

THE MONASTERY OF OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION IN BRUSSELS (1599-1794)

by Paul Arbiaster?

After 1558 new institutions of and for English Catholics were slow to be established. The first was the English College founded at Douai in 1568, one of the first Tridentine seminaries, but only re-established at Douai in 1593, after years at Rheims. The second was the English Jesuit college founded at St Omer in 1594. Both the seminary and the Society of Jesus were self-consciously modern institutions. The third Continental foundation for English Catholics, that of the English Benedictine nuns in Brussels, was quite different: a deliberate return to the monasticism which “lay at the heart of early English Christianity”² Interest in the Anglo-Saxon roots of English Christianity seems to have revived in the 1590s, culminating historiographically in Robert Persons’s *Treatise of Three Conversions of England* printed in 1603-4, and Richard Verstegan’s *Restitution of Decayed Intelligences in Antiquities* in 1605. Both drew heavily on Thomas Stapleton’s translation of Bede’s *history*, published in Antwerp in 1565. But it was a particular, and perhaps a very personal, reading of Bede which inspired the foundation of the Monastery of Our Lady of the Assumption. After considering the history of the foundation, and not being competent to speak of the spiritual life of the nuns, I will look briefly at the economic basis of the community’s daily life, and consider what little is known of its cultural activities.

Mary Percy, foundress of the monastery, was the daughter of Thomas Percy, seventh Earl of Northumberland, and Anne Somerset, daughter of the Earl of Worcester. After the failure of the Rising of the North, Thomas Percy sought refuge in Scotland, where he was betrayed and imprisoned. Anne Somerset went to Flanders with her infant daughter, Mary, trying to raise funds to ransom her husband and to enlist the diplomatic support of the Duke of Alva, Philip II’s Governor General in the Low Countries. Neither effort could take effect, the Earl was delivered to Elizabeth’s agents and transported to York, to be executed in

‘NOTES

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2 Henry Mayr-Harting. *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxons of England*, (London, 1991), p. 148.

1572, having refused to save himself by renouncing the Catholic faith. Anne Somerset remained in Flanders as a pensioner of the King of Spain, second in rank among the lay exiles only to the Earl of Westmorland, who did not take such an active interest in promoting the interests of Mary Queen of Scots and the exile community as did the Countess. Mary was educated in a succession of Belgian and French convents. She returned to England in 1579, suffered imprisonment for religion, and finally settled in Brussels in the mid-1590s. While considering the foundation of a monastery, she acquainted herself with some aspects of conventual life by spending time with the Augustinian Canonesses in Brussels and Louvain (the latter a house with many English members). Her own foundation was to follow the Rule of St Benedict. The Rule which, in the words of Abbess Neville *Annals*, “had hitherto, most flourished, in that now hereticall kingdom”.³

It seems not unlikely that Mary was particularly inspired by one of the first English monasteries, that of St Hilda at Whitby, a double house which provided five bishoprics to the early English Church. Whitby Abbey was refounded in the late eleventh century by the first of the English Percies, William de Percy, who died in 1096. But there were more personal reasons for Mary Percy to have taken St Hilda as her inspiration. Bede’s *History* (3:8) records how in the early days of the conversion, there being few English nunneries, “many were wont, for the sake of monastic conversation, to repair to the monasteries of the Eboracs or Gauls”, naming four aristocratic Saxon ladies who did so. St Hilda herself had been en route to Chelles to join her sister there when she was called back to Northumberland to found a monastery (4:23). When Hilda was an infant her father lived in banishment among the Britons, where he was later poisoned, and her mother dreamt that “as she yet busily sought for him, she found by and by a very precious jewel under his garment, which as she did well mark and consider it seemed to shine and glister with brightness of so great a light, that it filled all the borders of Britannia, with the grace thereof”. Circumstances not without a parallel in Mary Percy’s own childhood experiences and mature aspirations.⁴

³ CR5 6, p. 2.

⁴ It seems most unlikely that Lady Mary Percy would not have read Bede’s *History*, then a standard devotional work, and meditate particularly on the example of the saintly abbesses and monastic foundresses therein, especially as she was living in the same house as Fr John Gerard SJ while initially planning her departure from

Apart from the personal and dynastic resonance of Wiltby, there was also a distant family link with Brabant. The Percies died out in the male line two generations after arriving in England, and the heiress married Josceline, a son of Godfrey, Duke of Brabant, and brother of Henry I's queen, Adela of Louvain. Josceline adopted the name Percy, and was an ancestor of the line until 1670. Lady Maty was thus directly descended from a medieval Duke of Brabant, and was undoubtedly aware of this. What could be more natural than to found her monastery in Brussels, the Ducal residence, a stone's throw from the court? A final reference to the Percies may lie in the very dedication of the monastery to Our Lady of the Assumption:

the monastery's seal bore an image of Our lady crowned with stars and resting her feet on a crescent moon, the crescent moon being one of the heraldic emblems of the Percies. It seems only natural that seeing her family's emblem as Our Lady's footstool would stimulate Lady Mary's attachment to this devotion.

In the first years of her life in Brussels, Mary Percy relied much on her Jesuit confessor, William Illoit, and seems to have felt a particular attachment to the Society of Jesus. In 1596 she was one of six *nobiles >ktinae* who signed an attestation in favour of the Society. The other five were Dorothy and Gertrude Arundell, Elizabeth Allen (the Cardinal's sister), the widow Benedicta Gifford (or Guildford), and Mary Greene.⁷ The following year all English and French residents with access to the court in Brussels were required to register with the Audiencier. These registrations show that Mary Percy, the Arundell sisters and Mary Greene, as well as Mary Field, Anne Manners, Susanria Preston and Anne Issame, were

the country (see the conversion narrative of Thomas Poulton — brother of Dame Lugenia Poulton — as given in I-I. Foley. *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 1, p. 159).

