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Gregory Kirkus CJ

Five Houses Of The Mary Ward Institute Not To Be Forgotten – Broschüre im Eigenverlag der Englischen Provinz über die in Mitteleuropa weniger bekannte englische Geschichte des Instituts, in englischer Sprache

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SISTER ! (ROSE) ! ISABELLE

Hammersmith: the Great House in the 18th Century

FIVE HOUSES OF THE MARY WARD INSTITUTE NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

By Sister M Gregory Kirkus CJ

M. Isabelle

FIVE HOUSES OF THE MARY WARD INSTITUTE
NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

Preface

Every religious order has a tale to tell of foundations short-lived: abruptly ended, regretfully closed or admittedly failed. This pamphlet deals with five such houses of Mary Ward's Institute. Their names are familiar for they cross the pages of our history elsewhere, but as each did good work during its life-time – however brief – it seems appropriate that each should be separately and honourably recorded.

Ia m deeply indebted to Sister Christina Kenworthy-Browne and to Mrs Beryl Helps, without whose assistance this pamphlet could never have been published.

HAMMERSMITH
1669-1795

An old, undated chronicle recalls that "a group of members of our Institute ventured over from Germany to England in the reign of Charles 2nd about the year 1669". The journey and its object – to make a permanent foundation in England – had been long discussed and planned by Mary Poyntz, the General Superior, but she died in 1667 and it fell to her successor, Catherine Dawson, to commission the chosen members and to bid them farewell when they set out from the Paradeiserhaus in March. Frances Bedingfield headed the party and was accompanied by Isabella Layton, Christina Hastings and Mary Portington. They were selected from those whom Mary Poyntz had known for a long time and whom she trusted implicitly. All were remarkable women meriting some introduction.

Frances Bedingfield came of an old Norfolk family notable for its loyal service to the church and state. Her mother was Katherine Fortescue who, a few days before her marriage to Francis Bedingfield, confided to her father that she longed to be a nun. Sir John Fortescue explained patiently that it was too late; her dowry had been paid and all the nuptial arrangements made. So Katherine became an unwilling bride, but her vocation was amply fulfilled in the next generation; of her eleven daughters, ten chose the religious state and the eleventh, though opting for marriage to Lord William Hamilton, became a nun in her widowhood. Frances was born in 1616, made her profession in the Institute in Rome sixteen years later, was present at Mary Ward's death-bed in 1645, accompanied Mary Poyntz to Paris in 1650 and was later with her in Munich.

Isabella Layton was only two years younger than Frances. Her father was a wealthy and prominent citizen of London, who disinherited his daughter when she became a Catholic. She entered the Institute as a lay sister and proved a valuable fund-raiser through her social connections.

Christina Hastings came from Leicestershire where her father was a small landowner. She was educated by the Institute in Paris and Munich, and followed Mary Poyntz to Augsburg.

Mary Portington, born in 1637, was probably the youngest of the group. Though a Londoner by birth she had roots in the north, as her father held land in Holderness, East Yorkshire. She too was educated by the Institute in Paris when Mary Poyntz was Superior and Winifred Wigmore Head Mistress. Her strong character, moulded by Mary Ward's companions, was described years later by Frances Bedingfield in such terms that we recognise in her that rare treasure, a paragon of virtue possessed also of practical qualities:
"She has an excellent judgment, speaks Latin, Italian and French like her mother tongue, and is full of devotion and love of prayer. She has an uncommonly sweet method of leading souls to God, so that some years ago we entrusted to her guidance all who wished to join our Institute in England … She preserves her patience in all calamities, and often they have fallen upon her in heaps."

These four members, chosen and trained by Mary Ward's close associates, set out bravely for England. Optimistically, they travelled in their religious habits, and on reaching London were arrested as papists and therefore suspect persons. The magistrates who questioned them were astonished at the "prudence and firmness" of Frances Bedingfield's answers, and released the little band with the caution that they were not to "keep a priest" nor "instruct youth". They made no promises, since they intended to transgress in both ways, but they exchanged their religious habits for "matronly dresses" and Frances adopted the alias Frances Long for all business purposes. They took up residence in St. Martin's Lane, but realised that the provisions of the Clarendon Code kept a close eye on Catholics, and that inner-city Catholic schools were at high risk. A school under Mary Portington was nevertheless established in London, but Frances went house-hunting in Hammersmith, then a village some four miles

outside the city. There she decided to rent the Great House; this was next door to the Cupola House, once the residence of the Portuguese Ambassador who was godfather to Queen Catherine of Braganza, and later the country home of the Queen herself. It may have been she who advised Frances to take the Great House, but there is no evidence to support the suggestion that it was a gift from the Queen, nor in any way financed by her. In a letter to the annalist at Munich, Dorothy Paston-Bedingfield has a very different tale to tell:-

"She and her companions had not a crown to begin the work with, and few acquaintances to apply to. Nevertheless she went to Hammersmith and cast her eye upon the present house there, for which they asked a great rent which she agreed to pay. The landlord looked at her with some suspicion, she thought, she being in so poor a dress and being a stranger to him that he might suspect her pay; but he told her he would trust her, as being a Bedingfield, for Corronel Bedingfield's old sake, her kinsman, who was so worthy and honourable a gentleman, and just dead out of the house. So she entered therein without the least furniture or any moneys to buy necessaries with, so as they lay for some time upon straw, but as soon as she was heard of several came from London to offer their daughters and she got credit so as to get the house a little furnished for the entertaining of such, and as they were getting in a little settled way the landlord came to tell her she must either buy the house or leave it, as he was necessitated to sell it. That Divine Providence that never left her put into her head to apply herself to one Mr. Poulton a clergyman and great friend of hers. She sent Isabel Layton with the petition to him for not less than to lend her £300, upon which the good gentleman was very ill in bed he rise and gave her the moneys, without any reply, or taking as much as an acquitance for it."

