.

Father Palmes has described the household of Dorothy Lawson as if it were a religious house or convent. He has stated that:

her chapel was neat and rich; the altar vested with various habiliments according to the fashion in Catholic countries. Mass in the morning; Even-

song in the afternoon about four of the clock with the Litany of Loreto to recommend to the Sacred Virgin's custody the safety of her house and a De Profundis for the faithful departed; between eight and nine at night, the Litany of the Saints at which all her servants were present. On Festival days they also heard Mass and Evensong, and when there was not a sermon in the morning, there was usually a catechism in the afternoon, to which the children of her neighbours were called with her own household, and herself never absent, delighting much to hear them examined and distributing medals and Agnus Deis to those that answered best. (Biography, p. 43.)

Father Palmes goes on to explain how Dorothy Lawson celebrated the full liturgy of Easter and Christmas and how at such times she entertained many Catholics from the surrounding countryside with food and drink. She was well known as a gracious hostess but she was also well known as a lady who cared for all who suffered and she frequently ventured forth to assist the needy.

> When any fell into trouble or sickness, no occasion of business, weather or time, were it night or day detained her; yea she often went sick and returned sound, in so much that it passed as a proverb amongst us. . . To women in childbirth she never went without comfort of both sorts: relics for the soul and if they were poor, cordials for the body. For these offices, she gained so much on the opinion of neighbours, that they would generally say, they feared not if Mrs Lawson were with them. *(Ibid.,* p. 45.)

'Her liberality did bountifully extend to the poor, both by vow and necessity; these she hourly relieved, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and because she was a widow herself, she kept a purse of twopences for widows.' Father Palmes delivers himself of the powerful statement that 'as long as I lived with her, which, alas was but seven years, . . . none of her parish, man or woman departed this life without help, or infant without baptism'. *(Ibid.,* p. 46.)

Dorothy Lawson's charity towards the Jesuits is also worthy of record. When her chaplains, Father Henry Morse and Father John Robinson were in prison for the Faith in Newcastle, 'she furnished them with church stuff, washed their linen, provided them with all the necessaries for clothes and victuals, and though Mr Morse was known to belong to her, nevertheless preferring his convenience before her own safety, she adventured to visit him in gaol and petitioned the magistrate he might enjoy the liberty of the town for his health'. *(Ibid.,* p. 46)

And Father Palmes goes on to explain how well she provided for him as her chaplain.

> To her ghostly father nothing was wanting fit for the condition of a religious man. He was accommodated with a good chamber and library, with all things belonging to himself in a genteel and plentiful way; and according to the custom of the colleges, she gave him a viaticum when he went abroad, the remainder of which he restored when he returned home. I dare avouch, that for the space of seven years, I neither knew what was in my purse when I took journey, nor she what I expended out of it, when I gave it to her at my return. *(Ibid.,* pp. 46-7.)

To the Rector of the Society, she gave each year a sum of £10 and also the tithes of the salmon fishing on the estate and each year she financed the Jesuit retreat when half a dozen of the Society would live with her at her expense for eight days.

For such acts of charity Mrs Lawson was widely known and respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. She openly professed her Faith but she made no religious distinction among those she served, and all, irrespective of their theological viewpoint could recognize the holiness of the woman and the multiple good works which she achieved. There was therefore considerable anxiety over a large area in 1631 when news came from St Anthony's that a serious illness had beset her. For six months she lingered on as a chronic invalid, in great pain, confined to her bed, 'with a consumption or cough of the lungs'. She suffered in patience and equanimity but she was aware that the time was fast approaching when she must meet her Maker and for that joyous event she prepared herself confidently. She died on 26 March 1632 at the age of fifty-two.

Many tributes and compliments had been paid to Dorothy Lawson during her lifetime but the news of her death produced grief and sadness over a very wide area and the manner of her funeral was the most remarkable tribute and the greatest compliment that had ever been paid to her.

Her Requiem Mass was celebrated in her own chapel at St Anthony's at eleven o'clock on the very night she died and even at that short notice more than a hundred Catholics were present. Next day, her eldest son, Henry Lawson was the chief mourner and:

> all the gentry thereabouts were invited and a dinner prepared for them. The poor of that and the bordering parishes were served that day with meat; the

next with money. Divers boats full of people came in the afternoon from Newcastle, all plentifully entertained with a banquet; and when these civil respects were ended, we carried the body in the evening to Newcastle in her own boat, accompanied by at least twenty other boats and barges, and above twice as many horses, planting them on both sides of the shore 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, which they received covered with a fine black velvet cloth and a white satin cross, and carried it but to the church door ... *(Ibid.,* p. 60.)

At this point, perhaps, a reminder is necessary that the year is 1632 and that the Penal Laws are still in full force against the Catholics so that every Catholic taking part in that funeral procession was dicing with death. In these circumstances, what happens next is almost unbelievable were it not for the word of the eyewitness, Father William Palmes SJ.

At the foot of Pilgrim Street, where once stood the old church of All Hallows, a small group of Protestant dignitaries awaited the funeral cortege of the recusant Dorothy Lawson. The Church of England clergyman, the Reverend Samuel Barker was there; so was the Mayor, Sir Lionel Maddison; so was the sheriff, Francis Bowes. The Catholics could only hope that these stern upholders of the Law would shut their eyes to the presence of so many Catholics and would allow the vicar to conduct the Anglican Service, which was always required for Catholic burials. In fact, the vicar had other ideas. He knew that many Catholic priests were present among the mourners and now, with great charity and remarkable courage, he defied the Penal Laws and invited any such priest to come forward and preside in his place at the funeral ceremonies. Father Palmes felt himself to be unworthy of this honour, so it was another priest, unnamed, who took over the service and with Catholic rites laid Mrs Lawson's body to rest in her grave in the Protestant church while the Protestant ministers and the Protestant mourners stood around in love, sympathy and respect. It was a most unusual funeral for a most unusual lady and an extraordinary tribute to the sheer goodness of a holy woman, whose virtue transcended all denominational barriers.

Acknowledgement

The Society is grateful to Father Connelly for permission to reprint this biography which forms a chapter, pp.184-190, in his recently (1997) published *Women of The Catholic Resistance: In England 1540-1680,* available from The Pentland Press Ltd., 3 Regal Lane, Soham, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CS7 5BA, at £8.50, plus £1.25 p & p UK and £3.75 P & P overseas, or ordered through local bookshops.

WILLIAM MEYNELL [1744-1826] AND HIS TRAVELS

The Rev. Geoffrey Holt, SJ

In the eighteenth century in the days of the Grand Tour it was not unusual for young men to be sent by their parents, if they could afford it, to travel in France and Italy with a tutor or guide as travelling companion, supervisor and instructor. In Italy the journey might include visits to Venice, Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples and Sicily and sometimes longer stays would be made for purposes of the study of antiquities or the appreciation of art. Such tours were very attractive to Catholic parents as their sons could not take university degrees at Oxford or Cambridge and instead prolonged visits could be made to universities in France or Italy. It was not uncommon for English priests to take on the duties of guide and travelling tutor and this was not confined to members of religious orders. Thus in the 1780s Thomas Johnson *(vere* Middlehurst) was travelling tutor to 'young Mr Strickland' (later Standish), Joseph Berington was with Miles Stapleton, Charles Berington with 'young Mr Giffard' of Chillington, the Irish priest Thomas Hussey with 'young Mr Webb' and Gregory Stapleton with 'young Mr Stonor'.[1]

Jesuits also were to be found among the travelling tutors – John Johnson with Rowland Stanley in the 1720s, William Newton with the 'two Arundells' (sons of Henry, 6th Lord Arundell of Wardour) in the 1730s, William Aston with 'young Mr Arundell' (probably later the 8th Lord) and James Jenison with Thomas Weld in the 1760s. About 1768 and in the following years came Charles Plowden with Tom Gage, Edward Walsh with Jack Biddulph, William Meynell with Sir William Stanley and John Carroll with Charles Philip Stourton.[2] At least three of the above Jesuit tutors were not yet ordained at the time of the tour; Charles Plowden tried to study theology at Bologna for a year during the tour and take examinations at Florence. To tutor and pupil alike the travelling was a widening of horizons; to Jesuits, as to others, it may have been a way of showing appreciation to the families who by maintaining a priest or a chapel made possible their work in England and Wales. Indeed, sometimes it may have been difficult to refuse.

For the Jesuits their suppression in 1773 inevitably brought considerable changes. It is true that their work in England and Wales (now under the direction of the vicars apostolic) and their mission in America in

Maryland continued much as before but the houses of the English province in Flanders (St Omers College and the novitiate at Watten had already been lost when the French government expelled the Jesuits in 1762), the college at Bruges (the successor of St Omers), the house for the study of philosophy and theology at Liège and the house for the tertianship and novitiate at Ghent were all closed. Some of the priests and laybrothers gathered at Liège where under the authority of the prince bishop they conducted the Academy there, the successor to the colleges of St Omers and Bruges, until it moved to Stonyhurst in 1794. A few Jesuits took pupils on the Grand Tour. One of these was William Meynell.

In the North Riding of Yorkshire, at Kilvington and Yarm, was the home of the recusant Meynell family. William was born near Yarm on 3 May 1744 and was at school at St Omers College from 1753 till 1756 or later.[3] In September 1761 he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Watten and went on to study philosophy at Liège. Then followed five years of teaching at Bruges College during which he was in the last year in charge of the studies.[4] He then went abroad, probably in the summer of 1771 as tutor to the young Sir William Stanley. When they were in Italy, at Bologna, he wrote to the Jesuit general, Fr Lorenzo Ricci, and received in reply in November 1771 a letter approving his stay there with 'Juniore De Barone Stanley' in a *seminario nobilium*.[5] From Bologna they travelled to Rome, arriving there in February 1773, and Naples. Returning to Rome where they were received by the pope, they were believed in April 1773 to be on their way to France. William Stanley who had been said to be 'in danger of a consumption' was declared to be better.[6]

Neither the date nor the place of William Meynell's ordination to the priesthood has been found but by 1776 he was stationed at Eccleston Hall, the home of the family of that name, near Chorley in Lancashire.[7] As chaplain he remained until 1784. The accounts of the Lancashire district show this as does a letter he wrote from there in February.[8]

One of the masters at St Omers College when William Meynell was at school was John Thorpe who from 1761 was in Rome and after 1765 at the Jesuit headquarters there. He remained in Rome for the rest of his life and showed in his very numerous letters a warm interest in the lives and work of his Jesuit friends and colleagues. This interest continued after the suppression in 1773. One of these, a contemporary of Meynell's at St Omers College, was Charles Plowden. In earlier letters Thorpe had written of

Meynell's tour with Sir William Stanley. In 1782 and 1783 he mentioned him as being at Eccleston and in September 1784 he wrote to Plowden about Meynell's next tour: 'I wish to hear where that good friend Meynell will fix for his winter residence with his honorable charge . . . '[9]

Thorpe heard from Meynell in December; he and his charge were at Strasbourg.[10] Before the end of the following year he mentioned Meynell in two letters to Plowden and gave him information of something which was probably of some importance in Meynell's later life: 'What is to become of him after the marriage of his honorable pupil whose father is supposed to have settled a handsome sum on the tutor . . . '[11] And again: 'Mr Meynell often wished to live in Rome; is now at liberty and with a competency. I know now *[sic]* where he is or has been since he left Strasbourg . . . '[12] It seems almost certain that 'the honorable pupil' was Robert Edward Petre, son of the 9th Lord Petre (and himself later 10th Lord) who was probably at school at the Academy at Liège where he may have met William Meynell on a visit there. Robert Petre was married on 19 February 1786.[13] The 'competency', perhaps a pension and, it is presumed from Lord Petre, may be the explanation why Meynell was later able to travel and without a pupil for much of a year.

As he was 'at liberty' in 1785 it is possible that he was the Meynell mentioned in Sir Richard Bedingfeld's Memorandum Book as accompanying his son, Richard (born 1767), to the Academy at Angers in the summer of 1786 — 'Mr Meynell came to Oxburgh on ye 22nd of last Decbr'. As Richard Bedingfeld left Angers for Brussels in January 1787 and remained there until April, William Meynell (if it was he) was presumably free to accept another engagement.[14] In fact, the next tour which took him and his new pupil, George Robert Heneage (born 1768), the son of George Fieschi and Catherine (daughter of the 8th Lord Petre) Heneage of Hainton in Lincolnshire, to Germany, Italy and France, must have begun early in 1787. Thorpe wrote to Plowden on 29 May:

> Our friend Meynell has written to me from Vienna from whence he talks of conducting his Mr Heneage to Genoa before winter to visit the family of his grandmother Fieschi one of the most ancient and illustrious in Italy.[15]

But in July, Thorpe reported, they were still in Vienna where they had been seen by another tutor and pupil, Gregory Stapleton, the future bishop, and young Mr Stonor.[16] In September Meynell wrote from Venice to tell Thorpe that they were on their way to Milan and Bologna[17] but they arrived

in Rome earlier than expected, in October. Thorpe wrote to Plowden:

> Last week our friend Mr Meynell with his Mr Heneage unexpectedly arrived at Rome while I supposed him to be no nearer than Milan. He is the same agreable man & chearfully finds his way to S. Carlo [Thorpe's residence] where he entertains both himself & me. As the young gentleman expects some of his Vienna acquaintance this may perhaps detain him for a month or two here where otherwise he does seem yet to find any amusement, & for want of it, may as suddenly start away to Naples as he did from Milan.[18]

Their stay in Rome was not long. After a visit to Civita Vecchia they departed for Naples: 'Mr Heneage . . . finding nothing to entertain in Rome unexpectedly declared that he would leave it, & perhaps soon will return to go somewhither else. Meynell almost daily came to me at S. Carlo & frequently entertained me . . . '[19] They remained at Naples until February. There is no evidence in the letters to suggest that Thorpe believed that the tutor directed the pupil in any form of study apart perhaps from a general interest in antiquities, indeed it is difficult to resist the conclusion that young Mr Heneage was almost entirely out to enjoy himself. Thorpe began to tell Plowden of his misgivings: 'The Mentor [Meynell] has too much travelled in the present stile and will scarce sit down quietly at Liège unless he seriously meditates . . . thro' the whole course of a long Exercise . . . '[20] And later that month: 'I have had only one letter from Meynell since he has been in sight of Vesuvius . . . he replied with a jest to any recommendation of the Academy at Liège or of a laborious mission in England to his future care . . . '[21]

John Thorpe's interest in William Meynell and his travels is not surprising. They were both Jesuits, though suppressed, and Thorpe must have known Meynell as a boy at St Omers College. To be able to talk to a fellow-countryman visiting Rome must have been very welcome. But the extracts from the letters quoted here show that Thorpe had other reasons for his interest. In the first place he looked forward to the restoration one day of the Society of Jesus and in the meantime was anxious that the missionary work undertaken by the Society in England and Wales should continue. Secondly, he wished to see the Academy at Liège prosper because of the importance of its work in itself and its importance should the society be restored. He believed that Meynell had a contribution to make to both of these – to the work of the missionaries at home and to the work of the Academy. In January (1788) the travellers were still at Naples: '. . . where his young Esq[re] finds more entertainment . . . than in whatever Rome could

afford either to the eye or ear. [Meynell] tells me that he hopes for liberty before this year is on its decline . . . '[22]

Tutor and pupil returned to Rome from Naples in February but were soon talking of leaving on Ash Wednesday.[23] They departed, wrote Thorpe, on 13 February:

> Our friend Meynell with his young master has left this place. At their departure Florence and Genoa were in their intentions but how often the horses' heads are to be turned is more than Meynell could tell. He hopes to have filled his engagement to Ld Petre & to be at liberty with the next fall of the leaves when he will again have his occupation & situation to choose. Both at present seem to be undetermined. God grant him to do what will give a lasting satisfaction . . . [24]

The next news that Thorpe received came from Marseilles. Meynell, he informed Plowden:

> was waiting letters of credit for his young gentleman to proceed to places of more expensive follies & of discharge for himself from any further attendance on him. I do not know on what line our friend will dispose of himself; he declined close conversation with me on that matter; said however that he would politely excuse himself from accepting a French Marquis's invitation that has been very urgent to engage him with very honorable conditions to undertake the education of the young heir of the family . . . He has not forgotten Lancashire & seems to entertain a predilection for his friends there. I have by word & letter wished him not to forget Liège, but he would only jest with me on this subject . . . [25]

The marquis kept up the pressure and the flattery. 'What may we expect our friend to do [wrote Thorpe] under the influence of such and so many superlatives?'[26]