~ The image of the Woman of the Apocalypse had become associated with the Assumption in the course of the middle ages (for example as the Apocalyptic Virgin of St Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermon for the Octave of the Assumption), but in the sixteenth century it was also increasingly used to represent the Immaculate Conception, without losing its associations with the Assumption and the Apocalypse. It was thus an image which in itself recapitulated the history of salvation. I am grateful to Dr Beth Williamson of Bristol University for this

information.

6 Although there may also be a political edge to the dedication, since the nuns were leaving the territory of the Queen of England to enter the service of the Queen of Heaven. The apocalyptic 'Our Lady in Glory of the monastery's seal was also, beside the St Andrew's Cross of Burgundy, present on the 'Standai des Couluws' of the Archduke Albert.

'Westminster Diocesan Archives, vol.5 (1595-6), no. 95, p. 334.

together living under Jesuit spiritual direction.⁸ Two of Mary Percy's companions joined her in the scheme to erect a monastery: Dorothy and Gertrude, both daughters of Sir John Arundell of Lanherne in Cornwall. Another of the ladies, Anne Manners, was to see her daughter, Mary Vavasour, professed in 1616.

But before they could become nuns, Mary Percy and the Arundells had to go through a probation and a novitiate under a suitable superior. Fr Dolt advised them that there was a suitable English nun, Dame Joanne Berkeley, at the Benedictine abbey of St Peter in Rheims, where the Abbess was a French aunt of the Queen of Scots. At forty-two years old, having been a professed nun in an aristocratic monastery for over sixteen years, Joanne Berkeley had maturity, experience of the religious life, and the worldly advantages to authority of social

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grace and gentle birth. Their spiritual director was no longer to be the Jesuit William de Jolt, but the secular priest Robert Chambers, who had lived several years in Rome before coming to join them in Brussels in 1598. Another Jesuit, Robert Persons, was active in Rome on their behalf to obtain the necessary briefs for the foundation.⁹

During the process of finding an abbess and a confessor, Mary Percy had also been negotiating for a suitable property for the foundation, and on 18 April 1598 she exchanged contracts with Sicur Roland Longinus, Viscount of St-Winocbergen, for a property in the Ileetegeat (just inside the medieval town walls of Brussels but well within the newer defensive works). On 11 July 1598 Dame Joanne Berkeley, the three postulants, and a servant moved

⁸ Brussels. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Papieren van Staat en Auditie, I 398/7/unnumbered. Presumably they were 'spiritual daughters' under simple vows of chastity and obedience – a state of life much promoted by the Dutch and English Jesuits as suitable to a missionary Church. Dorothy Arundell was apparently living in this state in England before travelling to Brussels (David Lunn, *The Catholic Elizabethans* (Downside, 1998), pp. 242-3).

⁹ CRS I⁴-p. 175.

¹⁰ CRS b, p. 2. Robert Persons, whose niece Mary Persons was received into the monastery in 1605, is well known to historians. Mary Percy's Jesuit advisor, William Holt, is less so, although he was an influential cleric at the time. He had briefly been Rector of the English College in Rome in the 1580s, and from 1590 was a senior military chaplain in the Low Countries, where he was valued in turn by the Governors General the Duke of Parma, the Archduke Ernest and the Archduke Albert. Early in 1598 he was appointed Vice-Procurator of the English Jesuits in

Flanders, but in May he left Brussels for Rome, afterwards travelling to Milan to join the entourage of the Archduke Albeit, who was then on his way to Spain to claim his bride, the infant- isabclta. 1-Ic died in Barcelona in 1599 (CRS 74. pp. 9 1-93; CR5 75, pp.210-211). Abbess Neville cannot be correct in stating that he said the first Mass of the monastery in Brussels on the Fvast of the Assumption i 598 (CRS 6, p.²).

Most of the buildings were demolished durine the French occupation of Belgium (1794- 1814), and the Berlaimont Boulevard has since been driven through the site.

into their new residence. Three days later Mary made the down payment of 1500 forms. The servant, who was to become the abbey's first lay sister, was Elizabeth Tiehbourne.¹²

Little is known of the community's life over the next year, except that their numbers grew continually. The first to join them were three nuns from Rheims, requested by the Abbess-elect to help her establish a monastic routine. One was Mother Claude Noel, first Prioress, another was her niece Dame Mary Noel, first Novice Mistress.¹³ The identity of the third is unknown. On 4 November 1598 they were joined by a fourth postulant, Elizabeth Canstield from Robertshall in Lancashire. On 10 April of the following year, two more candidates joined them, Margaret Thomson, from Broadwell in Oxfordshire, and Margaret Smith from York.¹⁴ They were followed on 26 September by Frances Gawen and Elizabeth Southcott. Although James Frances and Elizabeth had different surnames and came from different counties, they were both grand-daughters of Sir Edward Waldegrave, Queen Mary's Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He had died in the Tower in 1561, one of the first victims of Elizabeth's change in religion.¹⁵ Their grandmother, Frances Neville, who had been a lady of the Privy chamber to Mary, died the very year of their arrival in the monastery.¹⁶ Another postulant was Mary Cruinhome, who in the end did not make her profession. Whether others tried their vocation in the monastery is unknown.

All these were postulants for the state of choir sister. Over the course of the Year Elizabeth Tiehbourne was joined as a postulant lay sister by Margaret Whitakers, Sybil Banks and Elizabeth Clayton. Sybil Banks had been lady-in-waiting to Anne Neville, daughter of

¹² There had been a recusant widow of that name assessed in 1577 as owning lands with an annual rent of £40, who by 1586 had been brought to the verge of ruin and was unable to pay the fines demanded (William Raleigh Trimble, *The Catholic Laity in Elizabethan England 1581-1603*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 22t).

¹³ *Chronicle* p. 42.

¹⁴ Margaret Thomson's father, a widower with nine children, had lived for some years in the Forest of Aiden under an assumed name to avoid pursuivants, and finally died while imprisoned in Gloucester Castle her brother, Francis, became a Jesuit (Mrs Bryan Stapleton, *A History of the Post-Reformation Catholic Missions in Oxfordshire*, (London, 1906), pp 161-2).