We hear no more of financial difficulties and the school was established. The nuns worked hard; Frances Bedingfield is reported as doing some of the servants' work and prodigious feats of being at the wash-tub from twelve at night until eight in the morning. But

there was leisure enough for the Jesuit Father Pracid to teach the sisters Latin, Greek and Hebrew in the Globe Room.

It seems that the house was always watched by government spies, and when the Titus Oates Plot was "revealed" it became thoroughly suspect. Time and again it was searched and the chaplain, Father Lucien, took refuge in the shrubbery. He and Cecily Cornwallis were arrested and brought before the Privy Council, but were released after being closely questioned. The storm blew over and in the peaceful years that followed the school prospered, attracting the daughters of the great and the notable. All seemed well, but by the end of the century a storm was brewing that was to shake the little world of the Great House to its very foundations. It was with the weakening of those very foundations that the trouble began. In 1686 with the Catholic James II on the throne, Frances Bedingfield thought the time had come to leave Hammersmith and fulfil Sir Thomas Gascoigne's urgent desire for "a school for our daughters" in the north of England. Cecily Cornwallis had often deputised for Frances; she now took her place as Superior of the Hammersmith house.

Cecily Cornwallis was the daughter of one of Princess (later Queen) Anne's ladies-in-waiting. We know little of her childhood, but she was well educated and cultured, and described as "much admired for her extraordinary learning beyond her sex and age, excellently well-versed in the Latin, Greek and several other languages, being also very read in most parts of Philosophy and Mathematics." To this burden of learning, her lessons with Father Pracid in the Globe Room added Hebrew. She was universally acknowledged as a very spiritual religious, given to long hours of prayer and meditation. She was, in fact, a saintly woman, but unfortunately she lacked the judgment and the toughness of fibre needed to make a Superior in the troublesome times ahead. So long as Frances Bedingfield was in England, Cecily could rely on her guidance and advice; but Frances returned to Germany in 1699, at a critical time in the history of the Institute. Other familiar figures left

the Hammersmith stage. Isabella Layton probably accompanied Frances Bedingfield to York in 1686 and she certainly returned to Germany with her in 1699. Mary Portington was in Paris by 1687 and Christine Hastings, sent to Dolebank in 1678 and subjected to a long period of imprisonment in York, never returned to Hammersmith, and died in Munich. Thus Cecily Cornwallis was bereft of all the members carefully chosen and well trained by Mary Poyntz. Those who took their places were of a very different calibre.

Timid and sensitive, Cicely became a prey to fears and scuples. In 1692 she was questioned by the Privy Council about the "intrigue with foreigners", and although she was shortly released, the incident confirmed her conviction that the community was surrounded by hostile agents. She used code words for names and places in her correspondence, and to deflect public interest from the Great House she had it structurally altered to look like three smaller houses. Her tender conscience prompted worse anxieties; what was the legal status of the Institute? Since it lacked papal approval, could the Superior General exercise ecclesiastical authority? In her perplexity she turned for advice to Bishop Bonaventure Gifford, Vicar Apostolic of the London District. Though he was cousin to Anna Barbara Babthorpe, Superior General of the Institute, it is charitable to suppose that he was ignorant of Mary Ward's plan of government, free from episcopal control. The suggestion of a transfer of authority almost certainly came from him, and he adopted it with fervour. In 1703 Cecily Cornwallis and the Hammersmith community placed themselves unreservedly under the authority of the Bishop, and so exchanged freedom for security. Bishop Gifford took his new role very seriously, and in a strongly worded document he not only outlined his new authority, but made it clear that it was to pass to his successors:

"Having found several pious gentlewomen assembled together at Hammersmith who seem very proper for the design we aim at (viz. the education of girls in the Catholic faith), we have taken them into our special care and by the instrument signed by us and sealed with our episcopal seal we constitute and own them for our Congregation, and

accordingly will support and protect them both in spirituals and temporals as far as God shall enable us. Now that our care and concern for this Congregation may not end with our life, we humbly and most earnestly beseech the Right Reverend Bishops who shall succeed us that they will continue with their fatherly love and protection to favour this community, considering it always (what it really is) as their Congregation, subject to their direction and depending entirely on their jurisdiction."

The Bishop set up his "new creation" with rules and statutes that gave it a standing in the London District, and his kindness and pastoral care won the hearts of most of its members. Ironically, it was Cecily Cornwallis herself who began to doubt the wisdom of the step they had taken. In a letter of 18th March 1705, while expressing great gratitude to the Bishop, she tentatively makes a claim to the right to choose a confessor for herself and the community. The issue was apparently unresolved, for two years later she wrote more boldly: "After a long consideration, much application to Almighty God and great anxieties and troubles of mind, I have at last determined to make my own choice of a chaplain or confessor for our family and I hope that your Lordship will not take it ill that I reserve that right to myself." A third letter, incomplete and undated, further emphasises the Superior's anguish of mind. "I am sensible of our great obligations to your Lordship," it reads, "for your many and great favours and charities, as well general as particular, but I did not understand they implied or obliged to any conditions either of conscience or otherwise, believing there was still freedom to act as might seem best, suiting to general or particular circumstances, so long as we kept due references [sic] and submission to your Lordship as our Bishop and chief Pastor..." There follows an apology "for anything I have said in the delivery of my poor sentiments and difficulties," but no retreat from her position.