But the next letter from Meynell came from Eccleston. He told Thorpe that he was 'like to remain there until the exit of the good old squire whose infirmities & years make the remnant of his life to be of uncertain duration . . . '. After quoting him to Plowden, Thorpe remarked: 'The dust of postchaises & the powder of the fine company stick in the eyes, if not in the heart, of such travellers for a time . . . '[27] In May 1789 Basil Thomas Eccleston died and the mission at the Hall was transferred to Portico nearby.[28]

Some months later, in November, Thorpe wrote to Plowden in considerable surprise:

> What wild schemes is our acquaintance Mr Will Meynell upon? He talks of coming alone into Italy, travelling over the whole length of it, passing into Sicily, visiting the isle of Malta & going to Egypt. When last in Rome he gave hints of some like extravagant designs, which I heard as so many jests without any intention of seriously aiming to put them in practice. But now he is said to be in any *[sic]* hurry and very like to be in Italy before Xtmas. You will undoubtedly hear of his motions in England, & with me you will much pity him if he extends beyond the Academy at Liège.[29]

Then Thorpe heard in January from Meynell himself. He was just about to go on board of the *Lively,* Capt. Brine, for Nice, Genoa and Leghorn and would go straight to Sicily without calling at Rome. 'Health and advice of physicians are the ostensible motives for this expedition which as he tells will require more than a year to complete'.[30] In a letter to Thomas Barrow, one of the staff at the Liège Academy, Thorpe expressed his amazement: 'I am anxious to know the cause and end of this strange & unaccountable rambling on sea in a person who was capable of doing much good on land.'[31]

William Meynell arrived at Palermo in April (1790). William Strickland, president of the Academy in Liège since 1784 was about to leave for London. He heard from Thorpe:

> Mr Will Meynell was well on 20 April at Palermo in Sicily; then going to pass a fortnight on the isle of Malta from whence he might perhaps take a fancy of visiting Egypt. It is a strange unaccountable jaunt. I have taken a friendly liberty in giving him a hint of advice & hope he will not take it amiss . . . [32]

Meynell wrote of his plans to Thorpe who passed on the information to Marmaduke Stone, the successor to William Strickland as president of the Liège Academy. Meynell had written from Palermo that:

> he was going to Girgenti (Agrigentum) & would from thence go over to Malta. He does not mention either Egypt or Africa but on his return will visit Syracuse, Catania & Messina. He is to be again at Palermo for the feast of St Rosalia in July. His return to England seems to be uncertain tho' he gives a hint of his perhaps seeing Rome before winter.[33]

To Plowden, Thorpe wrote that Meynell was on his way to Malta on 20 June. 'It is all a strange freak while he is elsewhere so much desired and wanted'.[34] The next month brought further news from Sicily:

> On 25 June Mr Meynell was come down from the top of Mt Etna to refresh himself in a country house belonging to the Benedictines near Catania . . . He has not been in Egypt . . . He now looks towards England by another sea voyage directly from Sicily . . . [35]

In August Meynell's travels on his own seemed to be coming to an end. He stayed in Rome for six days and, according to Thorpe:

> Last Wednesday Meynell departed with the French courier for Pisa; he then purposed going from Leghorn to Marseilles & thence by Paris to Calais & to be at London for the end of the month . . . He will be glad to pay you a visit at Lullworth . . . I would wish him to go to Wardour which he has never seen. Do you give him a help thither . . .[36]

Meynell did not arrive in London until October. John Carroll recently consecrated first Bishop of Baltimore (at Lulworth on 15 August) met him and wrote to tell Thorpe who commented 'Mr Meynell has had sea enough; if he keeps his word he will now set upon doing good in his own country'.[37]

John Thorpe, who died in February 1792, mentioned Meynell for the last time on 17 November 1790 in a letter to Charles Plowden. It seems he had called at Wardour Castle:

> His Lordship [Arundell] seems to be pleased with Mr Meynell but this gentleman's abandoning Lancashire for Diss or for any other place in Norfolk is not conformable to principles of rectitude which he expresses. He chose and desired Furness; it was left & prepared for him. To relinquish it without experiencing it or seeing it is not fair dealing & not even like an honest Yorkshireman,[38]

So in the summer of 1790 William Meynell had considered taking over the mission at Furness but had abandoned the idea in favour of Diss in Norfolk (probably as chaplain to the Havers family at Thelton Hall) but there seems to be no evidence that he actually went there. In 1791 he supplied at Durham for Edward Walsh who was on his travels. In 1792 or early 1793 he was reported to be supplying at Brough in Yorkshire and to be inclined to settle with Francis Howard *(vere* Holme), the priest at Richmond in the same county.[39] Of where he lived or what he did for much of the rest of his life there is little certainty. He was at Ellingham in Northumberland as chaplain from 1799 till 1803 and perhaps longer;[40] in 1809 it was mentioned in a letter that he was chaplain to Mrs Haggerston and in that year the suggestion was made that he should be asked if he would go to London after Mrs Haggerston's death and live with his Jesuit colleague, William Strickland, who was elderly, with a view to taking over his work, and it is probable that he did so at least for a while.[41] In 1814 it was thought that he might be the man to go to Rome to act as agent for the English Jesuits but there is no evidence that anything came of this.[42] Perhaps because of his travels he was considered, it seems, a reliable

adviser on questions of church architecture; he was asked to give (and gave) his opinion on the plans for alterations to a church in Preston.[42]

In 1815 Meynell was living (perhaps as a private chaplain) at Richmond in Surrey. In 1818 it was reported that he had had a stroke and he died at Richmond on 16 December 1826.[44]

John Thorpe and William Meynell seem to have been friendly enough and to have enjoyed one another's company whenever they met in Rome but the former did not hide, as the extracts quoted from his letters to Charles Plowden and others make clear, his bewilderment at Meynell's love of travelling when he believed there was on the missions in England and Wales and at the Academy at Liège so much work to be done. The suppression of course brought changes in the lives of individual Jesuits. For Thorpe, the older man steeped in the tradition of orderly Jesuit life and government, the change must have been very considerable. In the hope of a restoration one day he was anxious to save what could be saved from the wreck. For Meynell still under thirty in 1773 the change may not have been so great; it presented him with opportunities of which he was able to take advantage. After all, English priests including Jesuits, had been travelling tutors before. Had not the general of the Jesuits, Lorenzo Ricci, approved in 1771 of his studying at Bologna while with Sir William Stanley on a tour of France and Italy ? Medical advice was the reason he gave for the journey he made by himself in 1790.

NOTES

1. These journeys are often mentioned in John Thorpe's letters — see below note 9.
2. On these tours see my *The English Jesuits in the Age of Reason* (London 1993) chapter 10.
3. See *The English Jesuits 1650-1829* C.R.S. vol. 70 (1984) 165.
4. There is an entry in Accounts of the Lancashire District, 1752-69 (Jesuit Province Archives) – Nov. 1766 of Mr Beaumont [Fr Joseph Beaumont] a present to Mr W. Meynell of Bruges, his nephew's master 2 - 2 - 0.
5. *Epistolae Generalium* 1750-1853 f.4 (Jesuit Province Archives).
6. On this journey see *The English Jesuits in the Age of Reason* pp. 123-5.
7. He received a letter there which can be dated to 1776. See Foreign Correspondence 1776 1859 f. 2a (Jesuit Province Archives).
8. College of St Aloysius, R-W (Jesuit Province Archives) f. 229. It is likely that the previous chaplain, Thomas Coniers, continued to live there until his death in 1780.
9. Thorpe-Plowden I f. 184v. Thorpe's letters to Plowden 1781-92 are in two volumes. A third volume, Miscellaneous Letters, are those addressed by him to others.

10. Thorpe-Plowden 1 f. l95v (22/12/1784)
11. Thorpe-Plowden I f. 241v (31/8/85)
12. Thorpe-Plowden I f. 261v (28/11/85)
13. C.R.S. 13/209; *The Complete Peerage* X.
14. C.R.S. 7/205-6.- There were two Meynells alive at the time – both suppressed Jesuits – Thomas (1737-1803) and William. William seems more likely here.
15. Thorpe-Plowden II f22v (29/5/87). Thomas-Henry Heneage (George Robert's grandfather) had married in 1728 Anna Maria only daughter of Roboaldo Fieschi, Count De Lavagna, in Genoa. Burke, *Dictionary of the Landed Gentry* vol. 1 (London 1847).
16. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 30 (18/7/87)
17. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 40v (26/9/87)
18. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 45v (20/10/87)
19. Thorpe-Plowden II f.47v (24/11/87) and f.48.
20. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 54 (Dec. 87). Thorpe suggested perhaps in jest that Meynell might need a period of spiritual renewal if he was to settle down at the Liege Academy.
21. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 55 (29/12/87)
22. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 60v (23/1/88)
23. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 63v (2/2/88)
24. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 64 (13/2/88)
25. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 68 (12/4/88)
26. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 74 (28/5/88)
27. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 93v (13/9/88)
28. See *North West Catholic History* XVI (1989) 5. According to Brooke 'Historical Collections' (in the Jesuit Province Archives) II, Nicholas Sewall at Scholes and Portico supplied for Meynell during his travels.
29. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 154 (14/11/89)
30. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 161 (2/1/90)
31. Thorpe, Miscellaneous Letters (Jesuit Province Archives) f. 243 (27/2/90)
32. Thorpe, Misc. Letters f. 247 (12/5/90)
33. Thorpe, Misc. Letters f. 281 (5/6/90). St Rosalia was the patron saint of Palermo and 15 July was the anniversary of the finding of her relics. See Butler's *Lives of the Saints,* Thurston and Attwater, London 1934, September vol. p.50.

34 Thorpe-Plowden II f. 170v (6/9/90)

35 Thorpe-Plowden II f. 175 (7/7/90)

36.Thorpe-Plowden II f. 181 (11/8/90). Charles Plowden was then at Lulworth Castle as chaplain and tutor.

37. Thorpe-Plowden II f. 191 (27/10/90)

38 Thorpe-Plowden II f. 194 (17/11/90)

(The notes numbered 39-44 are on page 62)

CATHOLIC PRINTING, PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING IN THE NORTH-EAST BEFORE 1800

Alex Fotheringham

The publication in 1996 of *English Catholic Books 1701-1800, A Biblioqraphy*[1] was a notable and welcome event. It extended the chronological sequence begun by Allison & Rogers[2] and continued by Clancy[3]; it made accessible a little-known (and perhaps unconsidered) field; and it provided, in its detail and the impressively wide range of libraries consulted, a stimulating challenge to collectors and to booksellers such as myself. 'Not in Blom' is a token of serious rarity, and I have had a happy letter from a collector delighting in the fact that one of his books is not only unique, but recorded in Blom as being in his (the collector's) library. Perhaps most important of all, however, the bibliography offers (as good bibliographies should) a means whereby useful questions may be asked, and this article – by a bookseller armed with nothing more than a mind like a jackdaw's nest, supplemented by Gillow, King and Hunt[4] - will pose a number of questions in the hope that some scholar may know the answers.

One of the most useful features of Blom is the detail which is included about each item; in addition to the title, one is told the size and format of the book, who printed it, published it, sold it, when and where. The first and most basic question must be, then, how many Catholic books were published in the North-East in the eighteenth century? Forty-one are listed: 35 in Newcastle, 3 in Durham, one each in Stella (seat of the Widdringtons), Stockton, and Yarm. This is no more than a head-count of entries, but immediately the relative importance of Newcastle is clear, and one can ask why this should be so: a less populous hinterland? a less Catholic hinterland than (say) Preston, where 29 eighteenth century books (to Newcastle's 35) are listed?

The head count is only the starting-point, however; one needs to know the publishers, printers, booksellers, and when they were active. Seven are mentioned in Blom; their active years are: [with their entire commercial span from Hunt in square brackets]

Coates 1783-1800 13 pieces [1781-1803]

Walker 1796-1800 8 pieces [1795-1831]

Hodgson 1786 5 pieces [1785-1800]

Hull and Elliott 1789-90 3 pieces [1788-95]

Charnley 1778 2 pieces [1755-1803]

Vesey & Whitfield 1778 1 piece [1777-?80]

Cuddon [?undated] 1 piece [a shadowy figure, not in Hunt]

Several things are apparent now; that Catholic printing and publishing began relatively late in Newcastle (by 1778, when the first dated works appeared, Stuart of Preston had printed ten books); that only two men, Coates and Walker, were in any sense substantial Catholic printers or publishers; and that 1800 is a rather frustrating cut-off date - one would like to know more of Coates from 1801-03, and Walker from 1801-31. The latter printed a fine edition of Lingard for Keating in 1806 with plates by Bewick; but did he sell more Catholic works, as well as print them?

The other five names can be dealt with relatively quickly. Cuddon appears as bookseller of an edition of Gobinet's *Treatise on the Two Sacraments*, printed by Walker, undated and hence not necessarily pre-1800; he is not listed in Hunt and may not even be from Newcastle. Vesey and Whitfield had a brief career as itinerant and (one suspects) not very successful booksellers in Darlington and Newcastle. They appear, together with Charnley, as booksellers of an edition (1776) of Carracioli's *Life of Clement XIV* published in London. The translator may well have been Charles Cordell, of whom more later. Charnley himself, a substantial figure in the Newcastle book-trade, may have had a previous link with Johnson, the London publisher of Carracioli; otherwise his only appearance is as the bookseller for a 14-page *Discourse* (on the oath of allegiance) published by Thorne of Durham. (Anonymous, but by Cordell?)

Hall and Elliott printed three works: Challoner's *Garden of the Soul* (1789) and two short pieces - a pastoral letter for Bishop Gibson and an abridged Catechism (edited by Cordell, according to Gillow). They do not seem to have sold any of these works, or if they did, their titlepages did not mention it. Hodgson – another printer of substance – was responsible for five works in 1786; all translations of Fleury, all (almost certainly) translated by Cordell, and four of them sold by Keating, after Coghlan and Meighan, the most active London Catholic publisher.

Already the influence of Cordell is clear; of the twelve works mentioned above, he translated at least eight and it is reasonable to assume that he was responsible for them being printed and sold in Newcastle. We

shall return to him later; but what of Walker and Coates? Walker was primarily a printer – only two of the eight pieces to his name are sold by him; and the nature of his work is a little surprising. Four items are theses presented for examination at Crook Hall (Ushaw), and one is a single leaf of *Regulations* for Bishop Gibson in 1800. Of the remaining three, one is an abridgement in two volumes of Butler's *Lives*, edited by John Bell, later professor of rhetoric and poetry at Ushaw; one is the undated Gobinet *Treatise* sold by Cuddon and mentioned above; while the third is Grostête's *Truth of the Catholic Religion Proved*, 1799, translated by Bishop Gibson. The influence of Ushaw, and of Bishop Gibson, is strong; and it would be fascinating to trace Walker's career for the next 31 years, to ascertain whether what was clearly a productive and harmonious relationship continued – but it is also worth emphasising that Walker's contribution amounted to two (possibly three) books, four theses and a leaf. One's sense of publications appearing as a result of personal proximity and suggestion (rather than as a response to a perceived local market) is strengthening.

When one looks in detail at what Coates, 'Newcastle's leading Roman Catholic bookseller' (Hunt) produced, this feeling persists; but there are various aspects of his operation which set Coates apart from the others whom we have considered so far. First, he nowhere describes himself as a printer; he published, or published and sold, or sold for Keating or Coghlan. Hodgson had indeed sold the Fleury for Keating - but, one can suggest, as a local bookseller dealing with a work by a local translator, rather than as a Catholic bookseller acting for/with his London counterparts. It is an important distinction.

Second, he was distinguished from the others by the scale of works to which he was party: sixteen volumes of Gother's *Spiritual Works* (?1792), with Keating, Coghlan and three others; twelve volumes of Butler's *Lives* (1798-00) and a *Life of Butler*, printed in Edinburgh and sold by Coghlan, Keating and Booker. Bergier's *Deism Self-Refuted* seems to have appeared about the same time – this time published by Coates and sold in London by Keating and Booker; it had been translated by Cordell, according to Kirk and Gillow. [Both Gillow and Rogers suggest Newcastle as the place of publication of a 1776 edition; if this were indeed the case it could not have been Coates, and would be by eight years the earliest Catholic work to be published there]. Cordell also may have translated a Fleury *Catechism* (1798); and Gobinet's *Instruction of Youth in Christian Piety* (1783), published by Coates and Coghlan, was translated by Thomas Eyre.