¹⁵ John Gough Nichols (ed.), *The Diary of Isidore Macinn, Citizen and Merchant-Journeyer of London, from A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563*. (Camden Society, London, 1898), pp. 256, 266.

16 Diarmaid McCulloch, *Suifola and the Tudars. Pieter and Religion in an English County 150(A) 600*, (Oxford. 1986), p. 236. She bequeathed each of them £20, but only 5 marks apiece to their siblings, suggesting she was aware of their intentions (MM. Nolan, 'Some Benedictine Nuns at Brussels, *Essex Record* 19 1977). pp. 61. 70).

the Earl of Westwrlan¹⁷. who lived in Brussels with her husband, David Inniev.¹⁷ Their daughter iJrsula, Dame Anne in religion, was professed as a choir sister in 1612. Mrs Banks herself v 'as a widow witi. one daughter living in Brussels with her, and a maidservant of her own, but pr~ sumably sl,e could not afford a dowry of two or three thousand guilders after providing for her daughtet's future.

The papal brief was issued by Clement VIII on 31 March 1599. Shortly afterwards the Archdukes and the city of Brussels conferred on the house tlte tax exemptions customarily enjoyed by religiou~ communities. The Archduchess also offered an endowment, but the nuns politely refused. In the words of the Chronicle of 1898 "fearing less the incon~enee of poverty than the loss of free and entire liberty in the election of their Abbesses: for in those days a royal Ibundation was usually accompanied by a claim to nominate the Superior".¹⁹

On 14 November 1599 the Archbishop of Mechlin, Mathias Ilovius, consecrated Joanne Berkeley as first Abbess of "ihe English Monasterie of the Assumption of o A~ Blessed Ladie of the holie Order of St Benedict in Bruxells", and the fifteen nuns eight postulant cho~r sisters, four postulant lay sisters an(I the three prof~ssed nuns sent fron. Rheims to aid the abbess –formally recognized her authority. Seven days later, on the fi~ast of the Presentation of Our Lady, the postulants were clothed in monastic habits an,i became novices. This was a society ev~itt attended by the Archdukes and their court, an I by many of the English exiles.²⁰ in the words of Queen Elizabeth's agent, "It was one of the ~oleninest things that was seen this 100 years; many ladies and others could not forbear weeping '21 The Infanta Isabella herself conducted Mary Percy and Dorothy, the older of the Arurideil sisters, to the altar for their clothing, and the other six choir sisters were conducted lowrt the aisle tx~o by two, by great ladies of the court, each to be presented at the altar by the Infanta, who promised to be a mother to them.²² Afler the ceremony the Archdukes provided a

17 Brussels. Algeineen Rijksarchief, Papieren van Staat en AudiLutie, V98/7~nnumbered.

¹⁸CRS 14, np. 180-181.

¹⁹*Chronicle*, p. 46,

²⁰ This was one of the first public ceremonies attended by the Archdukes, who were sworn in as Dukes of Brabait four days later.

²¹ John Petit to Peter Halyns, Brussels 23 November 1599, in *CSP L)orn Eliz, 1598-1601*, p. 343.

²² Like the dedication to Our Lady of the Assumption, this promise was not without possible political

undertones. See M.. Thofner, 'Mariying the City, Mothering the Country: Gender and Visual Conventions ,rx

banquet not just for the nuns, but for a hundred of the English exiles then in Brussels. Such bounty for prominent religious institutions came to be typical of the Archdukes. This was the first occasion for displaying such munificence after their arrival in the Netherlands as joint sovereigns

One year later, on 21 November 1600, the eight nuns made their profession. Again it was a society event. They swore to obey not only their Abbess, but also her ecclesiastical superior the Archbishop of Mechlin, under whose visitatorial jurisdiction the monastery had been placed.²³ One of the liberties of the nuns was that they could write directly to the Archbishop, without the permission or even knowledge of the Abbess; a privilege which many invoked in the course of the next fifty years, filling several boxes in Mechlin's diocesan archive.²⁴

This correspondence is a very rich source in many ways, but is least useful as a guide to daily life in the monastery. The main purpose of the letters was to obtain authoritative action from the Archbishop or his representatives to solve a particular problem. but sometimes they seem to have served simply to relieve the writer's feelings. Most concern quite exceptional occasions, often related to the dissensions over the issues of frequent communion, unsuitable confessors and constitutional authority within the monastery. A couple of the letters were copied out by the Archbishop's secretary without the monastery's

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name, presumably because they were cases of conscience on which the Archbishop sought the advice of Ronte. or of moral theologians or canonists at the University of Louvain. One of these was the question of whether a serious sin committed in ignorance, and thus previously

Johannes Bochius's Account of the Joyous Entry of the Archduke Albert and the Infanta Isabella into Antwerp?
Oxford Art Journal, forthcoming.

²³ The oath which Joan Berkeley took before her formal installation was: "Je Jeanne Barciet clu Cloister de nostre Dame Abbess future prometz devant Dieu et ses saintz, et ceste congregation des soucars, ieulx. subjection, digne obeissance et Reverence, a nostre mere leglise Metropolitaine de saint Rombout de Malines, ci a vous Monsigneur Matthias de l'Archevesque de la mesme eglise, ci vos successeurs, selonc les saintz canons et comme commande l'autorite inviolable des Papes de Rome Ainsi que Dieu me ayde et ces saintz evangiles." (Mechlin, Diocesan Archive, Regulieren Brussel, Engelse Nonnen, carton 3).

²⁴ Mechlin, Diocesan Archive, Regulieren Brussel, Engelse Nonnen, cartons 3-8, 11-13. This besides the Archbishop's own records (visitation reports, etc.) in the section Fonds Mechliniensis, and the documents among the papers of Vicar General Amatus Coriache in the Fonds Coriache. Of the Roman documents. Peter Guilday wrote

that 'The documents in the Archives and in the Library of the Vatican, and in Propaganda concerning this difficulty [i.e. the protracted disputes], are the most numerous of all that we discovered relating to the English Foundations" (*The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent 1558-1795*, (London etc., 1914), p 259)

left unconfessed, had to be confessed once it was recognised as a sin. Another was about defying abbatial authority to absent oneself from a chapter one suspected of being uncanonically convened, in order to avoid having made oneself a party to decisions which might later be the subject of ecclesiastical censure.