Meanwhile events in Rome had taken a significant turn. Just three months before Bishop Gifford had signed and sealed his decisive

document, Pope Clement XI had issued a Letter Apostolic "ad perpetuam rei memoriam" confirming and approving the Rules of Mary Ward's Institute. Such a step was normally the prelude to the full approbation of a religious order, and the Institute's Generalate in Rome was confident that the usual course would be followed. It is not clear at what date the General Superior, Anna Barbara Babthorpe, discovered that the Hammersmith house had seceded, nor why she considered Sister Winefried Arundel to be responsible for the change of allegiance, but by 1709 the battle lines were drawn, and Anna Barbara Babthorpe penned a formidable letter to Cecily Cornwallis. She ends in forthright, Yorkshire style with the words "I send here a copy of the Bull and then Mrs. Winefried (Arundel) will see that the Superior and not she hath power to ordain a Bag (appoint a chaplain). It perhaps were good if I write to Mrs. Winefried and send her the Rules that she might see that I own the charge imposed upon me and fear her not."

The attitude of the majority of the community is seen in two documents. Neither is dated but it seems that the first was drawn up in or before 1709 and the second in or after 1712. The first is a short formula by which the signatories chose Bishop Gifford as "Community Chief Superior." It is signed by Martha Marshall (died 1712), Anne Powell, Bridget Coldham, Elizabeth Evans, Mary Dallison, Elizabeth Clarke (died 1713), Dorothy Perkins and Anne Ely (died 1709). Those who abstained were Cecily Cornwallis, Elizabeth Henslow, Frances Barnard, Winefried Arundel and Jane Thwing.

The sequence of events is not certain, but when the second document was drawn up, probably in or soon after 1712 (and possibly in response to Anna Barbara's letter) the opposition had hardened, the waverers had been won over, and only Cecily Cornwallis' name is missing from the signatories. With a united voice the community declare: "We do most fully acknowledge your Lordship's full power and jurisdiction over us and most gratefully confess ourselves

indebted for the innumerable favours and liberalities we have received from your Lordship..."

Mother Anna Barbara died in 1711. Her sister, Mary Agnes, succeeded her as Superior General and also inherited the Hammersmith problem. She gave her cousin, the Bishop, no quarter. Writing from Munich to Cecily Cornwallis in December 1712 she declares that "Sparrow" (Bishop Gifford) should not "invade into the government, particularly in temporalities which not in the least belong to him." Mother Agnes backed up this letter by sending a personal ambassador to execute her wishes. Mary Cramlington (or Cramblington) though bearing the code name Concordia, was not a happy choice, and it was strange that Mother Agnes should have made it, as she herself had said that Mary was "able to cause jealousies." Vilified in Hammersmith and greatly esteemed in York, the emissary of the Superior General remains to this day an enigma.

She did not come empty-handed in 1713, but well armed with documents legal and ecclesiastical. These were:

1) A letter to Bishop Giffard from the General, Agnes Babthorpe, asking him to accept Mary Cramlington as the appointed Visitor to the Hammersmith House;
2) Copies of the newly-appointed Rules of the Institute, together with the Rules of Office and Customs;
3) Copies of two letters addressed to Mother Agnes by the Bishop of Freysing and a Canon John Jules Mott, supporting the office of General Superior;
4) Two long letters from Martin Constante von Vestenburg, Dean of Munich addressed to Bishop Giffard himself. These letters insist upon the approval of the office of General Superior by the Holy See and support the practice of 'mutual government among the houses of the Institute', as envisaged by Mary Ward. Dean Constante makes a further interesting point, that the Bull of Suppression could be considered 'abrogated by a long subsequent toleration of the Institute'.

This legal battery, however, availed little. Cecily Cornwallis welcomed the Visitor warmly, hoping that with her support the situation could be reversed, but the wayward community hardened its determination to remain subject to episcopal control. The Bishop too was adamant, and addressed a petition to the Holy See asking for approbation of the Hammersmith House as a separate religious community. The situation was exacerbated when Cecily Cornwallis and Mary Cramlington formed a regrettably emotional and exclusive friendship.

The whole sad story can be traced in a document to be found among the Old Brotherhood papers. It is a long letter from unnamed members of the Hammersmith community to the Superior General and reveals Cecily Cornwallis' human frailty on the one side and, it must be said, a measure of malice on the part of the community. It opens with a complaint that they were not given fair notice of Mary Cramlington's visit, nor of its real purpose. It seems that Mary brought with her a possible novice, but the community was not consulted about her either, and they reject her out of hand. She is 'past the vigour of her age, she is broken in health, she is exceeding slow at her needle ... speaks very bad English' ... so that 'what service she could have done we cannot imagine'. This comment, however, is only a prelude to the main complaints which open with: 'we have seen with our own eyes in a letter of Mrs. Cramblington's greatest correspondent that the chief end of her journey and what she was contriving was to get our House into her own Power, and how this was to be done? Mrs. Cramblington, as her correspondent encouraged her, was to challenge the house in your name and to force the Bishop to retire from us.' This was the crux of the whole matter, but the writers did not leave it there. They followed it up in an ill-natured vein with a series of supporting complaints. Mrs. Cramblington had caused them great expense and 'while she stayed in this house, which was for three whole months, she had often in the week secret conferences with Madam Cornwallis, four hours together and in the