Coates' four remaining works were: Coombes' *Sacred Eloquence* (1798) printed by Coghlan and sold by a most impressive list of fifteen booksellers in England and Wogan in Dublin; and Cordell's own *Layman's Companion* (?1790), published by Coates and sold by a group of four Dublin booksellers. (Blom lists six other editions of works by Cordell; only one, *The Divine Office for the Use of the Laity* (1780) may have been published in Newcastle); and two works of instruction by Gother.

It is a substantial body of work; Coates's connections with other Catholic publishers were clearly good, his two multi-volume ventures impressive and presumably successful. And yet . . . take away those, and the Cordell works, and what remains? Five books in fifteen years, and only four of those for a non-scholarly readership. Indeed, Cordell, Bishop Gibson and Ushaw account for 25 of the 35 pieces under consideration; without their influence, there would have been virtually no 'ordinary' Catholic printing and publishing in the North-East at this time.

'Ordinary' Catholic publishing? The output of Stuart of Preston is worth listing at length, for it illustrates very clearly what was *not* being printed in Newcastle. From 1766-1778, Stuart 'Printed and sold' or printed:

Bona Mors, 10th edition
Bowes, *Practical Reflections*, 7th edition
Caussin, *Entertainments* (one of six editions in Blom)
Challoner, *Grounds*, 8th edition
Stuart, *Layman's Devotion*
Manual of Prayers
Pinamonti, *Short Meditations*, 3rd edition
Poor Man's Posey of Prayers, 3rd edition
Vade mecum priorum sacerdotum
Walton, *Directions for the Faithful*

All popular; virtually all reprints of known, loved and/or useful works; all produced for a strong local market-the plain people of Preston, one might say, and similar works were appearing in Liverpool, Wigan, Warrington, Manchester – Catholic Lancashire indeed. In this context, the North-East's offering looks and is meagre: but it suggests two possibly profitable lines of questioning. First, it would be useful to know whether *any* popular Catholic publishing took place outside London and Lancashire; and, *per contra*, what proportion of the whole was inspired by individuals

or institutions – or indeed by refugees from France in the broadest sense (French, English, institutional)? And it makes very clear that within the Catholic world there was a fragmented market: a point easy to overlook.

Cordell too is worth closer study; his contribution stands out because there was so little else. For twenty-seven years, from 1764 until his death in 1791, the influence on Catholic publishing, and indeed on Catholic life, of the 'learned and zealous Priest' (Kirk) was clearly inspirational.

And so to draw the threads together: Catholic printing and publishing came late to the North-East; depended largely on individuals or institutions; lacked any sort of an assured popular readership; began to come to life in the 1790's; and produced some substantial achievements in the face of considerable difficulty. The same would hold good, one suspects, for other regional centres (Bristol, perhaps); but it would be worth finding out, and in Blom one has the perfect vehicle for undertaking such a study. This article springs from a suggestion by Father Geoffrey Scott, one of the editors and himself a Tynesider; and it is an expression of gratitude to him for his encouragement and quietly understated assistance. Errors, whether of omission or commission, are most certainly not his but mine; but I hope too that this article may raise some questions which someone more scholarly than I may answer, to the benefit of us all.

It will be clear from this article that much remains to be added to what is known of 18th century Catholic printing and publishing – in Britain as in the North-East. Any additional information – about books or their publishers – would be most welcome and could be forwarded either to the Editor or direct to me: Alex Fotheringham, Antiquarian Bookseller, East Chesterhope, West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2RQ

NOTES

1. F. Blom, J. Blom, F. Korsten & G. Scott. *English Catholic Books, 1701-1800*, Scolar Press, 1996

2. A.F. Allison and D.M. Rogers. *A Catalogue of Catholic Books in English Printed Abroad or Secretly in England, 1558-1640*, CRS, 1968

3. T.H. Clancy, S.J. *English Catholic Books, 1641-1700*, Chicago, 1974, revised edn. Scolar Press, 1996

4. C.J. Hunt. *The Book Trade in Northumberland and Durham to 1860*, Newcastle, 1975

Charles Cordell: a short-title list of his works.

Kirk listed six works; Gillow increased this to ten, while Blom has extended our knowledge of Cordell yet further. The list which follows is almost certainly not complete but will perhaps provide a starting-point for further work; and it gives some idea of the extent

1. BERGIER (Nicholas Sylvestre) *Deism Self-Refuted*, 2 vols., s1.1775

   Kirk 4; Gillow 2; Blom 230. Translated by Cordell, according to Gillow and Kirk. Published in Newcastle (Gillow and Dr. D.M. Rogers).

2. . . . another edition. 2vols., Newcastle, Coates, s.a. Blom 231.

3. CARACCIOLI (Louis-Antoine) *Life of Pope Clement XIV*, London, 1776

   Gillow 3; Blom 435; not in Kirk. Translated by Cordell.

4. . . . second edition. London, 1778. Published by Charnley and Vesey and Whitfield in Newcastle. Blom 436.

5. CARACCIOLI, *The Travels of Reason*, Newcastle, 1781.

   Kirk 3; Gillow 5; not in Blom - a mystery.

6. CATECHISM, or *Abridgement of the Christian Doctrine*, Newcastle, Hall & Elliott, 1790. Edited by Cordell (Gillow).

   Gillow 9; Blom 473.

7. CORDELL (Charles) *The Catholic Layman's Companion*, Newcastle, Coates (ca. 1790).

   Blom 786 (noting also a 1766 edition); not in Kirk or Gillow.

8. CORDELL (Charles) *The Divine Office for the Use of the Laity*, 2vols., s.l., 1780. Dr. D.M. Rogers suggests Newcastle as the place of publication.

   Gillow 1; Blom 790, noting also a four-volume edition of 1763.

9. *A DISCOURSE on Catechetical Instruction.* Translated from the French by C.C., Newcastle, Hodgson, 1786.

   Blom 914; not in Kirk or Gillow

10. FLEURY (Claude) *The Manners of the Christians.* Translated by the Rev. Charles Cordell, Newcastle, Hodgson, 1786.

    Kirk 5; Gillow 7; Blom 1062

11. FLEURY (Claude) *The Manners of the Israelites*, Newcastle, Hodgson, 1786.

    Kirk 5; Gillow 8; Blom 1063

12. FLEURY (Claude) *A Short Historical Catechism*, Newcastle, Hodgson, 1786.

    Gillow 10; Blom 106 (Reprinted by Coates in 1798).

13. *Interesting Letters of Pope Clement XIV*, 2vols., London, 1777.

Kirk 2; Gillow 9; Blom 434

14. *A Letter to the Author of a Book* . . . London, 1785.

Kirk 6; Gillow 6; Blom 791/2 (two editions, both 1785. Authorship of this defence of Clement XIV has also been attributed to Milner.

Postscript (February 1998). I was surprised that virtually nothing was published for a 'popular', (rather than scholarly) Catholic readership in 18c Newcastle; but last week I acquired:

DES MAHIS (Mr.) *The Truth of the Catholic Religion proved from the Holy Scriptures*. Translated from the French, 8vo, 400pp., Newcastle: printed by Edward Walker, 1799.

This is an anonymous translation of a work first printed in 1697. Insofar as it has footnotes it is scholarly; but it is printed on cheap paper and is clearly aimed, if not at the very humblest readership, then at the middle ranks – indeed it is a mark of the translator's confidence that he should aim (according to his preface) at 'the impartial reader' as well as his more obvious audience.

This appears to be the only known copy, for it is not recorded in Blom, and its appearance suggests a number of questions: how many others like it may have been printed and failed to survive?; how many copies were printed?; how many potential readers were there – indeed how many literate Catholics were there in Northumberland and Durham two centuries ago? Any suggested answers would be most welcome.

'A KINDER MAN OR BETTER MASTER NEVER LIVED': MONSIGNOR THOMAS EDWARD WITHAM OF LARTINGTON (1806-1897)

The Rev. David Milburn, D.S.H.

INTRODUCTION

The village of Lartington is situated on the south bank of the Tees two miles west of the busy and beautiful market town of Barnard Castle. About twenty years ago its hall (manor house) was saved from almost certain demolition by its present owners Mr and Mrs R A Rackham. Thanks to their breathtaking enthusiasm the house has been restored to a degree of splendour not seen since the days of Mgr Thomas Edward Witham, its last squire, who died in the evening of 4 December 1897, just two days short of his ninety-first birthday.

There can be little doubt that Thomas Witham is of exceptional interest to those of us north-easterners who wish to know more about the Catholic history of our region. Not only did he wear, unusually, the two hats of priest and squire for much of his career, but in addition his long life coincided with the resurgence of English Catholicism after centuries of persecution and decline, and the main purpose of this paper is to bring to the fore Witham's personal contribution to the revival. It was by no means insignificant. There are in existence a number of portraits of him, one in oils for which he sat in his younger days, the others photographs taken at various stages of his long career. Perhaps we might have had more, had he not been so camera shy.[1] To capture the reality behind the image has been in fact quite a difficult task, for the records are by no means plentiful. If I have managed to persuade him to step out of his frame to take a bow in this centenary year of his death, the effort will have been very worthwhile.

EARLIER HISTORY OF LARTINGTON

Though the history of Lartington goes back over a thousand years, the earlier centuries are largely unrecorded except for a succession of names of families who either inherited or bought the property. Even as late as the 17th century we seem to be on uncertain ground. It is generally accepted that Francis Appleby bought the estate in 1639, but Hugh Aveling in his *Northern Catholics* says only that at some time before 1642 Ambrose Appleby bought Lartington and Linton on Ouse.[2] These Applebys seem to have come from Clove Lodge. They had long been 'mere gentry, living half

in the wapentake and half in Co. Durham, with a tenuous Catholic past."[3] Paulinus Appleby O.S.B.,who worked in the North Riding before 1642, appears to have been a relative.[4] The family became increasingly prosperous partly from the practice of law and partly from marriage into the Lawson family of Brough. That marriage also brought the Applebys to adopt a much more resolute Catholicism. Ambrose Appleby followed his wife into recusancy and saw two sons ejected from Gray's inn for persistent non-communicating.[5] Later, Lartington passed into the hands of the Maire family of Hardwick, who set about making extensive alterations to the hall. These were scarcely completed when John, the last of the male line, died and his nephew, Henry Lawson, acquired the property, only to lose it soon afterwards to his sister Catherine when he inherited the Brough estates. She married John Silvertop of Minsteracres in 1772, and as Mrs Silvertop Maire she lived on until 1832.[6] A further change of name came in 1800 when her second son Henry Thomas married Eliza Witham of Headlam, heiress to the Witham estate at Cliffe Hall, near Piercebridge. He took the name of Witham and went to live at Lartington in 1811.

The Maires, Lawsons and Withams all played an honourable role in helping the Church to survive the worst of times in the 17th and 18th centuries, not least by providing recruits for the priesthood and religious orders. Particularly we have reason to remember the two Witham brothers George (1655-1725), vicar apostolic of the Midland District (1702-1716) and of the Northern District (1716-1725); and Robert (1667-1738), a dynamic president of Douai College (1715-1738). The Maires also produced a bishop in William (1703/4-1769), for ten years co-adjutor to old Bishop Petre of the Northern District before succeeding him in 1768 and dying a year later at Lartington. With this kind of pedigree it cannot be any surprise that Thomas Witham, by then the youngest surviving son of the family, turned his mind to the priesthood from an early age. I do not suppose that as the fourth son it ever crossed his mind that he might one day inherit Lartington and so emulate the rather more numerous Anglican 'squarsons'.[7]

STUDIES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

The Withams seem to have been fervent supporters of the Jesuit college opened at Stonyhurst in 1794. In the old refectory one of the windows carries their coat of arms, and it is a fact that no fewer than nine boys of that name received their education there between 1798 and 1824.

Young Thomas himself went to Stonyhurst College on 10 September 1816 at the age of ten. Evidence of his progress is hard to come by, but we do know the content of the recitations which he twice gave on the Academy Days (Ushaw's equivalent were Orations and Speaking Days). The first of these fell in 1822 when he declaimed the Address of the Speaker of the House of Commons to the Duke of Wellington, and the second in 1823 when he delivered Byron's Destruction of Sennacherib.[8] Otherwise we have to rely on the published histories of the college[9] to be reminded of the severely classical programme which had been the long accepted educational norm. Living conditions, too, were severe. If, on the whole, school life in those days was something of an endurance test, it must have required extra fortitude to survive in a place which was still trying to come to terms with the loss of the prestige and security it had enjoyed at St Omers.[10] The rough days at Stonyhurst continued at Ushaw College where Thomas began his training for the priesthood as a first year philosopher in July 1824.[11] Among those who joined him was Evan Buller, author of that curious miscellany *Records and Recollections of St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw*. The transformation which has taken place at Ushaw in recent years makes it very difficult to imagine the spartan conditions which obtained at that time. The stone floors downstairs remain but the bare boards upstairs, even in the priests' rooms, have long since been carpeted. Nights must have been particularly sombre, the long corridiors lit by a single candle. When young Witham arrived at the college, the venerable second president, John Gillow, was still very much in charge. He had been brought from the York mission by Bishop William Gibson in 1810 after the death of Thomas Eyre, who had supervised the transfer to the new college from Crook Hall in 1808. Gillow, like Eyre, held resolutely to the traditions of Douai College, where they had been educated and taught.[12] These were still very difficult days, when bankruptcy threatened the young college. Nevertheless, within his limited means Gillow tried to better living conditions.[13] Amongst his improvements were a mill to provide better quality flour, and recreational facilities in the form of 'The Bounds' and a pond for skating. No doubt the feel good factor continued to elude the students. Like many another before and after him Thomas Witham enjoyed recalling these early days as he advanced into old age. He remembered Gillow as a model president, ruling the college with a firm hand in anxious times, a thorough disciplinarian, yet full of human sympathy.[14] He had progressed to the subdiaconate and was preparing for the diaconate when at about 5.00 p.m. 6 February 1828 the

'old' president died. He was only seventy-four years of age, but to the students he seemed a Methuselah. The whole college mourned his passing. 'Omnibus carus quia omnibus Pater,' recorded the college diary. 'Pater amabilis', echoed the students.[15] After a solemn requiem Mass John Gillow was buried in the college cemetery alongside Eyre and Bishop Gibson while the whole community and many visitors gathered round the graveside. It seems likely that Thomas, who himself became 'omnibus carus quia omnibus Pater' took Gillow as his own role model. He received the diaconate at the end of that year, and was ordained priest twelve months later, 19 December 1829, by the ailing Bishop Thomas Smith in the college chapel in the north-east corner of the quadrangle where the hall now stands.

ON THE MISSION

During these years it is likely that more often than not the small talk in the seminary would centre on the amazing transformation of Catholicism that was taking place all over the north. 1829, the year of Thomas' ordination to the prieshood , was itself the year of emancipation. Since the beginning of the century the Catholic population in the north had swelled to 180,000, served by 172 missioners (115 of whom were seminary trained) in as many missions, twelve of which were in Durham and eighteen in Northumberland.[16] Ten years later, (just before the old Northern District was divided into three, Lancs, Yorks and Northern, itself an indication of growth) that number had increased to 240,000 grouped into 190 missions, with 211 priests, 147 of whom were from the seminaries. Sixteen of these missions were in Northumberland and thirteen in Durham.[17] And looking ahead briefly to 1860, the date when Thomas Witham retired permanently to Lartington, by then the old Northern District of his youth had spawned several dioceses. Between them they accounted for 380 missions, 70 of them in the diocese of Hexham. The number of missioners increased proportionately, between 30% and 50% of them trained, like Thomas Witham, at Ushaw.[18]

STELLA

Witham's own activity as a priest reflects the heady enthusiasm of these years. His first appointment was to Stella, close to Blaydon along the south bank of the Tyne. The estate had been a centre of 'Popish spiritual services' since the middle of the 16th century when a younger branch of the Newcastle Tempest family acquired it.[19] Built in 1622 the hall incorporated eventually, if not immediately, a domestic chapel, though many and

possibly all its of earlier chaplains lived at Blaydon. The first there was a Benedictine, John Bennet Wilson, active in 1703, if not already from 1693. To him succeeded in old age a Thomas Witham OSB who died three years later in 1729.[20] Successive chaplains included seminary priests as well as religious.[21] The Widdringtons had appointed a Jesuit, but when in 1774 the property passed to a nephew, Thomas Eyre, he was replaced by Eyre's namesake, the future president of Crook Hall and Ushaw, who resigned his position at Douai College. Eyre remained at Stella until the Townley family purchased the property seventeen years later. A brief interregnum followed during which the mission was served from Hexham. In 1793 Rev. William Hull took charge and served the Stella congregation spread over 100 miles for close on forty years. He was probably the first missioner to live in 'Widow Jackson's house', purchased as a chaplain's residence in the time of Thomas Eyre,[22] though it is known that later, when ill health took over him, he went to the hall to live.[23] He was there and still sufficiently active to perform baptisms when young Thomas Witham arrived on 11 January 1830, just three weeks after his ordination to the priesthood.