But there are occasional references which give the odd glimpse of daily life in the choir, cells, refectory and parlours the novices' dormitory, the sacristy, cellar, pantry and infirmary, and the little boarding house where a few aristocratic girls were educated, and where at least one boy, George Gage (later James I's unofficial emissary to Rome), got his primary education.²⁵ Much of the community's time outside the choir seems to have been taken up with private study and work relating to the house. The nuns did not get on—they employed a gardener called Nicholas) and although they bought hops and barley for brewing, they paid a man to do the work. They did make decorative silk flowers to sell as a source of occasional income. The community grew rapidly, and Lady Mary's foundation was clearly a success. Just prior to the first death in the monastery in 1611, there were over thirty women living in the enclosure, not counting the scholars, with an outer household of unknown size. By 1623, before the filiation to Ghent and the second influx of nuns for Cambrai, the enclosure contained sixty-nine nuns, novices, and postulants and three children. In the outer house there were two confessors, an organist, four manservants and a maid “to go to the market”.²⁶ It was not an enormous monastery but sizeable enough to need real management skills, especially as many of the nuns were more accustomed to command than to obey.

All the nuns of the choir came from wealthy families. Most were from the gentry, but a few were of the nobility, or had fathers successful in trade or the profession. A surprising number of them were descended from household officers or county officials of Mary's reign. Several polemicists writing about the English Catholic institutions refer to the social exclusivity of the Brussels monastery, ascribing it to a Jesuit plot to concentrate wealth

²⁵ The school may have been founded due to Philip III's advice to the Infanta Isabella, in January 1601, that all English girls in Flanders be educated by the religious women of their own nation in Brussels and Louvain (*CCL*, vol. 1, p.38).

26 See appendix 2.

27 In James Wadworth's phrase, 'Damsels which are most of them Gentlernens daughters of very great fashion in England?'(*The English Spanish Pilgrime*. 2nd ed., London, 1630, p. 73).

in their hands.²⁸ Lady Mary herself boasted that “we are not obliged to receive only persons of quality yet we have received none but those who are of quality except two or three?”

We have seen already that the nuns turned down the offer of a royal endowment. But how was the monastery funded?⁹ The English intelligencer Lewis Owen, after a first-hand

mission on the Continent in the mid-1620s, claimed that

This Abbey is very rich, for they have purchased in that country whole Mannors and Lordships, and have many thousand pounds out at Use in the Lombards, and elsewhere; of all which the English Jesuites have the command and disposing: for they set at dale, receive and defray, or lay out for all things that concerne the Abbey, and the Nunnes, no not the Lady Abesse her selfe dare not call the Jesuits to any account.~

The statement, however, is simply not true. The monastery held no land, and the Prioress submitted detailed accounts to the Archbishop.³⁰ The dowries of the nuns were paid out in return for annuities, but this was hardly the dubious financial transaction Owen implies. ‘the sums he describes as going to “Lombards” (professional moneylenders) were in fact held by the *Montes Pietatis*, low-interest loan banks set up specifically to combat usury. Speaking of the funding of the English Catholic institutions more generally, Owen stated that the main source of support was the former abbey lands in England and Wales held by the Catholic gentry and nobility.³¹ Perhaps hinting that there might be rich pickings if such lands were confiscated all over again, it does seem likely that this statement contains a greater element of truth. Several of the nuns came from families holding former monastic lands or revenues. ‘The Bianchards of Chieveley (Berks.) for instance, held the manor of Priors Court, while the Cursons of Waterperry (Oxon.) were lay rectors of the parish. Both these sources of income had formerly belonged to Abingdon Abbey.³² It would hardly be surprising if Catholic

28 e.g. Lewis Owen, *The Running Register: Recordinge a True Relation of the State of the English Colledge, Seminaries and Cloysters in aliffrainc parts* (London, 1626) pp 101-2. Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomic of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* (np., 1623), p. 9.

~ Lewis Owen, bc. cit.

30 Mechlin, Diocesan Archive. Regulieren Brussel. Engelse ionnen, “neconomica”, See the appendices for two sets of accounts.

31 Loc. cit., p. 108.

32 VCH Berks., VCI I Oxon. Francis Trentham, father of Dame Mechtilda, owned Westwood Grange in Staffordshire, formerly a property of Dienlacs Abbey (VCI I Staffs). A systematic consultation of the VCH is expected to turn up similar properties held by the families of other nuns.

owners thought a monastic dowry a fitting expenditure of such income. As the appendices show, the monastery's basic expenses often outstripped its regular income.

But the nuns did not have to rely entirely on their dowries: at the first establishment of the monastery the regiment of Sir William Stanley donated two months' pay, with which Mary Percy paid the remaining sums for the property, banking the surplus.³³ In 1601 Philip III granted the house a monthly pension of 50 crowns on the Spanish military treasury in the Netherlands.³⁴ The English colleges and convents were, after all, Arsenals and Magazines of munitions and arms against the armies of errors and heresies.³⁵ In 1608, after complaints from Fr Joseph Creswell SJ, the King of Spain wrote to the Archduke to ensure that the pension was paid promptly.³⁶ The abbey's main source of income, though, was always the interest on the dowries. In 1650, when annuities from England could no longer be paid, the nuns obtained a licence to beg for alms.

Apart from practical matters, the letters to the Archbishop also reveal something about the conceptual life of the nuns, through the way in which they use certain terms:

vocation, reformation, reputation, liberty authority, humility. And a great deal about their education. Most could express themselves fluently only in English, but a few wrote in French and at least two, Dames Martha Colford and Mary Philips, could write Dutch. Some aspects of their more general cultural life –

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Mary Percy was a translator. Her English translation of Isabella Christina Bellinghage's *Abridgement of Christian Perfection* was a multi-transcribed work in the English Benedictine

~ Paul Arblaster, 'The Infanta and the English Benedictine Nuns: Mary Percy's Memories in 1634', *RUC* 3 (1997), pp. 508-527. Stanley was a second cousin of the Arundell sisters, and Philip III had been his regimental chaplain-major.