Times of Publick Conversation they were so entirely wrapped up in one another that Madam seemed to have neither eyes nor ears nor tongue for any but Mrs. Cramblington, so excessive a partiality may easily be believed to cause sufficient trouble in a Community. And had we none of the above-mentioned Reasons this alone was certainly a very warrantable motive to appeal to our Bishop for her removal, since Partiality is known to be the bane of Peace and Unity'. Here the letter degenerates into gossip: 'She pretended she could not return to Germany, nor remove to York for want of money; his Lordship was graciously pleased to allow her out of his own Pocket four pounds for her journey to York, whither she pretended she was willing to go; she received the money, but to the scandle of all that have heard of it, she lived upon it for these six weeks and better at London, from whence she almost every and sometimes twice a week (not excepting Easter Day itself when Protestants themselves are ashamed to take their walks) she comes to this House in Hammersmith, where Madam meets her, and there they spend two, three, four hours in their private encounters'. With a directness unusual for the age, the writer then berates the General Superior: 'In conclusion, had your Ladyship and Madam Cornwallis even studied and designed to disaffect us all against the very thing you desire to bring us to, you could not have a chosen a more certain means to effect it, than by sending Mrs. Cramblington in the manner you have sent her. And you may assure yourself that her continuing in these parts and intriguing with our Superior will serve only to blow the coal of dissension and increase the scandal she has given already.' The letter concludes with the rather lame arguments that such foundresses as Saint Clare and Saint Teresa had not claimed independence, and that the Pope had not explicitly approved the office of Superior General by a decree.

Several letters from Mother Agnes express sorrow and frustration at the situation and mention especially "Mrs. Winefried, who is so contradictory". At last on 22nd March 1714 the distracted Superior took up her pen and wrote a final, conciliatory letter that is indeed a cri de coeur. "Much esteemed in Jesus Christ" it begins "my Lord

Bishop residing in London having discovered to me his particular desire that I should give you an assurance of my sincere and cordial love to all the worthy members of our Ins. in our house at Hammersmith, I am persuaded that I can give you no greater testimony thereof than by my endeavour to revive the fervour and high esteems with which each of you at first embraced your vocation, if you want of right knowledge of the state to which God's infinite mercy had call'd you shd have caused in you any decay thereon. I have thought proper to lay before you a short declaration of the whole Institute from the very beginning, to the end you may see that nothing new is requir'd but on the contrary each shd uphold and follow what was introduced by your happy Foundress for our own perfection and the salvation of souls." There follows an historical account of the Institute stressing its government by General Superiors and its subordination to "the jurisdiction of the ordinaries, whose authority had always been submissively acknowledged as such ... so that there has never been any complaint made of us in any spiritual court". She introduces the sensitive issue with the words "I am most sensible of your present happiness, dearest beloved hearts, in having such a kind Father as my Lord Bishop" but pleads with them to "live together according to the Rules and ways of the Inst etc". She signs herself, "I am with all sincerity yr most affectionate servant, Mary Agnes Babthorpe, Chief Superior of the Institute of Mary." Despite the eloquence and sincerity of the appeal, it fell on deaf ears. Cecily Cornwallis, broken hearted by the knowledge that she had unwittingly caused the schism and hostility, left Hammersmith on 15th July 1715 and went to the Bar Convent, York where she died on 13th October 1722. Her portrait hangs in the Great Parlour there, its sad features a testimony of her sufferings.

Frances Barnard became the next superior of the Hammersmith community and for the rest of the century the house saw many turns of fortune. Bishop Challoner was consecrated in the chapel in 1741 and was a familiar figure in the house, bequeathing to it his "silver candlesticks and other things given to me by Bishop Petre." His

successor, Bishop Talbot took up residence in the convent, and built a small wing to accommodate himself and his visitors. A very different notable crossed the threshold when Casanova came one Sunday to place his daughter Sophie at school there. But this association with the famous and the infamous could not stay the terminal decline of the community. Only five new members joined it after 1703; the school closed in 1781 for lack of teachers, and by 1790 the community numbered only three. At the suggestion of Bishop Douglas the huge, almost empty house offered hospitality to nuns in flight from the French Revolution. A group of Augustinians and another of Carmelites took temporary refuge there, and were followed in 1795 by the English Benedictine nuns from Dunkirk, who settled in under the terms of a contract preserved on a scrap of yellowed paper. It is dated May 6th 1795 and reads: "The Bishop gives us the three houses at Hammersmith on condition that we pay the taxes and repairs and board the 3 Ladys of the house without payment, he finding them in clothes and all other extra ordinary [illegible word] etc. and also that we board the confessor at our expense and he will pay his salary. We also board Mrs. Tayleur his servant."

The Benedictines duly cared for the old members of the Institute, finally burying them in the little cemetery they had made for their own sisters. The register that opens with the name of Frances Bedingfield ends with the entry: "Woods, M. Joseph, died ye 20th April 1822, the last of ye ladies of ye Establishment."