It has been said that Thomas' sister Bridget lived in the hall with her husband Matthias Dunn, but he had no sister Bridget. The Bridget in the hall was the daughter of Joseph Todd of Greenside, colliery agent to the Silvertops. This much is true, however, that Thomas' sister Emma later (in 1841) married Bridget Dunn's nephew (also Matthias) who lived at High Hedgefield House just west of the Hall. The Dunns and Silvertops both had coal interests in the area, and were inter-related.[24] So we are able to say that with a healthy bank balance and relatives to encourage him Thomas was able almost at once to proceed with the building of a church.[25] Its principal benefactor was Lady Mary Eyre, Thomas Eyre's widow, who had left £500 for the purpose. By 1830 it was worth £950. Contributions from the Dunn family made up another £400, George Silvertop of Minsteracres gave £100.[26] John Green, the Northumbrian architect who had just won the contract for the Scotswood suspension bridge, designed a church 68ft by 33 ft in the early English style, the south facade of which was masked by the 'clergyman's house' complete with castellated angle turrets, the whole work costing something like £1,500. For Green it was rather small fry: he went on to design many local public buildings including Newcastle's Grey's monument and Theatre Royal. Yet for north eastern Catholics the building of this church signalled another encouraging sign of growth and confidence. It was officially opened on 12 October 1832 with a solemn high Mass

celebrated by Bishop Thomas Penswick. Dr Youens, Ushaw's president preached a 'perspicuous and persuasive' sermon, 'exhibiting at the same time profound theological knowledge and great talents as a preacher.' As for the priest in charge of the mission the *Catholic Magazine* declared: 'The whole of the extensive arrangements, made on this occasion, reflect the greatest credit on the Rev Thomas Witham who has been but a short time appointed to this old mission.'[27] What we see today is not entirely Green's design. In 1848-9 the church was enlarged, the sanctuary moved from north to south and a new entrance created on the west side of the building, the work reputedly of John Dobson, and though drastic, really the only way to house a growing congregation. Thomas, who came over to High Hedgefield with his sister in 1849, did not express any opinion about the alterations, but Winefrid did not much admire them.[28]

Such projects are not for the slothful or fainthearted. The building of tne new church and presbytery at first took up a great deal of the young missioner's time. Only afterwards could he settle down quietly to the regular and often dull routine of pastoral ministry implied in the bald entries of fading registers. The curiosity about Stella at this time is that we do not have the essential baptismal records. The only solid fact to support Witham's presence is his registration of the property for Catholic worship in 1837, as the new law demanded. 'I, Thomas Witham of Stella in the parish of Ryton in the County of Durham, Catholic priest, do hereby certify that a certain building situate and adjoining the back part of my dwelling house at Stella . . . is now used and henceforth intended to be used as a place of congregation.'[29] In the 1820s there had been on average twenty baptisms a year, a pattern repeated in the 1840s. For the 1830s, Witham himself enters six baptisms in the two months January and February 1832 (i.e. before the completion of the church). The next entry is almost six years later, witnessed not by Witham but by Rev. Richard Glassbrook (26 November 1837), and the register closes with the record of two baptisms in 1838, one in January by Rev. Joseph Dent, the other in December at which Glassbrook again officiated.[30] In other words, according to the existing records, Witham officiated at not a single baptism at Stella once the church was opened. What are we to make of this bizarre situation? The late Father W. Vincent Smith made the suggestion that Thomas Witham had started a new register in 1832 which is now lost to us.[31] The absence of any baptisms over such a long period might point in that direction. If it ever turns up will we find Witham's name there? I doubt it. For the earlier period I suspect

he was away for long spells, probably because of poor health. For the later years, 1838 onwards, he was certainly absent, and we do not need to hazard a guess at the reason; we know that it was connected wth the development of Ushaw. In 1837 Charles Newsham, one ofWitham's former professors, became president of the college. From the start his ambition was to make it the premier Catholic college in England. Rightly known as Ushaw's second founder, he ushered in an amazing era of expansion which continued almost up to his death in 1863. To the original plain classical quadrangle dating largely from 1808 he added extensively in the neo-gothic style, beginning with the Pugin chapel of the 1840s and culminating in the Edward Welby Pugin Junior House of 1857-59.[32] Such a lengthy and colossal programme could not have been undertaken without the support of friends, clergy and laity alike. Foremost among the laity was John Silvertop of Minsteracres, Thomas' relative,[33] and foremost among the clergy was Thomas Witham himself. He offered to go personally to seek financial assistance for the college from Catholic congregations throughout the north. Armed with a printed appeal from Newsham he rode off in the autumn of 1838 accompanied by the vice-president of the college, Thomas Cookson.[34] Together they braved the winter weather, and returned to the college the following Easter with £2,000 to further Newsham's ambitions. It needs to be said of course that the success of this kind of appeal invariably depends not so much on sheer physical stamina as on the gift of persuading people to part with their money. Those who had doubted the wisdom of the scheme were confounded largely, I suggest, by Witham's handling of the situation. The confidence in and respect for him was confirmed locally shortly after his return, when the Newcastle clergy chose him to voice their objections to the newly issued *Statuta Proposita* which planned to increase the number vicariates in England from four to eight.[35] As an indication of his personal preferences, it is worth mentioning that he absented himself from a later meeting at which the clergy drafted an address of loyalty to the Pope.[36] Thomas Witham belonged to the independent school. Not for him to wash in the tide of ultramontanism sweeping across Europe.

So close a relationship had Witham forged with Ushaw in the years 1858-9 that when he returned from his fund raising mission for the college he seriously considered moving there permanently, and a room was prepared for him.[37] What made him change his mind we do not know. Perhaps the invitation to move from Stella to Esh came just then. Esh, two miles at most from Ushaw, would be a lot more comfortable than the college, especially if, as a friend of his implies, he was not in the best of health.[38]

ESH LAUDE

The mission on the hill top at Esh Laude (recte Land?) came into being after the remarkable Rev. Ferdinand Ashmall died at Newhouse in the valley below at the age of 104 in 1798.[39] Its fourth incumbent, Thomas Witham officially took charge on Ash Wednesday 1840. Almost from the beginning he was out of sorts. Absent from 3 May until at least the beginning of June in the first year of his ministry[40], he was sent Rev. William Thompson as an assistant in 1841.[41] According to the *Catholic Directory* Thomas went off to his Maxwell-Witham relatives who lived at Kirkconnell House, Kirkcudbright, Galloway. Nevertheless, in the short time he was at Esh he provided the mission with a new burial ground, drew up plans to replace the single draw well by a pump and improve the access to the house, work eventually executed by William Thompson.[42] As for Thomas' cure of souls at Esh we know little apart from the fact that at least one member of his congregation enjoyed his sermons.[43] It was to this admirer's house that he repaired during the Ushaw Grand Week of July 1840 with his friends Rev. Thomas Youens (former president), Dr George Errington (future archbishop) and Robert Tate (vice-president).[44] He kept good company.

BERWICK

By the time Thomas arrived there in 1843, the Berwick mission had been in existence for about fifty years, its few Catholics during the 18th century served from nearby Berrington, an estate which had come into the possession of the Clavering family of Callaly. The Haggerstons also had an interest, however, and it was their chaplain, Rev. Michael Tidyman, who brought French emigrés priests to the town in 1792, and the same family helped to purchase a plot of land in Ravensdowne where a church large enough to hold a congregation of three hundred was opened in 1829, replacing the rather poor building erected in Church Street in 1799.[45] Within a short time of his arrival Witham decided that the fourteen year old church was no longer adequate. The growing congregation needed a larger building. To that end he made an appeal for funds in the pages of the *Catholic Directory* for 1846:

> The Pastor of this Congregation begs respectfully to call the attention of the public to this Mission. The present Chapel being far too small for the accommodation of the people who frequent it, he has determined, at the least possible expense, to erect a more commodious one, during the course of next spring and summer. For this purpose a plan has been furnished, which he has

determined upon adopting. It is neat, but not gaudy, and of the early style of Gothic architecture. When executed the Church will accommodate 500 people on the ground floor. Its estimated cost, including a quantity of material upon the place, is £800. He earnestly begs the assistance of the public, to enable to carry out a design, which will tend much to the advancement of religion, and place a very important mission upon a proper and lasting footing.

The young priest's plans to provide the Catholics of Berwick with a larger church were suddenly thwarted, however. Not by ill health, as we might guess, given his track record, but by his unexpected succession to the title of the Lord of the Manor of Lartington. When his father Harry died in the November of 1844, of Thomas' three elder brothers two had already died, Henry John (1802-I835) unmarried, and William Lawrence (1804-1841) married, but without children. George, the next in line (born October 1805), a captain in the 68th Light Infanry, thus succeeded to the Lartington estates at Harry's death. A relatively young man, much was expected of him, and in a short while he became a magistrate and deputy lieutenant of the counties of Durham and York. With only Thomas the priest left in the family, it is likely that had George lived longer he would have married in order to produce an heir, but he died in September 1847, aged only forty-one. Thomas at once resigned his living at Berwick and took up residence at Lartington as squire. Whether he took this step willingly or unwillingly we do not know. Nor do we know whether the diocese viewed his precipitate departure from Berwick favourably or unfavourably. I suspect that there might have been friction in some quarters. A priest-squire had been common enough in the Anglican Church, and maybe was still regarded as acceptable, but it was a novelty in the Catholic Church in England (if not unique). The strange combination might well have excited comment, if not outright jealousy, and it might be the origin of the misunderstanding of Witham which still persists.

GAINFORD

It was as squire of Lartington that Thomas embarked on the best known of his pastoral enterprises, the mission at Gainford: from start to finish his own personal contribution to the Catholic revival. Establishing a Catholic presence at Gainford he surely regarded as an act of pietas, compensating for the loss in the 1820s of nearby Cliffe Hall with its chapel, where he had been baptised.[46] With singular generosity he paid the full cost of the new mission out of his own pocket. At the same time he ran the

mission for the first few years, sacrificing to some extent the more comfortable life style he was entitled to follow at Lartington as squire.[47] The enterprise began in 1852 when he purchased two acres of land between the main road and the new railway. The foundation stone of the new church was laid two years later, and in the course of 1855 the church was opened by Bishop Hogarth, once chaplain to the Witham family at Cliffe. A Gothic style building designed by Thomas Gibson of Newcastle, it remains today externally much the same as it did when it was first built.[48]

Henry Dix who got to know Witham well in later years writes of these days at Gainford:

> Things were somewhat primitive, for we are speaking of nearly a hundred years ago. Annie Waugh – a name known to the older generation of Ushawmen – was housekeeper. Mary Storey was housemaid. Frank Goundry was Mr Witham's butler. Theresa Rickaby came from Coniscliffe to play the organ. Those who knew Mr Witham at Gainford say that he read his sermons and never had Benediction. The few children who came to Mass on Sunday were provided with food and stayed for the afternoon instruction. Mr Witham would ride or drive about the country, visiting his scattered flock.[49]

What is sometimes overlooked is Witham's determination to make Gainford something unique in the diocese, in fact the precursor of the later plan for the Bowes Memorial Church in the 1870s, that is, to create for Gainford a lay endowment, and free it as far as possible from interference by the diocesan authority. Whether this was a deliberate protest against the recent re-introduction of the diocesan system into England we do not know. Perhaps the squire was just instinctively harking back to the good old days when the laity were in charge. They had never sought permission to create their chapels. At any rate, having provided the buildings, and settled a handsome endowment of £4,000 on the mission, he felt that it was his right to keep the title deeds. When he discovered the diocesan records indicated otherwise – that they were in the hands of Mr Lamb, the solicitor at Barnard Castle, and that there was a debt hanging over the mission – he angrily called it a . . . 'cock and bull story. The deeds are in my possession and there is no debt upon the place.'[50] He surrendered the deeds of Gainford to the bishop only in September 1874, presumably under pressure, as this was the very time when he was fighting alongside John Bowes to keep the memorial church at Barnard Castle free of ecclesiastical interference.[51]

That was one battle which the squire fought and lost. Perhaps there was another. I mean his application for laicisation. The story goes that

when Thomas, the last of the Withams, so unexpectedly inherited Lartington, he applied for a dispensation from his priestly promise of celibacy in order to marry and have an heir. His request, the story continues, was regarded as an impertinence by Rome, and for that he was made to do penance in the form of paying for a new mission out of his own pocket. This is the version mentioned by Christopher Towers in his *History of the Church and Parish of St Osmund's, Gainford* (1992). Another version of the story, current among the villagers at Lartington and repeated in the *Teesdale Mercury* 21/28 December 1983 at the time of the re-opening of the Hall's ballroom by the Rackhams, is that the new squire's extravagant life-style so upset Rome that he was ordered to close off the drive across the park and 'build something.' No doubt it would be very interesting to look into the provenance and relationship of these two traditions. Suffice it here to concentrate on the possibility of the reverend gentleman's application for laicisation. A very unusual step for the time, one would think, but something that as a forty year old independent-minded clergyman might have considered, had he been concerned about the future of the Witham family. Actually, we have no records to say whether he cared or not. For all we know, he might have been content enough to let the estates revert to the Silvertops. But supposing, for the sake of argument, that he did apply for a dispensation from his promise of celibacy, such an application needed to go through official channels, first to the local bishop and then to Rome. It would involve a due canonical process, evidence of which would be deposited in the relevant diocesan archives and in the archives of Propaganda Fidei in Rome. Having trawled through the archives of the dioceses of Hexham, Middlesbrough and Leeds (the last two successors to Beverley), I have failed to find anything to support the allegation: no formal documents, nothing, not even whispers. Of course, those who are partial to conspiracy theories will perhaps cling to a face-saving cover-up. Such will readily seize on the convenient *double-entendre* uttered by Witham's friend Henry Dix. 'Gainford', he writes, 'was within sight of his old home and was well chosen as a place of reparation.'[52] A cover-up necessitates the hiding or destruction of evidence, possible perhaps at a local level, but very unlikely at the centre. I suggest that if we are looking for an answer we shall find it in the Vatican archives and steps have already been taken to seek it. Until such times, I am inclined to think that we have here a bit of folklore. A middle aged priest-squire, viewed by non-Catholic ladies as an eligible bachelor and by Catholic clergy as living it up, this is the pure stuff of gossip.