~ Philip III to Archduke Albert 23 July 1601 *CE* vol. 1, p. 74. This may have had something to do with expenses incurred pursuant of the order described in note 25 above.

~ “d’Arsenals & Magasins de munitions & arines, .. contre les armées des erreurs, & des heresies? *Sermon Funi-bre laict par le reverme. Evesque de Namur, Messire Jacques Blaseus, aux funrerailles du trescarho/ique, treshault & trespuis ant Prince & Monarque Phiippc 2. Roy des Espaignes &c. Celebrez en Brusselies en l’Eglise de Ste (Joedele, le dernier-jour de Decembre, de l’An 1598. Et la presence du Sereme. Prince Andre Cardinal d’Austrice, Gouverneur des Pays bas, Cap. Gen. &c.* (Brussels, Rutger Velpius, 1599).

36 Philip III to Archduke Alben, April 1608, (*CE* vol. 1, p. 281).

convents, and was twice printed.³⁷ Perhaps it provides a key to some of her difficulties as abbess: having always been a model of modest obedience to superiors, as advised by Bellinzaga, she expected no less from others. Irrespective of their views on the liberty of

rights of consultation set out in the Rule and the monastery's statutes. Of course, Lady Mary's medical problems didn't help. As she wrote to the Archbishop on one occasion. "it may be truly objected against me that I am colorike".³⁸ As yet I know nothing about the literary or scholarly achievements of other members of the community.

Literary and devotional works were dedicated to some of the nuns. The "Mistress D.A." to whom Southwell dedicated *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Teares* is traditionally identified with Dorothy Arundell, although the dedication dates from her years in England.³⁹ Thomas Carre (verely Miles Pinckney) dedicated his translation of *La Luke spirituelle* to Mary Percy in 1632. Benet Canfield, no relation to Dame Anne Canfield, dedicated the shortened English edition of his *Rule of Perfection* (1609) to the English nuns of Flanders and Louvain, having cousins in both houses, while his *On the Three Wills* was dedicated to Dante Agatha Wiseman and her two cousins in Louvain by name.⁴⁰ The first abbess, Joanne Berkeley, was the dedicatee of Richard Verstegan's translation of Pietro de Lucca's *Dialogue of the King and the Queen* (1601), and the same author's *Odes in imitation of the Sea and Penitential Psalms* (1603) was dedicated to a group of "Vertuous Ladies. the singers of these ditties", possibly a reference to the Brussels nuns. More tentative suppositions about the cultural life of the monastery can also be drawn from wider social and cultural connections. that is to say, the more public and thus better recorded activities of the fathers, brothers and nephews of the nuns. Mary Philips. received in 1614, was the daughter of Peter Philips. organist to the court chapel in Brussels. one of the most renowned keyboard composers of the time. From 1617, if not earlier. another

~ A. F. Allison, 'New Light on the Early History of the "Breve Compendio"'. The Background to the English Translation of 1612? *RH*, 4 (1957), pp. 4-17, By a curious coincidence the St Omer edition mistakenly attributes the translation to Lady Mary's advisor, Anthony Boskinds. just as the original was long ascribed to Bellinzaga's confessor, Achille Gagliardi sj.

~ MachIm, Diocesan Archive, Regulieren Bnissel, Engelse Nonnen.

~ Nancy Pollard Brown, 'Robert Southwell: the Mission and the Written Word?' in Thomas McCoog (ed.), *The*

Reckoned Expense, (Woodbridge, 1996). p. 202.

40 *Chronicle*, p. 55; Allison & Rogers, *Contemporary Printed Literature of the Commonwealth in England, 1558-1640*, vol. 2 (1994), no. 275.

renowned composer, Richard Dering was the monastery's organist, leaving in 1625 or '26 to become chapel organist in Henrietta Maria. Two of the nuns, Dames Catherine and Francisca Paston, were daughters of Edward Paston, a musical enthusiast whose large collection was divided between his four East-Anglian houses.⁴²

On the literary side, Dame Mary Gage was apparently the subject of a spiritual sonnet by Sir Tobie Matthew, who also wrote a life of Lady Lucy Knatchbull.⁴² Dame Benedicta Hawkins had an autographed copy of the emblem book, the *Fatiheneja Sacra* written by her Jesuit brother Henry Hawkins, and two more of her brothers were writers, one a translator of Horace, the other the author of a *Brief Introduction to Syntax*.⁴³ Dame Eugenia Poulton was the daughter of a famous jurist. Ferdinand Poulton, compiler of the statute books, and the prodigious literary output of Dame Mary Persons's uncle Robert is well known. Dame Columba Gage's nephew, the valiant soldier Sir Henry Gage, translated *l'let-man l-lu, ou l'Obsidia Bredana* into English, and an English book on heraldry into French.

The monastery's first confessor, Robert Chambers, was the author of *L'affiina*, published in Italy in 1600, a biblical-allegorical romance, and he also translated Philip Numan's account of the miracles at the Marian pilgrimage site of Scherpenheuvel into English. Incidentally, a few of the exiles seem to have adopted a particular devotion to Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel. Sir William Stanley's regiment made regular barefoot pilgrimages to the shrine when stationed at Tienen, and Lady Mary Lovell, who tried her vocation in the Brussels monastery in 1609, in her will mentions some pieces from the oak in which the miraculous image had stood.⁴⁴ The Spanish translation of Numan's account was the work of