By a strange quirk of history, the old house had not seen the last of the conscience-driven sisters of the Institute of Mary. In 1840 Mother Agnes Dunn, Superior of the Bar Convent in York, was not at peace in her mind. Intelligent and loyal to the principles of Mary Ward, she was aware that Mother Coyney had violated these principles in 1816 when she put the Bar Convent under episcopal control, and that Bishop John Briggs, for all his geniality and popularity, was wielding an authority that was not rightly his. She wrestled with her conscience and after a long dispute with the Bishop had to realise that she was in

a situation that she could neither change nor accept. She resigned her office in August 1840 and made a prolonged visit to Ireland, but this brought no alleviation. In December of that year she was released from her vows and early in 1841 she left the Bar Convent. She took refuge in the Hammersmith house, where the Benedictine nuns accepted her as a parlour boarder. Her declared intention was to enter another house of the Institute, but for some undisclosed reason she remained at Hammersmith, until her death on 3rd February 1849 put the word Finis to the ill-fated relationship between the house and the Institute of Mary.

For more than half a century the Benedictine nuns ran a successful school in Hammersmith, happy in the knowledge that they were responding to an educational need. But after the opening of the Brook Green mission in 1853 they had difficulty in finding a chaplain, and as other religious orders opened schools in London their numbers began to fall. Lured by the peace of a rural setting, they moved to Teignmouth in 1865 and settled in what became St. Scholastica's Abbey, where they resumed their contemplative life.

The ownership of the Hammersmith house may have raised a debatable issue, but Archbishop Manning made short of the matter by declaring that as there were no title deeds the property belonged to the archdiocese. After renting it out on two short tenancies, he decided to use it as part of his ambitious plan to establish a seminary in every diocese. But the house was in great disrepair so he commissioned the architect, Francis Bentley to demolish it and design something that measured up to Victorian ecclesiastical standards. Behind the showy red-brick façade Bentley erected quasi-cloisters and other monastic features. The seminary, dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury, was opened in 1881, but it never flourished and was closed by Cardinal Vaughan, Manning's successor, in 1893.

The rest of the story is briefly told. The Society of the Sacred Heart bought the property in the same year and opened a school for

girls. Happily the school continues to this day its long tradition of Catholic education that stretches back to Frances Bedingfield's establishment of 1669.

Today we have few visible reminders of those early members who founded that tradition; little remains but two ancient registers (one of the nuns, the other of the pupils), a beautiful silver monstrance made for the nuns in 1762 by William Tuite, a little model of the Great House and a few weather-beaten tombstones. But those who approach London on the M4 motorway can easily identify the site of the Hammersmith house. As they follow the flyover, a glance to the left shows Frances Bentley's ecclesiastical façade maintaining its place on the Broadway. They must also notice St. Paul's Church, almost jostling against the flyover where lie buried fourteen members of the early Hammersmith community. Road building and road widening have twice truncated the churchyard, and now many bones may lie under the tarmacadam. There is something curiously appropriate about the restless London traffic whirling round and over the bones of those turbulent nuns. But it is of little significance as surely their souls have now found the peace that eluded them in life.

SCARBOROUGH
1859-1863

In the spring of 1859 Mother Angela Browne, the Superior of the Bar Convent, York purchased a property in Scarborough. It was a momentous step, for though the convent had been in existence since 1686 it had never attempted to extend its physical boundaries nor to enlarge its apostolate by founding a daughter house, and during the past half-century its members had lived entirely within Mother Coyney's high brick walls, under a self-imposed rule of enclosure.

It is not easy to determine the exact sequence of events, nor the priority of the motives that led to this change of policy, but it seems probable that the initiative came from the Reverend John Walker, the zealous parish priest of Scarborough. The contemporary enthusiasm for sea air ensured the town a steady growth of population, and in response to the proportionate increase in the number of Catholics, Father Walker had recently built a new church, designed by the Catholic architect George Goldie, and dedicated to St. Peter. Hitherto Catholics had worshipped in what became known as "the old chapel", a squarish building said to have a seating capacity of 230 persons. The building was now vacant, and Father Walker suggested to Mother Angela that she should use it as a day school for middle-class local girls.

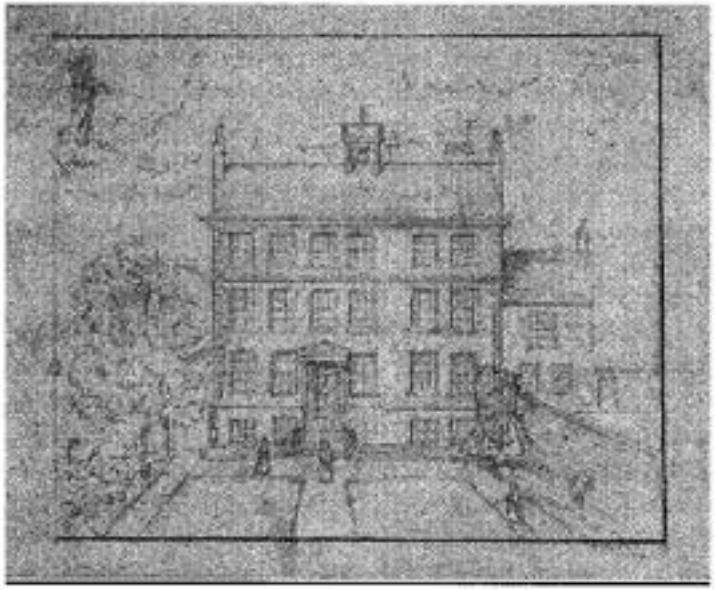
Despite all tradition, Mother Angela had good reason to consider the proposal very seriously. In the previous fifty years at least ten promising young members of the community had died of tuberculosis; others, diagnosed as "falling into a decline", had almost certainly fallen victims of the same disease, and yet more were showing alarming symptoms. Scarborough offered recovery for the sick, healthy holidays for the delicate, and a new apostolate for the robust. The town was prosperous, the parish expanding, the parish priest congenial. With the community in York numbering a record thirty-