Gainford's first priest relinquished his post and rode back quietly to Lartington after Mass on All Saints Day 1860. Presumably he had always intended to return there, but his sudden departure from Gainford was probably linked with the precarious state of health of the hall's long serving chaplain, Rev. Michael Ellis. One of the few Lartington papers in the archives of the Middlesbrough diocese is a letter to Bishop Briggs of Beverley from his vicar general, Rev. Joseph Render, concerning this very matter. The bishop had evidently asked Render to go to Lartington to see the situation for himself and report back. Render replied:

> I have seen both Mr Witham and Father Ellis. In the first place it is certain that Mr Ellis is perfectly incapable of discharging any longer his missionary duties. In the next place I find Mr Witham very much opposed to the idea of any other priests than the one at Barnard Castle (William Allen) attending to the Lartington Congregation.
>
> He tells me that there is only one famiy on the remote side of Lartington – that even they have other means of conveyance – and that members of a country Congregation never complain of having to go two or three miles to Chapel – that he will give £20 a year to the Priest at Barnard Castle to encourage him to give all due attention to the Lartington people and that he consequently hopes that your Lordship will free your mind from all anxiety on the subject.[53]

Michael Ellis died the following year. He had been at Lartington since 1811. As long as he was well his presence had allowed the priest squire to concentrate on the management of his estate, at most going on occasional supply[54] and attending occasional retreats like that conducted at Ushaw in 1850 by Father Ignatius Spencer.[55] But the chaplain's illness changed all that. From the letter just quoted we gather that the squire did not want another chaplain. On occasion the priest at Barnard Castle may have lent a helping hand, but from 1861 Thomas himself was advertised in the *Catholic Directory* as being in charge of the Lartington mission. He received as an assistant in 1871 the Rev. John Bulletti,[56] the first of a number of young men who aided him in his old age.[57] A new presbytery was built for them across the road from the hall.[58] Even so, the old man continued to help out on Sundays until a serious seizure at some date unknown made such public duties difficult, if not impossible.[59]

Before venturing into an appreciation of Witham's management of the estate and his life style it might be worthwhile adding a note about the hall itself. The present sizeable and rambling mansion has at its heart a

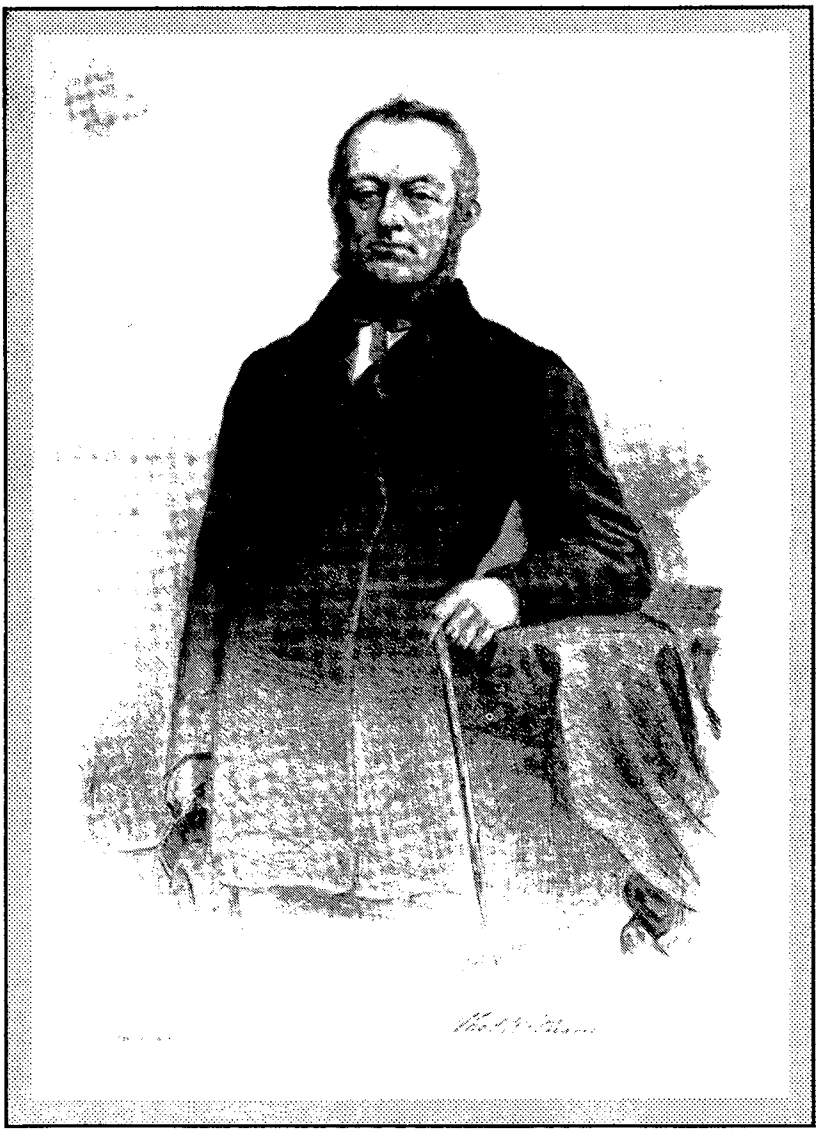
small and undistinguished manor house built at the turn of the 17th century.[60] The flanking east and west wings added some fifty or more years later were followed in the 1830s by an impressive room (now known as the ballroom) designed, it is said, by Ignatius Bonomi to house Harry Witham's substantial geological collection.[61] Thomas Edward himself considerably enhanced the house in the 1860s with the work of Joseph Hansom. In addition to a new cantilever staircase lit from above and a useful extension known as the priest's hall (1862), Hansom 'wrapped round the ballroom a sumptuous corridor, almost like the foyer of a theatre, an entrance hall, and a spacious porte-cochère.' (Pevsner) A feature of the entrance hall (rather overpowering, to judge by the photographs) were the richly carved limewood panels by the Florentine artist Bulletti, who did work elsewhere in the north east of England. Hansom also laid out a formal garden with a number of stone statues. All this work inside and out must have cost a great deal of money.[62]

Lartington Hall, c.1860

Baptisms were conducted in the hall from 1769, and the Mass, according to the Rev. Michael Ellis, celebrated from c. 1700, the year he thought the new chapel was built.[63] 1693 is the more likely date when Thomas Liddell, ordained at Lisbon, came to the hall as chaplain.[64] At first a room would be earmarked for the purpose, as was the case at Cliffe and nearby Wycliffe,[65] for despite Ellis' 1700 date the present chapel is part of the later 18th century extensions.[66] ThomasEdward embellished it: it was decorated in 1850,[67] and the earliest stained glass, reputedly the work of Hardman, belongs to 1859, perhaps part of Hansom's improvements.[68]

Thomas Witham lived to be squire of Lartington for fifty years. During that time he earned a reputation for kindliness, geniality and generosity which few other landowners of the time could match. 'A kinder man or better master never lived' commented his sister Winefrid in her diary on one occasion,[69] a view shared by the vast majority of those with whom he was in regular contact, tenants, staff and villagers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Grateful recipients of his attention were the many poverty-stricken folk of Barnard Castle, two miles away, where the squire indefatigably supported every effort to improve the appalling overcrowded and insanitary conditions which prevailed at the time.[70] To the forefront of all public improvements, he is particularly remembered today by railway enthusiasts for his support of the new line from Darlington to Barnard Castle, completed in 1855, the first stage of an ambitious project concluded in August 1881 to link the south Durham coalfields to the iron resources in the north west of the country. Witham himself laid the foundation stone of the impressive Deepdale Viaduct close by Lartington to carry the line across the Tees. He was also chairman of the new Tees Valley Railway Company until it was absorbed into the London and North Eastern Railway.[71]

When Thomas inherited the estate in 1847 , in addition to the hall with its home farm there were 1500 acres let out to tenants, which brought in an annual average income of £1,609 during the years 1811-1858.[72] For many years the estate had been allowed to run down, so the new squire had a great deal of work to do to make the estate profitable. Fortunately for him he soon acquired the services of the very able William Horner Scarr, a convert to Catholicism who had begun his career at Lartington as schoolmaster in 1841. With experience of estate management gained in John Bowes' office at Streatlam Castle between 1845 and 1852 he returned to



Thomas Edward Witham

Lartington to implement a new land drainage scheme made necessary by the squire's decision to convert to pasture.[73] In 1857 he was made the estate agent and worked closely with the squire for nearly forty years. During that period the estate, including the village, was transformed. £10, 000 was spent on land drainage, twenty-five miles of wall were built, highways and by-ways were straightened out, trees extensively and judiciously planted.[74] Surveying the changes that he had made in the course of fifty years, Witham in October 1897 recalled his work to convert the scrub land between Barnard Castle and Lartington into pleasant pasture. The poverty stricken village, too, he had done away with. 'When he first arrived in it, it was a poor, dirty, blackguard place, with a public house which in no way tended to improve it. In time they had seen the public house depart, and in its place came peace, quietness and contentment. And so it had come to pass that some-one had lately called Lartington the loveliest village in Yorkshire.'[75] How tastes change. A recent survey mentions how the changes swallowed up the open village green into gardens and houses and 'an attempt, neither thorough nor successful, was apparently made to impose an estate style of architecture on the village. Hipped roofs, stone bands and drip stones give a superficial flavour. A closer look reveals variety and detailing, and the survival of an older, sturdy vernacular alongside new Victorian infils.'[76]

The squire's life-style is best revealed in the fairly full diaries kept by his sister Winefrid, the wife of Gerard Salvin of Croxdale, during 1849 and 1850. Deeply attached to Thomas, she often went over to Lartington, a journey which within ten years she would be able to make by train from Durham via Darlington. Numerous were other visitors there, too, occasionally clergy, more frequently relatives and local gentry.[77] From Raby Castle came on occasion the Duke of Cleveland. Cardinal Wiseman paid Witham at least one visit, when he was on his way to Ushaw to celebrate President Newsham's jubilee in 1853.[78] Bearing in mind the special affection the squire had for it, it was only natural that anyone from the college was always welcome. Some of the professors made ritual visits to Lartington at specific times of the year, maybe at Shrovetide and certainly at Whitsuntide. They enjoyed lavish hospitality.[79] Life at the hall was leisurely but far from dull. Hunting, race-going and shooting were seasonal pursuits[80], a more regular pastime was an evening round the card-table, with the chaplain providing an extra hand.[81]

The genial squire called in turn on his family and friends in their houses. Naturally, he went over to Croxdale a great deal, but occasionally (usually with Winefrid) went to the Dunns at Hedgefield and Stella.[82] There is a record of one visit to Lady Strathmore at Gibside.[83] Of course, we need to multiply these comings and goings of 1849-50 several times over if we wish to relish the full flavour of life during the fifty years that Thomas Witham was squire of Lartington. The year reached its climax not with Christmas, oddly enough, but with Easter. Holy Week ushered in a time of serious preparation for it, after which everyone was wonderfully relaxed.[84] Shortly after Easter occurred the annual Rent Day. With business done, the tenants went to the servants' hall to enjoy a traditional dinner of roast beef, leg of mutton, plum pudding, rhubarb tarts and other delicacies, with plenty of punch to drink. The day closed with dancing in which the squire liked to join. [85] He was never one to stand on ceremony, and took a particular delight in being mistaken for the gamekeeper when he was out walking.

A GENEROUS BENEFACTOR

As this account of Thomas Witham draws to a close some estimate ought to be made of his generosity. A very open-handed gentleman, he was generally discreet in his benefactions. At his funeral the preacher claimed that 'he would have scorned to be cast in the light of a public benefactor,' and what we know is probably a fraction of the total. Certain it is, however, that his generosity increased with age. From 1878 Lartington came within the Jurisdiction of the newly formed diocese of Middlesbrough, and the few Witham papers in its archives cast some light at least on Thomas' desire to help that fledgling diocese. For example, he wished to find and buy a worthy site for a church at Loftus in 1883[86] and create a centre at Staithes:- with negotiations for a half-acre site (soon reduced to a quarter because of the likely ground rent): a promise of £200, the interest of which he hoped would pay the ground rent: a further £200 when the building started, and a £50 annuity to be paid half yearly. The immediate needs of the new missioner were not overlooked either: '. . . as the good man cannot live on air I enclose you a cheque for £25 for his sustenance.'[87] Solicitous Witham was too for the bishop's own welfare. In 1891 he sent a begging letter to his friend Archbishop Eyre of Glasgow on behalf of Bishop Richard Lacy (consecrated 1879, died 1929!) and he also cancelled the annual £80 interest which the bishop owed him on the £2, 000 lent earlier towards the

purchase of a suitable house.[88] The squire showed himself to be Mr Bountiful to the end. Just before he died he ordered a silver ciborium and pyx for the bishop. The bill of £6.5.0. was paid out of his estate twelve months later.[89] These few letters illustrating his beneficence provide us with a brief but precious insight into the warmth of an essentially rugged northern character. In one he asks the bishop to give his love to his old friend Rigby: 'tell him if he is low in port wine, to order some at my expense to the amount of three dozen.'[90] Six or seven weeks later he concludes another: 'I think dear old Rigby must be in a queer state – he was daft enough when last here – He is a curious compound of goodness and other things.'[91]

What Squire Witham did for Middlesbrough was likely enough replicated in Hexham. To Gainford he was particularly generous, and he seems always to have held Esh in generous remembrance ever since he lived there, though that should not surprise us considering his connection with William Thompson, its pastor for forty years.[92] In general, it is likely that a trawl through the financial records of the diocese might well furnish us with details of considerably more of his benefactions. Ushaw, of course, was a special favourite. Having collected funds for his friend Newsham's ambition to make of Ushaw a university college, he joined in the scheme to give the 'factory' a face-lift, starting as early as 1838 with a gift of ten paintings from his own collection.[93] Where they were displayed originally is uncertain, but an inventory of paintings drawn up at the end of the century credits them with a value above average, for they graced three of the important rooms of the college, the hall, refectory and professors' parlour. The presence of the Witham coat of arms in the west window of the new library seems to me to suggest Witham's interest in that particular interprise, perhaps by aiding the ageing Kendal missioner Thomas Wilkinson to buy the books that he thought appropriate. Later benefactions to the college would include £1,000 towards the new Dunn and Hansom chapel and a silver-gilt chalice remarkably like the one now at Minsteracres presented to him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday and the forty-seventh anniversary of his priesthood in December 1876.[94]

LAST DAYS

The crowning of Thomas Witham's ecclesiastical career came almost certainly in June 1884. He writes to Bishop Lacy:

My Dear Lord,

Thanks for your letter and for the kind congtratulation you offer. I feel that I am in debt to your Lordshlp for the high honour conferred upon me. – You may believe me, when I tell you how deeply I feel, how unworthy I am of the dignity. But I pray with great humility and earnestness, that God will give me an addition o{ grace to be more fervent and diligent in his service.

Believe me, my Dear Lord,

I remain yours most respectfully and truly,

Thomas Witham

Towards the end of his life, and in recognition of the contribution he had made to the development of the Church in northern England over such a long period, Pope Leo XIII created Thomas a domestic prelate. We may safely presume that the above letter refers to that honour, and it fixes precisely the date hitherto unknown.[95] Due recognition for his work as an enlightened squire came from his friends, tradesmen, neighbours, estate workers and tenants some thirteen years later, when he celebrated his golden jubilee as squire of Lartington. Because of his advanced age – he was ninety years old – it was limited to the presentation of a suitably inscribed gold cup and an illuminated address by a small representative group during the afternoon of Saturday 9 October. Refreshed after his morning walk round the estate, the squire responded briefly with one or two recollections: first, the dreadful conditions which prevailed in Barnard Castle when he first arrived, with the plague rampant in Bridgegate. Then, the even worse conditions which he found at Lartington. Both places, he was glad to say, had witnessed vast improvements during the last fifty years and he thanked God 'for length of days, a well-preserved frame, and good health.'[96]

The whole estate, especially the children, now looked forward with great anticipation to the old priest's ninety-first birthday on the 6 December. Preparations were well under way when, in the week preceding he developed bronchitis. Perhaps he was subject to this. No-one was unduly worried; there was no question of calling off the celebration. But came Saturday the 4th: the doctor had just paid his routine call when the patient's condition worsened and he died peacefully shortly after 7.00p.m. whilst two nurses were still on their way from Newcastle to attend to him.[97] The following morning (Sunday) prayers were said in the local churches, and the first of the tributes made: encapsulated by the vicar of Barnard Castle in a preface to his Sunday sermon:

> He was the friend of everyone: no-one ever thought or spoke of him in any other way than with respect and affection. In the days that he was able to take part in public affairs, the people of Barnard Castle always found in him a ready helper in every good and philanthropic work. It is a great point for us all to live so that other persons are the better for our existence, and it may certainly be said that there is no one who came within the sphere of Monsignor Witham's influence, who was not the better for his christian example and kindness of heart.[98]

The funeral took place on Thursday 9 December with his wishes for as simple a service as possible duly respected. It was a bright day, though cold. Over forty clergy packed the body of the small chapel. The Silvertops from Minsteracres, Sir John Lawson, Lord Barnard, and Major Chichester Constable were among the relatives, members of the household and friends who occupied the tribune. Mr Ralston J. P. represented Lord Strathmore. Bishop Lacy of Middlesbrough presided at the requiem Mass, assisted by the Revv. George Silvertop (nephew) and Gabriel Ryan (priest at Lartington). Bishop Thomas Wilkinson, described as a long standing acquaintance of the deceased, had been expected to preach, but George Silvertop had to stand in for him at the last minute, and was clearly unable to do justice to his uncle's memory at such short notice, mentioning only his generosity and his penchant for disregarding externals, even in the matter of his dress.[99] The burial took place not in the mausoleum which Thomas had built in 1877[100] but just inside the gates of the cemetery, where he could be closer to his people. An elaborate sandstone pillared grave cover, was put up later, but even in the 1940s was already eroded, and the inscription is now very difficult to decipher. This perhaps, can be taken as a symbol of this remarkable man's life, so difficult to recapture. It must be clear enough at the end of this account that the reverend gentleman has been remarkably reluctant to take centre stage. Maybe it is time to allow him to step back into that picture frame.