~ John Fendley, 'The Pastons of Horton and the Horton Court Library' *RH*, 22 (1995), pp. 5Q1-5~8
 42 Anthony O Petti, 'Unknown Sonnets by Sir Toby Matthew' *RI-h* 9 (1967), pp. 237-252, esp. p. 152: Sir Tobie Matthew. *The Life of Lady Lucy Knatchbull*, ed. David Knowles (London, 1931). Petti's Conjecture, Matthew's 'To a Religious Woman' may also be addressed to Lucy Knatchbull, with whom he had a close friendship (she being one of the few people to whom he revealed the fact that he was a priest).
 ~ Josephine Evetts Seeker, 'Henry Hawkins, SJ. 1577-1646' *RI-I*, 11(1972), pp. 215-252, esp. p. 238.
 ~ L. Willaert, 'Testament de Dame Marie Lovell' *Annalectes pour servir l'histoire ecclesiastique de la Belgique*, 3rd ser., 2 (1906); the Marian devotions of the Brussels monastery were those which were actively promoted by the Archdukes: Our Lady of Halie, where the Archdukes spent the night in prayer before first entering Brussels

together; Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel, where the Archdukes built first a chapel and later a basilica: Our Lady of Loreto, whose shrine they adored (see Luc Duerloo, 'Archducal Piety and Habsburg Power' in Werner Thomas & Luc Duerloo (eds), *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621. Essays*, (Turnhout, 1995), pp. 27-44.). There were chapels of Our Lady of the Hill and Our Lady of Loreto in the monastery's cloister

Dr Caesar Clement, a grandson of Thomas More's foster-daughter and, as a speaker of English and as dean of Brussels minster, a likely deputy of the Archbishop in his dealings with the nuns.⁴⁵ But although all this is very suggestive, it is not very solid as a guide to the literary and musical life of the nuns. The same sort of family relations tied them to many company captains in the Army of Flanders, and later to royalist officers in the Civil War, not to mention several of the gunpowder plotters. Which hardly suffices to suggest that the same sort of military and terrorist activities took place within the convent walls.

A few more solid, but far less suggestive, clues to the cultural life of the nuns lie in the provenance catalogue of the Royal Library in Brussels. One manuscript formerly belonging to the community is held by the library: a collection of early seventeenth-century English translations of Jesuit letters from Japan.

Thomas Lodge's translation of Josephus (1670), two early-seventeenth-century translations of John of Avila, and Cressy's *Church-History of Brittany from the beginning of Christianity to the Norman Conquest* (1668). The weight of the evidence points towards music, literature and Church history (ancient and recent) as the main intellectual occupations of the community but no doubt there were other sides too. Both Richard Verstegan, a literary figure already mentioned, and Gabriel Colford, the father of Dame Martha Colford, were involved in the English Catholic book trade, and both probably bought books for the monastery from the Plantin Office.⁴⁸ The records of their substantial purchases from the Plantin Office survive, but Colford was also lay procurator for the English Jesuits at St Omers, while Verstegan was the Antwerp book agent of the English colleges in Spain. It is thus impossible to determine for whom they were buying any given volume.

(*Chronicle*, p. 80). Lt. Anthony Chambers, a nephew of the monastery's first confessor, was the beneficiary of one of the miracles described in Justus Lipsius's *Diva Virgo Hallensis* (1604).

~ *Historia de los milagros*, (Brussels: Rutger Velpius, 1606).

46 Brussels, Royal Library, MS 513.

~ Lodge's Josephus is annotated to belong to the Confessarius of the English Benedictine Dames in Brussels 1710; Cressy 'Belonging to the English Benedictine Dames at Bruxelles'. The East Berghoet library catalogue now in Douai Archives will hopefully provide further insights into the book holdings of the monastery.

~ On Colford's involvement in the trade, see *Acts of the Privy Council*, vol. 25, pp. 73, 479; vol. 26, p. 10; Antwerp, Archief Plantin-Moretus, no. 21, (rootboek 1590-1599, fol. 338; no 127, Grootboek 1600-1608, lbs. 24, 129. In the years 1604-1608 he was also buying books for St Ursula's in Louvain.

The best guide to the intellectual life of the monastery is no doubt the extensive controversy, or linked series of controversies, which raged within the community from 1620 to 1650. The conflicting zeals of pro-Jesuits and proto-Jansenists, of monastic constitutionalists and abbatial absolutists, of the proponent of dependence on the EBC and of continued independence, and of all the other controversies, were no doubt powerful encouragements to discord. The factions not only of English Catholic life and the exile community, but of post-Tridentine Catholicism more generally, were to be found within the community. External lines of interest and influence, and conflicting expectations, met and mixed in the monastery. Despite the enclosed life of the nuns, the English Benedictine monastery was a high-profile institution.

The Archdukes, members of their court and leading figures in the English exile community were present at the clothing or profession of nuns in 1599, 1600 and 1607. On the last occasion, Mass was said by the Papal Nuncio.⁴⁹ The Archdukes were also present in 1618 at the dedication of the church, described in an eighteenth-century guidebook as “petite, mais très-propre”.⁵⁰ The main window, costing £150, was paid for by the Archdukes and decorated with their arms. The widowed Isabella was present at clothings in 1622, 1623 and 1626.⁵² At the profession of Teresa Gage in 1617. “all the better sorte of our countrymen living hereabouts” were present, and the rectors of the three Jesuit houses in the Low Countries (St Omer, Liege and Louvain) assisted at Mass.⁵³ But the church was also used for ceremonies which did not directly concern the nuns. In 1612 it saw the Earl of Arconnet’s son confirmed by the Bishop of Dublin, with the Archduke personally acting as his sponsor and giving him the confirmation name Alheil.⁵⁴ At a more mundane level, English exiles in Brussels would no doubt visit the church to hear sermons and make their confessions in their own language, and in the hope of meeting compatriots. As we have said, many of the nuns

~ Sir Thomas Edmondson to the Earl of Salisbury, Brussels 17 April 1607, quoted in Peter Guildar, *The English Catholic Revival on the Continent 1558-1795*. (London etc., 1914), p. 258 note 1 (from PRO SP 7718-279).

~ *Le Guide fidèle, contenant la Description de La Ville de Bruxelles*, (Brussels, 1761), p. 12.