eight members and the account books well balanced, the time was surely ripe for a new foundation. Defying any arguments to the contrary, Mother Angela made up her mind and signed a cheque for £1,000; thus the convent came into the possession of a property in Upper Tollertongate comprising the large priest's house and the adjacent "old chapel". A contemporary drawing shows St. Joseph's Convent, as the nuns named it, as a tall Georgian house with a flight of steps leading up to the pedimented front door. The fenestration is symmetrical and stone quoins add dignity to the façade. But despite its imposing architecture the building was in a sorry state, and the pioneer group of nuns sent from York to make it habitable faced a daunting task. A mountain of bills preserved in the Bar Convent archives tell a tale of inadequate water supply, faulty drainage, a leaking roof, broken windows and rotten sills, damaged chimney pots and crumbling brickwork. In addition rooms had to be divided, walls re-plastered and much carpentry and painting done. Unfortunately there is no record of the names of the gallant Scarborough community, but we know the three sisters who were successively in charge. Sister Gertrude Curr seems to have been sent to oversee the alterations. She was succeeded by Sister Walburga Goldie, the sister of the architect, and finally Sister Alphonsa Ball, Mother Angela's most trusted assistant, was appointed Superior.

The school, intended to educate local girls, was opened in October 1859, but it failed to attract a viable number; at most only eleven attended, often only eight or nine. The classes were probably held in the old chapel, as yet undivided, and the unattractive conditions may have contributed to the failure of the school. It was closed in January 1862 and the following year – with the chapel divided into three rooms – the nuns took over the running of the "poor school." Success came at last, with the number of pupils rising to 90, and at the same time the community held night classes for the instruction of working girls in the basement of the convent. These two apostolic works

seemed to promise a bright future, but they were doomed to destruction.

In 1861 the avuncular Bishop Briggs was succeeded by Robert Cornthwaite, a man of very different callibre. Energetic and full of reforming zeal, Bishop Cornthwaite was tenacious of his pre-conceived ideals and autocratic in his style of government. He disliked "branch houses" and convalescent homes run by religious, and insisted on the closure of St. Joseph's Convent, arguing that it was a financial burden on the Bar Convent. The nuns begged for a stay of execution, pointing out the value of a seaside house for the health of the community; but, as Mother Hilda Haigh expressed it, his Lordship was adamant: the sisters must wait till they reached heaven for a change of air. So, in December 1863, the furniture vans rumbled back to York and the nuns returned to the Bar Convent, never to venture again on a new foundation until 1898.



That, however, was not the end of the story. St. Joseph's Convent was put up for sale, but no purchaser came forward. Maintenance bills rained upon the York bursar's head, while Father Walker paid the salary of a lay headmaster out of his own income. In 1878 Father Arthur Riddell, then parish priest, wrote to Mother Juliana Martin, who had succeeded Mother Angela Browne, begging that the nuns should return. The Bar Convent was still in the grip of Bishop Cornthwaite's rule, and Mother Juliana had to refuse. She suggested, however, two other orders that might provide members. These he rejected out of hand, writing bluntly "I am still desirous of having nuns in Scarborough and I want them merely for the schools. I do not want nuns to visit people in their homes and to hear all the scandal of a fashionable watering-place." Not until 1882 did the Ladies of Mary come to Scarborough to fill this exacting mission, purchasing the St. Joseph's property for £1,000 and so ending a disappointing and expensive chapter in the history of the Bar Convent.

There is a tradition that later in life Bishop Cornthwaite regretted his ruthless destruction of the young foundation, but this adds nothing significant to the story. Nor is there any purpose in dreaming of what might have been. Life must be accepted as a complexity of failure and success.

GLOUCESTER
1862-1872

The story of the house in Gloucester is full of anomalies. The foundation was made by an Irish woman, a convert to Catholicism, who fell in love with the Institute of Mary in Germany and joined the noviceship in Augsburg. She subsequently spent some years with the Loreto sisters in her native Ireland and then, with a little community of Irish and German members, founded a convent and school in Gloucester, subject to the authority of the General Superior, then resident in Nymphenburg/Munich. After a brief ten years the community and pupils moved to London, leaving a solitary tombstone as the only memorial of their sojourn in Gloucester.

Mary Petronilla Barratt, the daughter of a Protestant doctor, was born in Belfast on 1st April 1812. Nothing is known of her childhood, but it is thought that as a young woman she taught singing in a Loreto school; this may have influenced the journey in faith that led to her reception into the Catholic Church about the year 1835. Young Petronilla was probably eager to see the world, for she readily accepted the suggestion of her Loreto friends that she should take a teaching post in the Institute school in Augsburg. There she taught English, learnt German, and observed the strict religious life led by the community in the oldest house of the Institute of Mary. The nuns rose at 4.30 every morning, worked hard, and observed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Petronilla felt strongly drawn to such a life and entered the noviceship. In September 1844 she received the religious habit and was at first known as Sister Petronilla, but her name was soon changed to Sister Ignatius.