POSTSCRIPT

Since completing this article I have heard from Sister Dominic Savio C.P. that her search of the Vatican Archives has produced no evidence, direct or indirect, of Thomas Witham's supposed application for laicisation. We can therefore be morally certain that however persistent the story about it has been, it is nothing more than that. My thanks to Sister Dominic for helping to restore Witham's good name.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A word of thanks for information provided by: Mr R. Gard, Mr A. McGregor, Rev. D. Minskip, the Passionist Community at Minsteracres, Mr and Mrs Rackham, Rev P. Phillips, Mr D. Rutter, Barbara and Miles Sharratt, Mr C. Towers, the staff at DCRO and TWA and finally members of the North East Catholic History Society. A special acknowledgement must be made to Captain Gerard Salvin of Croxdale Hall who allowed me to consult the Diaries of Winefred Salvin in DCRO and to use material from them in this article.

NOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

CRS	Catholic Record Society publications
DCRO	Durham County Record Office
HNA	Archives of diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
HUC	D. Milburn, *History of Ushaw College*
LA	Archives of diocese of Leeds
MDA	Archives of diocese of Middlesbrough
NCC	*Northern Catholic Calender*
NCH	Northern Catholic History
NCRO	Northumberland County Record Office
PRO	Public Record Office
SP	G. Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests*
TWA	Tyne and Wear Archives
UM	Ushaw Magazine

1. This is what I gather from comments made by Witham about a suggestion that his photograph should be used as a frontispiece to a printed lecture given by Henry Fell Pease at Cotherstone in 1880. DCRO D/Pe 2/196-199 (1880-1).
2. H. Aveling, *Northern Catholics: The Catholic Recusants of the North Riding of Yorkshire 1558-1790*, 1966, p.242 and pp.259-60.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.* pp.241-2. A convert of Fr Richard Palliser who had been at Lartington (152). Educated at Valladolid, he left to become O.S.B. and was for a time prior at Dieulouard before coming to the Yorkshire mission.
5. *Ibid.*, 260.
6. George Silvertop, *Memoirs of the Silvertops of Minsteracres with some account of the families of Maire, Witham and Lawson*, revised edition 1930, p.13, quoted by Rackham, *Lartington Hall*, p.1. The ms. is now in NCRO ZHE,111. Cf. *NCH* 18 (1983), p.17. The writer of the obituary notice of Thomas Witham (helped by Geo Silvertop) in *Teesdale Mercury* 8 December 1897 does his best to provide a family pedigree.

7. *Ibid.* p.184. The Withams and Maires were well represented among women who entered convents on the continent of Europe. Up to the middle of the 18th century 45 women from north Yorks were professed abroad, including four Withams and three Maires, of whom one Witham and two Maires were Poor Clares in Dunkirk. Aveling, *Northern Catholics*, pp.392-3. The Silvertop family of Minsteracres, being rather late in the field certainly sent sons to Douai, but I think George (who wrote the memoirs) was the sole priest, born 1856, educated Oscott, professed Fort Augustus 1884, transferred to Hexham 1895, died abroad 1935 (NCC 1936).
8. I am indebted to Rev. F.J. Turner, the archivist at Stonyhurst, for this information.
9. For college life at the time most recently T.E. Muir, *Stonyhurst College 1593-1993*, p.73f.
10. HUC. p.71; H. Chadwick, *St Omers to Stonyhurst*, 1962, p.401.
11. Details of TEW's Ushaw career from the college diary. The Stonyhurst list says that he left on 15 July, the Ushaw record says he arrived on 12 July. Up to 1840 the annual vacation coincided with the first three weeks of July. The year was divided into four 'Quarters': 1. the last week of July to Rosary Sunday; 2. Rosary Sunday to Christmas; 3. Christmas to Easter; 4. Easter to 29 June. After 1840, examinations forced the vacation to be taken at the end of July and it was lengthened by a week. Cf. R.O. Bilsborrow, *Recollections of an Old President*, UM 20 (1910), pp.270—1.
12. For Gillow's presidency HUC pp.116-120 and p.126. At the academic level he began to collect a theological library which by 1827 numbered about 7,000 volumes, mainly the collections of Bishop Dicconson and Rev. Thomas Eyre. Some, including former Durham Abbey books, belonged to the Tempests of Stella.
13. At one stage the Durham trades people threatened to withdraw their credit facilities, but a friend, Mr. Taylor of Cornsay House, advanced the procurator £1,000 in cash and the crisis was averted. UM 21 (1911), p.269.
14. UM 8 (1898), p.91.
15. UM 21 (1911), p.272.
16. Figures given in 1830 by Bishop Thomas Smith. Cf. HUC p.150.
17. Bishop Briggs' report to Rome in 1839. Cf. HUC p. 150.
18. Information provided by the *Catholic Directories.*
19. For Stella, cf. J.Galletly and T. Yellowley, *St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas 1851-1981*, 1981. Also TWA PA, W.J. Nicholson's notes on Stella Chaplaincy.
20. *Ibid.* p.14. W. Vincent Smith, Durham Missions (ms.) 4, pp.4-5 says that he was born at Cliffe, professed at Douai 1685, and came to Stella 1725-6 in old age. He died in 1729 and was buried at either Stella or Blaydon.
21. Galletly and Yellowley, p.15. Also Nicholson (fn.19)
22. *Ibid.* p.17. Cf. Nicholson's notes, p.2.
23. In 1827 he was already, he felt, a dying man. 'From the situation of the pain . . . and the difficulty I have in making water, I apprehend my complaint is caused by the stone and for that, at my age, there is no remedy but patience and death.' Quoted in J.M. Hagerty, 'Notes on the Northern District under Bishop Thomas Smith, 1821-1831', *NCH*, 27 (1988), p.20. The article offers a useful insight into the bishop's routine business.

24. Galletly and Yellowley, p.15. At the last minute Mrs Margaret Oates who is working on the Lawson family papers has helped me to clear up these relationships.

25. By this time there were nearly twenty baptisms a year. PRO RG4/352, baptismal register 1775-1838. Microfilm in TWA MF 1875.

26. Galletly and Yellowley, p.21. We must not forget, however, the burden of masses imposed on the new church: one each week for Lady Jane Widdrington, perhaps also one each week for Lady Mary Eyre, and one mass every month for twenty years for Mrs Bridget Dunn from the date of her death. HNA Mass Register.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Diaries of Winefrid Salvin, vol. 1 DCRO D/Sa/F419. She visited Stella on 2 May 1849 with her brother when they were staying at Hedgefield. K.J.C. Dunn in 'The Diaries of Winefrid Salvin', *NCH* 33 (1992), pp.27-30 prints some of their more interesting information bearing on church life at the time. Winefrid seems to have been the usual spelling of her name, though the memorial inscriptions in the mausoleum at Lartington give (twice) Winefride.

29. DCRO Q/E/RM/1/39 (11 August).

30. Cf. fn.25.

31. W. Vincent Smith, Durham Missions (ms.) vol.4, pp.4-5. The one record which might have helped to solve this problem is TWA C/BL3/5, a confirmation register and a list of Easter duties. Regrettably, it seems to have been mislaid.

32. HUC p.164. Thanks to Rev. P. Phillips for additional information and the new numbering of the papers in LA: nos. 289, 295, 300, 308A (1837-8).

33. *Ibid.* His uncle George headed the list of subscriptions – not surprisingly – for he had long campaigned to enhance the status of the college.

34. *Ibid.*

35. W. Vincent Smith's transcripts of Rev. Robert Hogarth's Letters 1770-1862 (ms. in Ushaw archives) nos. 71-74. LA 487, T. Youens to Bishop Briggs 14 February 1839 refers to 'mischief makers.'

36 *Ibid.* nos. 77-8.

37. From an appreciation in UM 8 (1898), p.93.

38. H. Dix, *An Old Time Pastor of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle 1806-97*, in UM 59 (1949), pp. 16.

39. Cf. *St John Boste and the Continuity of Catholicism in the Deerness Valley*, 1993, pp. 16-17.

40. *Memoirs of John Oyston of Hill Top (1799-1867)* ed. C.A. Corbishley, in UM 45 (1935), p. 47. Tailor and porter at Ushaw for many years, Oyston was old enough to remember the foundation of the college.

41. Born at Stella, educated Ampleforth, studied in Rome. Ordained priest 1839. At Esh until 1860 when he retired to the farm at High Hedgefield left to him by his father. Known to Witham from Stella. Friend of Wiseman from Roman days. Obituary NCC 1894, pp. 56-7.

42. R. Platt, Memoirs of an Old Catholic Mission, 1873 (ms.) transcribed by W.V. Smith, p. 138. Also HNA Esh Laude file.

43. *Oyston Memoirs*, p. 47. 'March 15: Mr Witham at the Chapel, first time as our own Pastor I have been much pleased with his discourse.'

44. *Ibid.* p.48.

45. J.M. Rowley, *A History of the Church of Our Lady and St Cuthbert, Berwick upon Tweed*, 1992, pp. 8-13 for background. Also T.G. Holt, *Berwick upon Tweed: the Story of a Legacy*, NCH 18 (1985), pp.3-6. Neither account mentions Witham. HNA Berwick file contains a visitation report of 1868: nave of chapel is given as 65ft x 24ft: sittings 343, standing c.60. The priest adds: 'Founded in 1829. I cannot say by whom it was blessed or opened. I cannot say by whom it was founded.'

46. Cliffe Hall was demolished c.1820, though its baptismal register in PRO RG 4:4057 runs from 1785-1840.

47. I choose my words carefully. The Lartington people thought he lived in great state. In fact, it seems that he slept in a small uncarpeted bedroom just by the main staircase. He was a very liberal host, yet certainly in later life, if not earlier, a man of abstemious habits.

48. C.J. Towers, *A History of the Church and Parish of St Osmund's, Gainford*, 1992, p.6.

49. UM 59 (1949), p. 19. Quoted by Towers.

50. *Ibid.* Also UM 8 (1898), p. 96. HNA Register of Title Deeds fol. 41.

51. Towers, *art. cit.*, p. 5. D. Milburn, *New for Old*, NCH 34 (1993) p.50f.

52. Dix, *art. cit.*, p. 18.

53. Lartington file, undated but certainly 1860/1. Written at Barnard Castle. Maybe he had been consulting William Allen about the possibility of help for Lartington.

54. E.g. 1849: at Croxdale, 1 April, Burn Hall 13 May; encouraged by Winefrid to go to Amble, 23 July. 1850: at Durham for a few weeks during the typhus epidemic, 8 February, 1850, Hartlepool 28 Sept.

55. Diary 3 August 1850. On his way he stayed at Croxdale and said Mass there.

56. James Rodgers was with him for some months after Ellis died. Then he was on his own until Bulletti (born 1828, ordained 1854) came to assist him. Was he related to the Italian artist who carved the intricate (and expensive) wooden panels the new foyer at Lartington?

57. When Kirkham (1877/8-c1890) left his place was taken by Francis Nelson, then just before Witham's death, Gabriel Ryan, who stayed on to become priest in charge of the new church of St Laurence, Lartington, when the hall was sold. (Cf. the *Catholic Directories.*)

58. Now Park House. A substantial house costing £395 in 1868. The old priest's house was demolished in the 1880s to make way for the house called Yews Trees, built for Thomas Boddy, Witham's butler. Cf. V. Chapman, *Lartington, a Teesdale Village Walk*, 1985, p. 18.

59. UM 8 (1898), p. 96.

60. Rackham, p. 1.

61. Between 1828 and 1836. Ibid. p. 4.

62. 'Hansom's decoration is done in a Cinquecento way. It is interesting to watch him in a Renaissance job.' (Pevsner's *Durham*, pp. 223-4). Mr Dominic Rutter of Gainford has in his possession an undated letter from Hansom giving instructions for the cornices of the vestibule's ceiling.

63. Note attached to the Baptismal Register sent to Somerset House in 1638. PRO RG4 /3470 [220:1]. Microfilm in TWA MF 1875.

64. An article in *The Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion* for 22 January 1915 reprinted in *Teesdale Mercury* 10 Feb. of that year gives the names of the earliest known chaplains. Heading the list is Thomas Liddell, ordained at Lisbon,in residence 1693-1713. Cf. SP 3, p.135 and CRS 72 (1991), p.108.

65. Aveling, *Northern Catholics*, p. 389.

66. The memorial tablet in the mausoleum to Henry Maire [later Lawson] (1750-1834) records that he built the chapel, added largely to the house and to the estate.

67. Diary, 9 June 1850. Winefrid remarks that because of the inconvenience some of the usual congregation went going to Barnard Castle for Mass. After Easter the following year Thomas was busy having the passage by the chapel papered in white with a blue stripe.(Diary 25 April 1851.) At the present time the chapel is a squash court, but designed in such a way as to allow it to revert to its former use. It is to the credit of the hall's owners that they have recently spent a considerable amount of money restoring the stencil work on the chapel ceiling.

68. T. Whellan's *History of York and the North Riding* published in 1895 mentions only the Virgin and Child window.

69. Winefrid's diary 5 October 1850.

70. Witham recalled this philanthropic work when he celebrated his golden jubilee as squire in October 1897. Cf. *Teesdale Mercury*, 13 October. Also Rackham, p.5.

71. Cf. *Teesdale Mercury* 8 December 1897. An ornamental wheelbarrow now at Minsteracres bears the inscription: 'Presented by the Directors of the Darlington and Barnard Castle Railway to their Chairman 20 July 1854.' The impressive Deepdale Viaduct was dismantled some years ago, but its supports on either side of the river are reminders of its grandeur.

72. These details are from papers belonging to Mr Dominic Rutter of Gainford, William Horner Scarr's grandson.

73. *Teesdale Mercury*, 13 October 1897.

74. Obituary notice UM 8 (1898), P.94.

75. *Ibid.*

76. V.Chapman, *Lartington: A Teesdale Village Walk*, 1985, p.2.

77. Usually circumspect, Winefrid could not help remarking that when Rev. William Allen from Barnard Castle came to dinner on Easter Thursday 1849 he had 'a wild look with him, his hair dressed like a German student's', (12 April).

78. *The Catholic Standard*, 11 June 1853.

79. Dr Robert Tate was a regular visitor in 1849 before he left for Hazlewood. (11 April, 5 June, 12 June with Bishop Hogarth). Presumably he would resume his visits when he returned to Ushaw as president (1865-76). Henry Dix thought that the professors went over to Lartington at Shrovetide (Cock vacation) but confessed that his memory was rather hazy. UM 8 (1898), p.97 definitely says Whitsuntide. 'It was on such occasions that the cheerfulness and gaiety of his disposition . . . found full vent. Princely as was his hospitality, warm as was his welcome, they were outshone by the singular joyfulness and

free joviality of his manner. You felt that he not merely gave you of his best, and made his house your home, but that he put himself without reserve to the entertainment and amusement of his guests.' Praise indeed.

80. Diary 1849: 9 May (races), 16 August (grouse shooting); 1850: 13 March (hunting at Tudhoe with the Duke of Cleveland).
81. Diary 11 April 1849 (Wednesday after Easter week).
82. Diary 1849: Holy Week (Croxdale), 2 May (Stella); 1850:12 May (Hedgefield), 27 July (Croxdale).
83. Diary 8 April 1850.
84. Dancing in the hall, 19 April 1849.
85. Diary 26 April, 1850. Smokers were relegated to the laundry.
86. Letters of June-August 1883. His generosity in regard to Staithes was officially recognised by Bishop Lacy at the laying of the foundation stone of the new church, cf. *The Tablet*, 1884, pp.233-4. Paying off the Loftus debt is mentioned in his obituary notice, *ibid*, 1897, p.942.
87. MDA Letters June-September 1885 and one in June 1885.
88. *Ibid.* Letters October 1885 and October 1891.
89. *Ibid.* Hanby Holmes, solicitor at Barnard Castle, 1 Feb. 1898.
90. *Ibid.* To Bishop Lacy, 2 Aug. 1885. Presumably Nicholas Rigby, born 1800, ordained at Ushaw 1826, died 1886.
91. *Ibid.* 27 September 1883.
92. UM (1898), p.93.
93. *Ibid.* The *Teesdale Mercury* describes Witham as a patron of fine art. A recent valuation of his paintings at Ushaw reveals that his collection was not worth as much as he supposed. Among other *objets d 'art* he gave to Ushaw is a 'vera effigies' of the head of St Thomas Aquinas, engraved on copper. Had he a particular devotion to the saint? The dedication of the church at Stella is to St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas.
94. Known also as the Spanish chalice, it was made by the skilful Augsburg silversmith Johann Zeckel who died in 1728. Of silver gilt it stands nearly 12" high and bears two sets of enamels portraying Nativity and Crucifixion scenes.
95. MDA Lartington file. This letter was quoted by the preacher at Witham's funeral Mass. Bishop Lacy referred to him as Rt. Rev. Mgr. at the laying of the foundation stone of the Staithes church. Cf. *Tablet*, 9 August 1884, pp. 233-4.
96. *Teesdale Mercury*, Wed. 13 October. He must have been joking about his good health. We have seen that he was often indisposed. By this time he had also suffered a partial seizure. He left his butler Thomas Boddy £2,000 for being 'kind and attentive to me in my infirmities.' (Extract from Probate Registry, at York, DCRO S/Sa/F 446).
97. *The Tablet* 1897, p.942.
98. *Teesdale Mercury*, Wed. 8 December.
99. *Ibid.* 15 December.
100. *Ibid.* Wed. 29 Aug. 1877 refers to the consecration of the new cemetery by Bishop Cornthwaite of Beverley the week before. It also reports that the small mortuary chapel designed by Mr Scarre was expected to be completed in the autumn.