51 Chambre des Comptes de Lille, June 1618, cited in An Convents, unpublished seminar paper, Leoben, 1997.

52 Arblaster, op. cit.

~ Sir William Trumbull to Sir Ralph Winwood (Brussels, 26 Sept. 1617), in *Downshire MSS*, vol. 6, p. 296-297.

~ Sir William Trumbull to James 1 (Brussels, 3 Sept. 1612), in *Downshire MSS*, vol.3, pp. 360-361.

had brothers and cousins in the Army of Flanders, who one would presume visited them when in Brussels. There was also a small number of exiled aristocratic households in Brussels and its vicinity, such as that of Edmund Neville, Lord Latimer, who styled himself seventh Earl of Westmorland and whose wife was a familiar figure at court. Lie was a cousin of Dame Anne Ingleby. The monastery seems even to have functioned as a post office for letters to and from England.⁵⁶

As has been mentioned, after years of being an exemplary institution⁵⁷, and reports of the lives of the nuns inspired Florence de Wet-quignocul to initiate the Belgian reformed *La Paix* congregation⁵⁸—the community was torn apart by dissensions over various issues. What finally brought peace was the decision of the Archbishop in 1651 to impose his own candidate as abbess, Lady Alexia Blanchard. All the nuns were united in opposition. Having been reduced to begging for alms because of shutting down a royal foundation in favour of free elections, they were not going to stand for such blatantly uncanonical treatment from the Archbishop. They even had a fourteen-page Latin pamphlet denouncing the Archbishop printed, ostensibly for limited circulation to the canons and judges to be involved in their appeal.⁵⁹ The seventy-year-old Lady Alexia, no doubt much distressed, died the year

Archbishop of Canterbury to William Trumbull (15 Dec 1614 o.s.), in *Downshire MSS*, vol. 5, pp. 75—79;
James Wadworth, *The English Spanish Pilgrime. Or. a New Discovery of Spanish Popery. and Je~a iticail
Stratagem. With the estate of the English Pentioners and Fugitives under the King of Spaines i)emin,cns, and
else where at this present*, (2nd ed., London, 1630). p. 69.

56 John Wolley to William Trumbull (Brussels, 12 April 1618), in *Downshire MEN*, vol. 6, pp. 405-406.

~ Craig Jarline & Eddy Pui, 'A Bishop in the Cloisters: the visitations of Mathias Lovius (Malines, 1596-
1620)? *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22:4 (1991), pp. 615, 630.

~ Ursmer Berliere, 'Le renouveau benedictin dans la premiere moitie du XVIIe siecle? *Revue lit. Argique &
monastique* 2 (1926-27), pp. 306-7.

5~ *Qua Ratione ac-turn sit ab Illustrissimo Archiepiscopo Mechliniensi Mense Martia Anna 1651 in Electicac L).*
Alexiae Blauckart, praetensae Abbatissae Alonialiurn A nglarz Arn J3ruxeiis

following her appointment. The community then unanimously elected the Jansenist Archbishop³ least favourite nun, Dame Mary Vavasour, who had led the pro-jesuit ‘mutiny’ in 1630. After this reconciling experience, peace returned, to be undisturbed by historic events until 1793.

APPENDIX I

ANNUAL EXPENSES

no. I: The perticiuers of what is spent through Out the whole yeare (1619)

Ther ~vas spent the last year of 16i9 as apeei-s upon the houshold booke:

... pound of mutton and veale wljhileh at the rate of 3 sriiversl the pound cums
to 227 ~-.9

	In fresh fish	472-...
	In sea fish	489-...
In freanch batty. oatemeall, vineger all kind of spices, frure, suger, and such like groserie wares		500-...
	In salte butter for the whole winter	484)-...
	In fresh butter for the somer	182-...
	In lumpe butter for the sorner i	80-... In
mileke, crearne~ butler mileke and whav I		50-..
	In eggs	555-...
	In cheese	100-...
	In beefe	210-..
	In all kind of poultry	870-

...

	In wheat to bake 1	360-..
	In wheat to brue	480-...
	In harK?387k	
	In hops	120?..
	In wine for the Church and house	794..
In OyIe for the Church and the severall offices of the house		139-i 0
	In hard wood	1082-..
	Infaggets	100~..
	In wayges	470-...
In wax ii~hts tbr the Church		450-..
In candies for the house and fhiihers		p50-..
In all the chrages of bruing and to the bruer		240-
	In yest to bake ~	

In canÆts, parsoipes, turnops, apples, pears, plums. chines, strahuries, hartechockes, cahacge.

	and all kind of sal lerts	100-...
	In blacke cloth fur habets I	00-
	In rugg for petecoPs	28-...
In undercotes for the summer		20-...
In undercotes for the winter		30-...
	In summer hah.ets	60-...
	In fustian wasteotes	20-...
In white serge to were next us		90-...
	In linen of al sortes	200-..
	In stockinges	39-...
	In wollen sockes iS-...	
	In shoose	90-...
	In riapem-ic	100-

...

To the cooper for mending, making and clensing the vesse.ils 76-...
Ther at divers other things as thred, piuns, needles, whipcorde, filliting, strawe for beds,
reperation of bookes, penns, and paper. all w[hijch as neer as we can gesse cums to about some 100-...