A significant event, with far-reaching consequences, occurred during her noviceship. This was the visit of Mother Paul Finn, Superior of the Loreto house in Navan, who was making a grand tour of Europe, to complete her convalescence after a severe illness. It was

natural that Sister Ignatius should be given the task of looking after her fellow countrywoman, and a firm friendship soon developed between them. They had much in common besides language and nationality. Both were converts and both were intelligent, lively and apostolic. Mother Paul found the young sister "a charming person" and recognised her gifts. Before leaving Augsburg she begged her new friend to return to Ireland and work with her in Navan. Sister Ignatius assured her that she was very happy in Augsburg and had every intention of staying there, but after Mother Paul's return to Ireland the friendship was kept up by correspondence. A few years later a change occurred, described by Sister Ignatius in her own words: "In my eighth year [in Germany] an insuperable homesickness seized me and nothing but a return to my own country could satisfy my desire. In that, as in all things else, I submitted myself to my Superiors and at the request of my much revered Bishop, the General Superior and my local Superior, I succumbed for a year, believing, as they thought, that I was labouring under a temptation." But the homesickness was unabated, and after all the proper procedure had been observed, Sister Ignatius was transferred to Navan. This momentous step was taken under a double misunderstanding. First, before leaving Augsburg, she was assured, in good faith, that the religious way of life in Ireland was identical with that of Germany, whereas in fact the two nations had inevitably developed many differences of practice. Secondly, she seems to have been strangely ignorant of the history of the Loreto branch, and of its foundation by Mother Teresa Ball as an independent congregation. Thus Sister Ignatius' transfer to Navan was much more than a mere geographical move from one house to another under the same authority.

Nevertheless she was an instant success, re-vitalising the school and attracting new pupils. Mother Paul Finn had such faith in her that in 1857 she appointed her Superior of the new foundation she was making in Balbriggan, where again she worked wonders, but in 1862 matters came to a head. Balbriggan was in the archdiocese of Dublin, and when Archbishop Paul Cullen declared his intention of bringing

all the Loreto houses of the archdiocese under his direct control, Mother Ignatius, now fully aware of her constitutional position, argued that she was subject to the General Superior in Nymphenburg, Mother Elizabeth di Graccho. In August 1862 she wrote to Mother Elizabeth, whom she had known in Augsburg, and received an immediate and very sympathetic reply, assuring the prodigal of a welcome when she returned home. Inexplicably, however, Mother Ignatius was already exploring other possibilities. She had a slight acquaintance with Father James Duck, a monk of Downside, and it may have been at his suggestion that she wrote, in May 1862, to Dr. William Clifford, Bishop of Clifton, offering to found a house and school in his diocese. Of the letters extant, the first bears evidence that the initiative came from Mother Ignatius. A letter from Dr. Clifford, dated 17th July 1862, and written in a neat and scholarly hand, is a masterpiece of episcopal courtesy and caution. He thanks her for her letter of May and apologises for the delay (due to a visit to Rome) in answering her "application." He continues: "The reports that have reached you of the spiritual destitution of my diocese are but too true, but my temporal wants are such that I am frequently unable to avail myself of the assistance which, not infrequently, is offered to me ... by good souls who, like yourself, are anxious to labour for God in these abandoned portions of his vineyard." This was no exaggeration. Though the Bishop was brother to the 8th Earl of Chumleigh, he lived in real poverty and the temporal affairs of his diocese were in a parlous state. But something in Mother Ignatius' letter prompted the next sentence of his letter: "However, as you are prepared for uphill work, I will not let this chance pass without an effort to avail myself of your kind offer. I have long been wanting to have some nuns in the city of Gloucester, where there are none at present." After some practical observations about the parish school and the possibilities of a boarding school, the Bishop asks for a recommendation from Mother Ignatius' Bishop and for "something more of your Institute and rules." These were evidently satisfactory, for the next letter, dated 23rd August, is more encouraging. The Bishop "most sincerely hopes that the nuns will come and is convinced that "they will do much good

in Gloucester and will bring a blessing on the diocese." The horizon brightens with the intimation that a "pious lady" will help with the first year's rent and that Canon Calderbank, the parish priest, will find "at least twelve or fifteen children to attend the middle school on modest terms." It is assumed that the nuns will teach the poor, and they are promised the sum of money hitherto paid to the mistress of the free school. The third letter, of 28th August, offers an enthusiastic and unqualified welcome to the community.

Fortified with these letters, Mother Ignatius left Ireland on 31st August 1862, taking with her a promising young novice, Sister Joseph Edwards, an eager would-be postulant called Ann Whyte and two German sisters, Sisters Alphonsa and Xaveria who had been lent to Balbriggan. Mother Paul Finn's reaction to this secession is mirrored in a letter she wrote to the General Superior (or possibly to the local Superior of Augsburg) dated 22nd August 1862. Generosity struggles with dismay and disappointment as she writes:-

"I address you with deep sorrow in regard to our highly esteemed and much loved Revd. Mother Mary Ignatius Barratt, who being only now aware that the German Institute would not be admitted into this (Dublin) diocese has resolved on leaving to establish it in England where she will take some novices, and where, I am sure her virtues and her extraordinary talents will cause her to succeed. We at Navan made a tremendous sacrifice in giving her to found this mission and little foresaw that after five years of the most intense anxiety and suffering she would leave.

"She has established a fine school for young Ladies, repaired solidly a house that was in ruins, reclaimed the grounds gone to waste, and built schools for the poor and a wing of a Convent which is admirable in all its arrangements. These things she has done by almost superhuman labours and yet for sake of the Institute as it exists in Germany she abandons all as the Archbishop now informs her that unless this House be made conformable to the Institute as it is in this country he cannot sanction it.