AN ARCHBISHOP FOR DARLINGTON?

Leo Gooch

Since the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, London has been divided between two sees, north of the Thames in Westminster and south of the Thames in Southwark. Francis Bourne, appointed Archbishop of Westminster in 1903, was dissatisfied with this arrangement and wanted the whole of the capital to be incorporated into the one diocese of Westminster; Peter Amigo, consecrated Bishop of Southwark in 1904, did not agree and could not be persuaded otherwise. The archbishop had, therefore, to find other means of achieving his aim. A small batch of letters in the diocesan archives of Hexham and Newcastle reveal how he proceeded.

In October 1911 the two provinces of Birmingham and Liverpool were created in addition to that of Westminster, and in November Bourne was raised to the Sacred College. On Christmas Day Amigo wrote to tell Bishop Richard Collins of Hexham and Newcastle that he had heard on good authority, which would later emerge as 'a safe and secret channel' between Rome and William Brown, the vicar general in Southwark, that the cardinal would stay in Rome until 17 January

> to carry out a further plan of his of divisions 'inconsultis episcopis.' I believe that you are to be included in this division. I am quite certain that he proposes to take S. London from me and to cut up even the rest of my diocese into two. I am to go as Archbishop to Darlington!!! Don't be surprised if I leave for Rome this week. I may help you.

On Boxing Day an astonished Collins thanked Amigo for the information saying that he had heard nothing about the plan but that it caused him some anxiety

> firstly, because I feel that, as a preliminary to the consideration of such a question, at Rome, the responsible Ordinary would, with advantage, be among the first to be consulted, and secondly because I know of the disquiet which a division would cause here if it seemed to involve us in the settlement of difficulties elsewhere. I quite sympathize with you.

Collins had realised immediately what the cardinal was up to. Bourne thought he could induce Amigo to leave London by offering him a more senior post elsewhere, even if one had to be created. The following day Amigo told Collins

> We must be ready to put all particulars before the Holy See. The matter is urgent. My information is that it was to be settled over our heads altogether. They will not be pleased to see me in Rome. You may be sure that I shall do all in my power to avert *disaster* to your diocese and to mine.

On 4 January 1912 Brown reported to Collins that Amigo had found that the cardinal had impressed the Roman Curia with the advantages of unifying London and had even led it to believe that the chapter would not object to the proposed annexation and division. In fact, when the chapter heard of the plan it had voted seven to one to send a rigorous protest to Rome. Brown went on:

> The Bp. has not gleaned any information so far as to the Darlington project, but there can be [no] doubt as to the anxiety of H.E. to get the Bp. out of the present Southwark area. You know he tried to get him sent to Plymouth when vacant [in 1911]. He feels he can't have his own way as to Seminary &c if the Bp. remains in any part of the ground, and above all he wants to even up the financial troubles as far as he can. Whereas the Bp. is determined to face them and attack the huge indebtedness of [the] diocese and reduce it to a point of safety.

The same day Amigo wrote to Collins from Rome confirming that the cardinal was trying to obtain substantial changes to the diocesan structure of England but that his own presence would prevent Bourne's ''projectism' being carried out without full consideration'. Amigo hoped that the awful financial straits in which Southwark was placed would make for delay. As for Hexham and Newcastle, Amigo advised Collins to draw up a list of objections to any division. He also suggested that Collins bring forward his *ad limina* visit so as to explain 'the situation personally to Cardinals de Lai and Merry del Val. In any event, he would not himself leave Rome until he was sure that the cardinal was back in England.

Ten days passed and it seems that Amigo feared that Collins was leaving it all to him, for, indirectly and probably prompted by Amigo, Collins got exactly similar advice from an English cleric in Rome, perhaps someone in the *Venerabile* – possibly Brown's original informant. James Rooney, vicar general in Hexham and Newcastle and rector of St Augustine's in Darlington, received a memorandum, dated 15 January signed only with an undecipherable initial. The writer told Rooney that while he was not officially aware of the proposals, there was no doubt that Bourne, on his own initiative and without consulting his colleagues, had proposed a division of the present English dioceses and the creation of new ones

which would 'considerably change the present hierarchical order of those in the northern counties.' Bishop Amigo had reacted quickly and Collins should do so too by writing to Cardinal de Lai as soon as possible begging that no decision be reached until he had had an opportunity of making his case. The memorandum was obviously written by someone experienced in the ways of ecclesiastical politics for he recommended the tone and content of the bishop's letter; it should be couched in terms of loyalty and submission to the Holy See but stress his own episcopal duty. In particular Collins

> could say that Cardinal Bourne does not know the financial condition of his diocese and that nobody knows it except himself and his staff. He could urge any objections he has to make against detaching portions of Co. Durham or Co. Northumberland from Hexham and Newcastle . . . If he comes to Rome he should bring with him a Secretary who speaks Italian. I could advise him here but could not accompany him to interview Cardinals . . . I do not think anything will be done in a hurry in Rome in the matter, but it is well to be on the safe side.

Collins, however, was in a quandary; he could not draw up a list of objections because, as he told Amigo, he was unable to find out what exactly was being proposed; but he was satisfied that Rome would do nothing without consulting him. Amigo was right; Collins was content with Amigo's advocacy and was reluctant to make the journey to Rome, correctly as things turned out.

On 19 January Collins was relieved to hear from Brown that 'the opposition of the North effectually killed the Darlington Prov[incial] scheme', but how that opposition was expressed is not known. Amigo returned to England towards the end of January and a week later he was delighted to inform Collins that he had succeeded in his own cause, but he noted, without comment, that the cardinal now denied initiating the idea. He had been unable, however, to find out anything about Bourne's plan for the north

> except that I was proposed as Archbishop of Darlington. There was a talk about cutting off Cumberland and Westmoreland. Darlington is certainly quite off . . . Most probably you will be left in peaceful possession.

On 1 February Collins was sent a letter confirming the crisis was over from an unknown resident at the Westminster Palace Hotel. The signature has been torn off but it was from someone in London for a meeting of the Cowper Committee on education; the writer clearly identified himself as coming from the north, and Canon Rooney was Diocesan Inspector of

Schools, hence there is little doubt that it was from him:

> I am extremely pleased that the scheme as applied to Hexham and Newcastle has come to nothing. I consider that such a division at this time would be fatal to the good work going on in the diocese. A severance at the present time would immensely weaken the efforts we are making to spread the faith in the North, and would undo much of the good work of the last fifty years.

Two months later Amigo asked Collins when he was going to make his *ad limina* visit for he had heard

> rumours again that divisions of dioceses are likely to be made soon, and it would be important for you *in an indirect manner,* e.g., your relatio, to state your case. I know that both Cardinals de Lai and Merry del Val are bitten with the notion that divisions make for progress and they are being encouraged from another quarter.

He did not need to specify who that was. But Collins was still procrastinating about going to Rome in June and his indecision was not helped by Bishop Frederick Keating of Northampton who wrote after his *ad limina* that Collins would find the Eternal City intolerable at that time of year. In any case he confided that he had been

> assured by Cardinal de Lai that nothing would be determined in the way of creating new dioceses &c without consulting the English Hierarchy, or at all events a Commission of English Bishops. In every case the Bishop concerned would be allowed to state his case.
>
> My own strong impression is that the scheme, whatever it was, has been hung up for the present, and is not likely to he resuscitated during the lifetime of the present Holy Father [Benedict XV].

And so matters remained for some nine years, but a reorganisation of the English dioceses was never far from Bourne's mind.

On 30 June 1921 Pope Benedict approved a proposal to erect the Diocese of Lancaster (taking eighteen parishes from Hexham and Newcastle and forty-six from Liverpool) notwithstanding the declared opposition of the two bishops and all the northern deaneries. Archbishop Keating of Liverpool (who had been elevated from Northampton earlier that month) remarked to Collins:

> After repeated experiences of a like nature, it is hardly a rash judgement to connect this renewed activity of the Consist[ory] with H.E.'s recent visit to Rome .

Keating objected because the division 'would knock the bottom out of my two great undertakings - the cathedral and the completion of the semi-

nary'. Collins objected because he would lose important schools; he had written to Cardinal de Lai suggesting that an auxiliary bishop be appointed instead. Pope Benedict died in January 1922 and Keating went out to Rome shortly after the election of Pope Pius XI in February. He presented a *Memorial* to the Consistory and discussed the matter with the Pope and with Cardinals de Lai and Merry del Val. The latter came round to Keating's view 'that nothing should be done for the present' and promised to advocate it in the Consistory. Keating left Rome confident that the existing dioceses were 'fairly secure', and in August he was able to tell Collins that the creation of the new diocese was 'indefinitely postponed'.

Keating was fully aware, however, that the health of the sixty-five-year-old Collins was poor and he encouraged the latter to re-apply for an auxiliary if he was 'able to face the visit *ad limina* in October'. Collins went to Rome as planned but he was disappointed not to be given a coadjutor. Moreover, the arduous journeys and his efforts to deal with the back-log of work when he got back proved too much for him. In December he suffered a stroke and he was given the last rites. He survived but the doctors insisted that he be relieved of all work. In January 1922, therefore, Canon Rooney was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese. He was eight years older than the bishop but he served in that capacity, and as Vicar General as well as Diocesan Inspector of Schools, for the next two years. He tried to get Collins a coadjutor to relieve both of them; and he even suggested that two vicars general be appointed for the better administration of the diocese which, he disingenuously hinted, would pave the way for a division in due course. But nothing was done until Bishop Collins died in February 1924. In November, during the period of *sede vacante,* Cumberland and Westmorland were hived off to form part of the newly-created Diocese of Lancaster. (Incidentally, Cardinal Bourne was in Sunderland that September to preside over the 1,250th anniversary celebrations of the monastery at Wearmouth.)

The long anticipated though unwelcome division of the diocese had been effected at last, but in a more judicious way than that initially contrived by Cardinal Bourne for his own purposes. Improbably, for a few weeks in 1911/2, there was a possibility that a new province would be created in north-east England, with an archdiocese of Darlington carved somehow out of Hexham and Newcastle, and that the archbishop would have his chair in St Augustine's. Bourne over-estimated Amigo's ambition,

however, and the latter's prompt and determined stand was decisive; the plan was stillborn and London continued to be divided ecclesiastically by the Thames. Cardinal Bourne died in 1935; two years later Bishop Amigo was made an archbishop *ad personam.*

REFERENCES:

For the background to relations between Amigo and Bourne see: Michael Clifton, *Amigo: Friend of the Poor* (1987), esp. Ch 5.

All quotations are taken from the Diocesan Archives of Hexham & Newcastle: Old File No. 44, items 1-13, 19-26.

Notes continued from p.23

39. Sewall Letters f. 134; Residence of St John District Accounts 1749-95, f. 250; College of St Aloysius, St Wilfrid's Preston, 1713-1841, f. 4 — all in Jesuit Province Archives.
40. C.R.S. 70, p.165.
41. Sewall Letters f. 162 - 4 December 1809. In a letter to a priest in Sicily William Strickland in London asked for a book on the discipline of the early Church, half a pound or a pound of the largest onion seeds and a pound of Pantelleria vetches for seed to be sent to Meynell at his request. (Letters 1805-18 f. 193 in the Jesuit Province Archives).
42. Letters 1805-18 f. 252, Nicholas Sewall to Robert Plowden, 6 September 1814.
43. Sewall Letters f. 134
44. Plowden Letters f. 371

THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE: A SHORT HISTORY OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE BRANCH

Lyn Gilroy and Bernadette Lawson

The Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Branch of the Catholic Women's League was formally inaugurated at a meeting at Marie Reparatrice Convent in Newcastle on 15 May 1911. The League already had a few local members, albeit only four in 1910, but there were 200 by the time of the inaugural meeting, at which it is interesting to note that Reverend Mother Superior and the entire community became members. Margaret Fletcher, founder of the League, attended the meeting and spoke of 'the immense good which to her knowledge had accrued to individuals through association with the big Catholic life of the League', but she also pointed out some difficulties which might beset the new Branch. These difficulties could, however, be easily avoided by observing two rules: 1) never to undertake active work except with the approval of the clergy, and 2) in your relations with one another, remember the motto *Charity, Work and Loyalty*, and that the whole intention of the League is to bind you together in the spirit of Catholic Fellowship. The first Branch officers were Mrs Louis (Chairman), Miss Wells (Secretary), and Mrs Forster (Treasurer). And so the work began.

By 1913 the Branch was being congratulated by its Chaplain, Fr Mackin, on the invaluable work it was doing for individuals and for society as a whole, for instance, the CWL Nursing Association, Rescue (girls), and a variety of good works in the parishes. Important, too, were the discussion groups and the educational work among all classes of women. In those days there was a great division by class, but within the League there existed a close unity of members of whatever class. At the outbreak of the War in 1914 the League played a large part in providing comforts for the troops, particularly the famous Huts and Canteens. Members worked very hard during the War years, and this was recognised when a report in 1920 recorded that a Miss Balfe had travelled from London to attend a meeting at the Connaught Hall to present medals given by the Huts Council of the CWL to forty members who had successfully carried on the work of the CWL Soldiers' Club in Newcastle during the previous year. At the same meeting, the Chairman (still Mrs Louis) stated her ambition to start a Mother and Child Hostel and said she felt confident of the support of

members. Her confidence was not misplaced and the hostel became a reality – a forerunner of St Cuthbert's Care?

During the inter-War years the Branch membership grew enormously and there was a section in most parishes in the Diocese. The League was involved in every charity and many committees in the Diocese, as well as having its own societies. One, now amusingly archaic, was the Registry Office, where the CWL placed maids in suitable Catholic homes. We wonder if maid and mistress were both members of the League? Apparently, the number of applicants always exceeded the supply, so for as long as it continued it was a great success.

By 1934 the Branch membership had risen to over 3,000 and the large area covered created problems of communication for a single central body. The need to reorganise the Branch was discussed at a Convention called by Bishop Thorman in November 1934 and motions were proposed and carried which resulted in a system of Branch, Area and Section. The Areas then were Alnwick, Durham, Darlington, Newcastle and Sunderland. (Nationally, we are one of only a few Branches which have the Area structure, and although we no longer have 3,000 members, we are still one of the largest in the country.) The first Branch meeting in the new form with area officers serving on the executive committee was held in Marie Reparatrice Convent on 5 December 1934. From this date we have all the minutes and area reports of our work, which make inspiring reading. Our sisters of sixty years ago did great things, in Charity, Work and Loyalty, and in return gained much in their own spiritual growth.

In September 1939 came the outbreak of the Second World War. Within weeks the League members were immersed in War work of all kinds. They knitted and sewed, they cooked and cleaned, they 'rescued' many girls in need of care. They opened a hostel for Catholic Services girls in Lovaine Place, and of course, the famous Huts and Canteens were re-established and thousands of meals were prepared, cooked and served for Service men and women passing through the region. Towards the end of the War, the League became involved in helping displaced persons who came to England from Europe. Our members offered them friendship, loving care and the teaching of English, and we know personally of one League member, who gave her heart and married one of the gentlemen. They are still living happily ever after! At the end of the War members played a large part in the formation of various social services now taken for granted.

During the post-War years the League considerably broadened its work and began many new initiatives. A Branch meeting held on 15 September 1945 is worth mentioning as it took place in 'the CWL Office' at 95 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, the officers feeling justly proud at achieving their first official headquarters. At the next meeting on 8 December the Secretary read a letter from the Tyneside Council of Study Groups asking if the CWL would let its office to other societies and this was agreed at a rent of 7/6 for an occasional meeting and 5/- per meeting for a series. In 1946 at the Branch AGM in Darlington it was reported that the membership was 2,422 in 46 sections, making it the largest branch in the country by about 500. The outstanding event in that year was the National Council meeting held in Newcastle in April. In 1947 the Branch purchased a house in Bentinck Road, Newcastle, for £4,000, with some land opposite which was sold for £900, the money being put towards the cost of converting the house into bed-sitting rooms (sheltered accommodation) for elderly ladies. The house was sold in 1976 when it became obvious that the City Council was providing similar accommodation. The Branch realised £20,000 from the sale, which was invested and produces an annual dividend given to charities. In 1949 the League supported the Diocesan Mother and Baby Hostel opened in Lovaine Place. However, the CWL office was closed due to a high increase in rent.