I 3440-.9

in this calculation nothing is sett dowr.ie for the doctor, barbour potticary and his drugges, nor for so~ pe neyther

for what is spent by the carpenter, mason, joyner gIasier locksmyth etts. yeerely for mending making and altering of thinges in the house, nor *for* what is spent in other necessary implements and household stuffe, nor alsse what is spent in ornaments or otherwis~ dfor the churche and sacrisrie.

no. 2 (undated: Ca. 1620)

In wheat for bread after the rate of 6 measures the weeke	3 12 measures	618-13
In wheat to brue	120 measures	.16-..
tn barley	240 measures	~60-...
In moutton and veale at 3 Sti the powr~		2142-...
In freshwater fish		505-...
In seafish		540--S
In bee&, porke, inwards and &.c		389--6
in eggs		529—2
In fresh butter		184-13
In other butter		666—7
In flute. motes, and herbes &.c.		169-19
In suger. frute, spice, ripe french barly and all kind of gross lie		41)0-
		...
	In wine	440-
	...	
	In poultry	8-S0-
	...	
	In waxe lights for the church	800-
..~		
...		
	In woode	1082-
	In Apothecarie stuffe	30-...
	In candles	1%-...
	To Father Chambers	160-...
	To Mr Remie [the sacristaul	.10-...
	To Mr Deering, org- fist	120-...
	To Martin our dispencer	70-
	...	
	To Nicolas our gardiner	60-...
	To Paule who healpes in the garden, and doth divers laborious workes	30-

		inmilke 183-9
	In vinegar	19-II
	In l—loppe	30-...
	In the bruers waiges	150-...
In bred for the bruer and other extraordinaries		12-
		.6
	In diet bred	-
	inbacqtn cake? I~	10
	invest	22-19
	in musterd	12...]
	Incheese	111-13
	in oyie	
	90—...	
	In cole and tots	130-...
	in drages	90~
	...	
	In portage	36-.6
	Some	11810.8

APPENDIX 2
ANNUAL INCOME

no. I: A note of all such monies as the Monasterie

ham in banke, and what each somme

veeldeth to the Monasterie yearly 1623

Imprimes in the colledge of Do~ay 4000 flu: the rent of which some yeeldeth yearly	250-...
Item in the Coiledg of St Omers 26000 flo: ...	1625-...
Item in Montes Pietates 20000 110:...	1250-...
Item in the handes of Mr Culley 55000 flo:...	385-...
Item in the handes of Mr Munger 9000 flo:...	630-...
Item in the handes of Gabriell Coulford 3500 fib:...	2 18-15
item in the handes of the Count of Buckquay 4800 Ho:...	300-...
Item in the handes of the Earl of Arrendle 4000 flu:...	400-...
Item in the handes of lady Anne Winter 5000 Ho .	500-...
item in the handes of Mr Draycott '000 Ho:.,.	187-10

Item for our yearly pention from line king of Spaine, the which is litle mole than halfe

of it paid: we should receive	1000-...
ttem for an Annuetye for Dame Gertrude	500-...
item for an annuetyc for Dame Marie Phillippes	300-...
Item tbr the diet of II Novices & scollers	2100-..
Item for an anuety for Dame Columba Gage	100-...
Some totales	9746--S

The number of our family both within and 'Aithout and the stat of esch on.

Ther are 43 professed of the quire 'Aith my Lady

Ther are 16 professed layc sisters

Ther are 3 Novices of the quire

Ther is one Novis of the lave sisters

Ther are 5 scoilers for the quite

Ther are 3 children

[her is one scoller for to be a layc sister

Ther are 2 Ghostly tathers

Ther are 4 men servantes

Ther is a pore maiden to goc to the marketes

In all the Nombor is 79 persones

The wages of the family in the outer house yearly

tt: to father Chambers 160 flo:

To Mr Warde 120 Ho:

To the organes 100 lb:

To our factor in Inland 100 flu:

To the Sacristine .40 fib:

To the Gardner .60 flu:

To him that fecheth the flesh .30 fib:

To the maiden what my lady pleaseth to give her

610 flu:

no. 2: A note of all such monies, as the
 Monasterie hath in Banke. and
 what each somme yeeldeth yearlie
 to the Monasterje; taken the
 first of March 1623

Imprimis in the Coliedg of Doway 4000 fl : the yearly rent is 250-.. Item in the Coiledge
 of St Omers 26000 Ho; the yearly rent is 1625-...
 it. in Montes Pietas 20000 fl : the yearlie rent is 1250-...
 It. in Mr Cutleycs Wndes 55000 Ho: the rent at 7 in the tOO is yearly 385-... It. in Mr Gabriell
 Coulfords hands 9000 Ho: the rent at 7 in the 100 is yearly 625-...
 It. in Mr Coulfords hands 3500 fl : the yearly rent is 21 8-15
 It. in Mr Lionie Wakes hands 10000 flu: the yearly rent is 625—... It. in Sir Edward
 Parhames hands 2000 fl : the yearly rent is 125-...
 It. in the hands of the Count o~ Buckquay 4800 fl : the yearly ~ is 300-... It.
 in the Earle of Armindles haul 4001) flu: the rent is 4t)0~--...
 it. in the hand. of the lady Arnie winter 5000 Ho: the rent is 500-... It.
 in Mr t)racotes hands 3000 flu: the rent is 240-...
 It. in Mr Parris haiides 4000 Ho: the rent is 300—...

6848—IS

other monies due to the monasterie.

Inpriines for Dame Gertruds Annuet e	500-...
Item for D. Colmnbas Ann netie	100-...
It. for the diet of 4 Scollers	800-...

The totall some 8248-15

no. 3: A note of all such monies as the Monasterie
 bath in Bar~ke this first of october 1642

Inprinis in the mount of Pycitie of the Capitall of 34000 Ho: (2 Religiow bieng dead) 4000-... Item upon the stats
 of mouns in henault an anuetie for 7. lyves due the 2b. of Agust 700-...

It. upon the Towne house of Bruxells for Ivff rent
 of 4. Religions due th~ 16. of march & the 18. of septem. 530-15 It. the Rent of the
 Courtt of Bucquoy of 4800 Ho. the yearly rent of it is 300-... It. in the hands of the Abbott of
 Flierbeke 8000 fl , the yearly rent is 500-..
 it. in the Mount of Pycitie for Sister Barbara Campbell 3200 flo. the yearly rent is 160-...

6191-15

A13BREV IAT IONS

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- Chronicle* [Dame Gertrude Ivescher], *Chronicle of the First Monastery founded at Brussels for English Benedictine Nuns, A. U. 1597*, (Bergholt, 1898).
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- Ru* *Recusant history*
- Downshire MSS* Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Downshire*, vols 3-6, (London, 1938-1994)
- VCH Victoria County History