In 1950 Our Lady's Catechists were started with much work being done in the Diocese by our members. This work is now carried out by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre and through various programmes in parishes, with more lay people trained as catechists and leaders in the RCAI and other programmes. This year also saw the beginning of the International Committee and the League's affiliation to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO). In 1952 St Margaret Clitherow's house in York was purchased by the Church and the CWL contributed a great deal to its cost. 1954 was 'Our Lady's Year' and the Bishop asked the CWL to stage a pageant in honour of Our Blessed Mother. Entitled *Ave Maria*, the pageant proved a great success, spiritually and financially, £500 of the proceeds (an enormous sum in those days!) going towards paying off the loan on Bentinck House. In 1955 the League helped the St Vincent de Paul Society to set up its proposed Youth Camp on Holy Island. In the following year the CWL Relief and Refugee Committee was appointed by the Hierarchy as its official channel for relief to refugees in this country. A Lourdes centenary pageant entitled *Mary Immaculate*,

comprising eleven tableaux was presented in Newcastle City Hall in October and November. The music was specially composed by Fr Leo, OFM (Cap) and the choir, formed from twenty sections of the League and augmented by 47 girls from Sacred Heart School, was conducted by Fr Edward Harriott. In 1959 the Whitley Bay section started a Housing Welfare Fund to purchase a house for elderly ladies.

In 1960 the League was the only Catholic organisation on the British World Refugee Committee, and £14,000 was donated to this cause by CWL members and the Catholic community. In the same year the first Family Fast Day was organised and sponsored by the National Board of Catholic Women, of which the CWL was a founder member. By now the League was involved in international work and a member of the Branch, Miss Phyllis McMahon, was National Officer on the committee. By 1961 Branch membership had risen to 3,312 and in 1962 the Newcastle Area which had 44 sections and 1,322 members was divided into North and South Tyneside. In 1965 the final payment was made on Bentinck House, which had been bought in 1947 for £4,000 and converted into flats at a cost of £5,000. Two grants of £120 each had been received from the Gilbert Harding Fund and £500 from the *Ave Maria* pageant, but most of the cost had been raised by the painstaking efforts of members. Fantastically, the loan from the Building Society was paid off two years ahead of time! In 1968 the first Diocesan CWL Children's Summer Camp was held. This was a personal triumph for Miss Gennie Gallagher, who for some years had been National Camps Organiser and had worked tremendously hard to get the camps going in the Diocese. Thirty-four camps have so far been held, in various venues including Longridge Towers at Berwick, Burn Hall, the Catholic Youth Centre at Seaham Harbour, Brettargh Holt in Cumbria, the Anglican Youth Hostel at Seahouses, and Minsteracres Youth Centre.

The Diamond Jubilee of the Branch took place in 1970 which was also the year of the canonisation of our patron, St Margaret Clitherow. In recognition of these happy events, the Branch presented the Pope with a Spiritual Bouquet of 3,382 Masses, 3,290 Holy Communions, and 3,076 Rosaries. The Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 occasioned a presentation to her of an illuminated address from the Branch, and in the same year it raised the money for a motorised buggy for a handicapped child. The 75 years celebration of the League itself was marked by a pageant in the Festival Hall in London, in which various branches illustrated its work throughout its life. The Diocesan Branch depicted the work for refugees

during World War 1, with one of our past presidents playing the part of a priest. The same past president organised a series of classes to train women who could instruct young women in Natural Family Planning. She called a meeting attended by interested organisations and individuals, including the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council. Some members who trained them are still teaching natural methods of family planning and keep up to date with developments in this field.

On the occasion of the Pope's visit to Britain in 1982, several members went to York to arrange the flowers for his visit there, and in the same year many members attended the National Council meeting in Jersey, most combining a holiday with the serious business of the Council. A very successful Antiques Auction was held in 1988 at Durham University Chaplaincy in aid of CAFOD which raised £2,000. Members have paid attention to their spiritual lives, too, with annual retreats to such places as Haydon Bridge, Minsteracres and Benwell. They have likewise been on pilgrimages to Carfin, Jesmond, Walsingham and other shrines. Days of recollection have also been held in different places in the Diocese. The Branch has been blessed with the help and advice of many good spiritual directors over the years, including Fr James McKenny, Fr Edward Wilkinson, Fr Thomas Power, and Fr Patrick O'Connell.

With better means of communication, the League has been able to see more rapidly when and where help is needed. Television has brought into our own homes the realities and the needs of today's society. The problems are now very different those when it was started in 1906. The break-up of family life has meant that there are more young people homeless and needing help. Members have taken part in the Night Stop Scheme which offers emergency overnight accommodation for young people. With increasing pressure on women to have abortions, members offer help to mothers wishing to keep their babies through being counsellors for *Life* and by preparing layettes and other equipment. Several members have manned a Listening Post service for those in distress and wanting to talk through their problems. Some members in the Stockton and Billingham Area have helped to run a creche in Holme House Prison, where mothers can leave their children during visits. Many sections now regularly help *Intercare*, which sends medical to countries in need.

Ecumenical work, too, has increased with sections joining their sisters in other Churches each year for worship and social events. All

sections took part in the Women's World Day of Prayer. Knowledge of the use of the media has been brought to members' attention through Media Awareness days arranged by the Anglican Mothers' Union, and media study days have been held in some areas. Information about women's issues throughout the world has been passed on to members by our International Representatives, and by speakers from the Board who have talked at our AGMs about the World Union congresses held in such places as Mexico, Canada, Great Britain, Kenya and Australia. They have explained the work being done concerning euthanasia, literacy, education, bio-ethics, AIDs, refugees, unemployment, homelessness, debt, violence in the home, etc., and in return they have heard of the work of our own Branch.

While members have supported literally hundreds of charities, one or two are exceptional. Several members, for instance, co-operated in the making of a quilt depicting famous Christian women throughout the centuries. The quilt was displayed at a service in Durham Cathedral in January 1992. The Branch supported the Keep Sunday Special campaign through the Jubilee organisation and, although this was defeated in Parliament, it still supports the Jubilee Centre which seeks to keep a Christian influence in the public life of the country. During the last few years a Morpeth member and her husband, with the help of the CWL in her Area and the Branch, have raised thousands of pounds for a centre in Roumania, where people are given spiritual and material help. They have also visited the centre several times and arranged for a young Roumanian doctor to work here for a few months to gain clinical experience, enabling her to help her own people on her return home.

The representatives of the Standing Committee have attended many study days in London, Oxford and Birmingham for their own benefit and that of the Branch. Members of Parliament and Ministers have been bombarded with letters on a wide range of issues, including the use of landmines and sex tourism and prostitution in Thailand. This has meant that organised women are being listened to – nothing of any significance passes the attention of our intrepid members! Members serve on countless committees, both civic and religious, and we are no longer regarded as 'just the women of the parish who make the tea and clean the church', although these activities are not beneath our dignity!

Today the Branch is much depleted in numbers, compared with the years between the Wars and afterwards up to the 'swinging sixties' and

beyond, but our aims and aspirations have not changed. We still work in Charity and Loyalty for our parishes, our country and, more importantly, for the rest of the world. Society's needs have changed but we aim to keep up with them and to do our best to help where we can. There is much to do, to realise the vision of our founder, Margaret Fletcher, whose aim was to carry out the work of Our Blessed Lord. Women are now more fulfilled in the Church. They take a fuller part in the liturgies and in the pastoral work of the Church. The mission of the Branch extends, however, beyond the parish and Diocese, and our members are represented by our National Officers on every Catholic body where women should have a voice or which are concerned with social and political matters affecting women, while the League's membership of international organisations, such as the United Nations, gives women a role in global affairs. And within the League, the Branch gives loving support to all its members, sharing the happy as well as the troubled times.

The League and the Diocesan Branch are both alive and well. It is up to us, all of us, to convince more women to join us. Please be proud to be a member. Talk about our work – it is a great work. The League is a great organisation, and without it the Church would be the poorer, and we would all be the poorer, too.

NOTE

This history of the Diocesan Branch of the Catholic Women's League was written originally for the information of Branch members in March 1996 and has been revised and is published principally to bring to wider notice the very valuable work of the League and to encourage new members to join, but also in memory of Lyn Gilroy, co-author and Branch President, who died on 1 October 1997. (Bernadette Lawson, former Branch Secretary, January 1998).

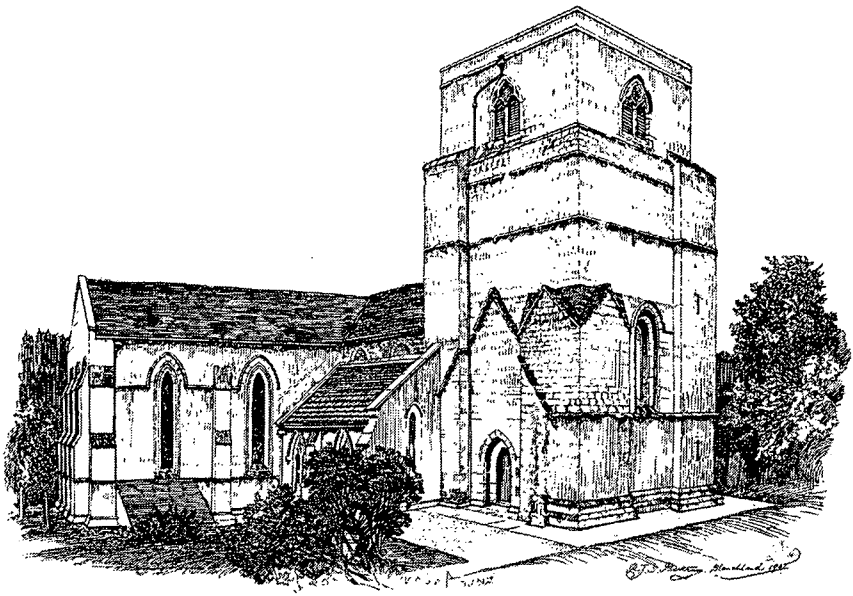
Anyone seeking further information on the CWL should contact the Branch Secretary, Mrs Pat Biagioni, 27 Burnside Drive, Hartburn, Stockton on Tees, TS18 4ET (Tel: 01642 615660).

BLANCHLAND ABBEY AND WARDEN CHURCH: THE AUTUMN EXCURSION, 1997

George Thornton

The sun shone on 41 members of the Society on the afternoon of 20th September as they set out to explore some of the Christian heritage of South-West Northumberland.

Country Life (January 1997) does not exaggerate when it describes Blanchland as 'one of the most remarkable of England's surviving medieval monastic sites, as it incorporates the substantial remains of a Premonstratensian abbey . . . the history and surviving buildings of this house provide a vivid picture of the life of a small monastery in the Middle Ages'. It was at once clear to us that the present 18th century model village, built largely of abbey stone, owes much to the lay-out of the monastic buildings. The gate-house, originally the only entrance, stands intact and now houses the village post-office.



Blanchland Church from the North East

We learned that in 1165 the local Norman lord, Walter de Bolbec, founded the new house dedicated to *God and the Virgin Mary* to support twelve Premonstratensian canons. The Order originated from Prémontré, near Laon, in Northern France at a place in a forest 'already shown' by an angel to St Norbert and aimed to combine a strict community life with serving the pastoral needs of neighbouring parishes. Some thirty-one houses of White Canons (hence the name Blanchland) were established in England and Wales among the astonishing number of 483 religious houses founded here in that age of spiritual renaissance, the 12th century. The Order, transitional between the enclosed Cistercians and the later itinerant friars, settled at Alnwick and Dryburgh on the Tweed but none of its houses was as remote as the Abbey of *God and the Virgin Mary* in the deep, thickly wooded Derwent valley among desolate moorlands.

Despite being down to eight in number at times and always short of money, the community showed much perseverance in keeping going right through to the final Dissolution in 1539. This was no-mans land and the abbey and its lands suffered in the Scottish wars; Edward III and his army camped here, a big drain on resources; the tale is told here, as at Brinkburn, how the monks tolled the bells, rejoicing that the raiding Scots had missed the abbey in the mist only to be guided back to the place by the sound of the bells. In such hazardous times when journeys on horse or mule were difficult, admiration was expressed for the courage of the canons in serving the spiritual needs of parishes as far afield as Bywell, Heddon on the Wall and Kirkharle. It is hardly surprising that a late medieval Visitation by the only bishop the Order produced, Richard Redman, an outstanding figure, commented on a lack of discipline and the serious state of disrepair of some abbey buildings; comment was also made on the lack of a tailor, a barber and a washerwoman!

The abbey church is much changed, yet we still found fascinating relics of its medieval life. With the aid of binoculars, we studied symbols of the Passion set in stained glass in a window above the high altar; a ladder, a crown of thorns, Peter at the fire warming himself. In a lancet window we noted the bulky figures of White Canons at prayer, well-clad against the cold, and in the wall beside the altar a piscina and three stone sedilia. We had fun deciphering the insignia on six grave slabs in the floor of the north transept; pastoral staff, chalice and host for an abbot; horn, shield, sword and arrow for Robert the huntsman or forester; a pair of scissors for a

seamstress perhaps. The whole church is dominated by a massive north tower supported by a magnificent stone arch, while equally impressive is a 14th century stone cross in the churchyard, the most intact cross of its kind in the county.

In search of refreshment, we naturally called at the adjoining abbot's lodge and guesthouse, now the Lord Crewe Arms, where we admired two huge medieval fireplaces, one from the abbey kitchen, another with an alleged priest's hiding-hole. The aptly named Crypt Bar, low and barrel-vaulted, is the original monastic store-house. As we strolled in the garden at the rear we saw clearly the typical cloister garth pattern, and at the bottom of the garden the site of the monks' infirmary was pointed out. As the coach departed we all agreed that our two hour visit had shown that there was much more to Blanchland than we had ever realised.

A short but delightful run through pleasant, wooded, hilly country brought us to the ancient parish church of St Michael and All Angels at .Warden where the North and South Tyne rivers meet; it is an architectural gem. We settled in the pews to hear Bede's lively account of how John of Beverley, then prior of Hexham Abbey, invited a dumb boy to his oratory here and taught him to speak. We then explored the re-used Roman altar, 'the Warden Man', the Saxon tower, the graves caged in iron hoops against grave-robbers and the well-preserved lych-gate. As the setting sun of this perfect autumn day lit up the warm sandstone of the church, originally built by Wilfrid c.704 AD, the colours of the leaves of the elm, beech and yew trees and of the tombstones were highlighted; there was a profound sense of peace and timelessness about the place and we felt it was good to be there.

Our final port-of-call was St Andrew's parish church at Corbridge, described by Pevsner as 'the finest Saxon monument in the county, excepting Hexham crypt'. Anglican since the Reformation, it is a sure and welcome sign of the progress we have made along the ecumenical road that we were able to join the local congregation for the Vigil Mass where we were welcomed by Father Deegan who made kind reference to our founding chairman, the much-loved late Father Bill Nicholson. With so many memorials of life in early and late medieval Pre-Reformation England fresh in mind, as we listened to a homily by a visiting Holy Ghost Father from the African Missions in Nigeria, we were struck by a sense of the universality of the Church in time and space. The joyful celebration was a fitting climax to a memorable outing.

PROGRAMME 1997 — 1998

All lectures will be given in St Mary's Cathedral Centre, Clayton Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne, on Wednesdays, at 7.00 p.m.

3 September 1997	Mass followed by AGM.
1 October 1997	Gerald Bonner, Esq., F.S.A: Ireland and Italy in the Culture of Early Christian Northumbria. (with slides)
5 November 1997	Rev. Roland Connelly, S.M: Women of the Catholic Resistance in England, 1540-1680.
3 December 1997	Rev. David Milburn, D.S.H: Mgr. Thomas Edward Witham, Priest and Squire of Lartington Hall (1806-1897).
4 February 1998	Mrs. Brenda Currer: *The Role of the Priest in the North East Catholic Education in the mid-19th century.*
4 March 1998	Rev. Paul Fisher: *Robert Tate and 19th century Catholicism.*

Coach Excursions

20 September 1997	Blanchland Abbey, Warden Church, Corbridge (half day).
16 May 1998	Mount Grace Priory.
20 June 1998	Skipton Castle, Broughton Hall.

Printed at Darlington Carmel