"She ever prayed that her works would not receive their reward in this world and her prayer has been heard. I had no idea that she would find so great differences in the Institute in Germany and here or I never should have invited her to come to us in case [sic] she left Germany.

"She is one of those extraordinary persons whom God raises from time to time to do great things through great sufferings. May Heaven protect and direct her in all things is a prayer in which I am sure you and yours will all join.

"I beg my love to little Sarah Osborne and am, dear Revd. Mother, with great respect.

"Your affectionate Sister in Xt.,

Mary Paul Finn,

(Superioress of Navan Convent)"

What passed between Mother Paul and Mother Ignatius is not recorded, but there must have been some acrimony in their relationship, because two years later, after Mother Paul was terminally ill and had retired to the Loreto convent in Leek, she wrote in heartfelt terms to her old friend:-

"Dear Revd. Mother Ignatius,

"Here I am to end my days and I wish to end in peace and charity with every human being. There was but one interruption of these sentiments of mine towards you but I soon returned to the most sincere desire for your every good which I had and proved from my first acquaintance with you.

"I am truly glad to hear your plans have all succeeded and that you have powerful and holy protection besides. I wish for your prayers and those of your children.

"I write with my left hand – the right as well as the right arm and breast being the victims of cruel cancerous tumours which are incurable, but God's Will be done in all things.

"If you would take any interest in knowing anything of any mutual acquaintance I shall tell you anything you would like to know.

"I hope you will receive this in the spirit in which it is written. Do not write unless you like but believe the truth which is simply that I wish you all bliss in this life and throughout eternity.

"If you have no objection give my love to the Sisters and get all the prayers you can for your old and sincere friend

M. J. Finn"

Meanwhile, the little band set out for Germany, leaving Ann Whyte temporarily lodged – perhaps for economy – in Selly Park where she had relations. September was spent in Augsburg and Nymphenburg, discussing the new foundation, and we are left to speculate how the General Superior felt about the prodigal who, after being warmly welcomed home, made only a flying visit there before being off on her new venture. Gloucester was reached in October, and Ann Whyte, soon to become Sister Paul, became a permanent member of the community. The nuns lived for a short time in a house, 3 Newlands Villas, set up for them by a Miss Gordon Canning (perhaps the "pious lady" previously alluded to) and then a more permanent home in Malvern House, London Road, almost next door to the Catholic Church. This latter house was demolished years ago, but one can picture it from details seen in the background of a contemporary photograph and corroborated by a study of houses still standing nearby. It was of the Regency period, decorated with iron balconies. It had a painted iron canopy over the garden door, whence a flight of steps with an iron handrail led down into the garden.

Small as the community was, it was committed to a three-fold project. They had accepted the Bishop's assumption that they would teach the poor in the free school, and the parish priest's suggestion that there should be a "middle school" for the daughters of the shop-keeping class, while Mother Ignatius was determined to found a boarding school for "young ladies".

The advertisement for the boarding school was put into the Catholic Directory, and a hand-bill was printed. It is headed, rather confusedly "A.M.D.G. Les Dames Anglaises of the German Institute of Mary, Gloucester" and reads "The establishment, founded from the Parent House in Bavaria, October 6th, 1862, and conducted on the same plan, undertakes the entire care of Young Ladies of the upper class in all branches of a useful and an accomplished Education; together with every description of Plain and Fancy Work. Pension: Thirty Guineas per Annum and one Guinea Entrance. (Table Service and Sheeting included)".

The fees are modest, as compared with those of the Bar Convent and other contemporary boarding schools, and the extras, too, seem easily affordable. Pianoforte and singing lessons are to be had for £1. 11. 6d, German and Dancing for one guinea each, and the Young Lady's washing done for a whole year for 15s. The reverse side of the sheet gives further interesting information:

"The Languages are taught by Members from the Sister Houses on the Continent; and every attention paid to accent and conversation.

"The uniform must be procured at the Convent, to secure similarity of Colour and Fashion.

"Table Etiquette and general politeness are strictly enforced, and for which every convenience is afforded.

"No reduction can be made for the absence of a young lady, unless the Religious themselves, by the advice of the Medical Attendant, find it necessary to send her home; her absence under such circumstances, shall be allowed on her return to school; but in no case can money be refunded.

"For a shorter period than Twelve Calender Months, no young lady will be received, and a Quarter's notice or Pension is required previous to a removal.

"Malvern House stands in the open country, commanding on every side an uninterrupted view of the Malvern and Cotswold Hills.

"A Lady giving unexceptionable references, can be accommodated as Parlour Boarder."

A lady with the required "unexceptionable references" was found in Jemima Bridgett, sister of Father Bridgett, the Redemptorist historian, and she lived for some time with the community, enabling it to balance its books.

The nuns experienced plenty of "uphill work." They maintained the free school for three and a half years and then, after a dispute over the spending of the government grant, they withdrew in favour of secular control. The middle school fared very badly and had to be closed for lack of numbers. Gloucester was described as "frightfully bigoted", the city never extended a welcome to the community, and there is a tradition of violently anti-Catholic scenes. Agnes Bailey, a pupil of the boarding school, wrote of how twenty people witnessed the first Mass in the convent chapel, when the candlesticks were hurled to the ground, to the accompaniment of horrible groans.

Nevertheless Mother Ignatius had no thought of giving in. The Bishop, described by a contemporary as "the very soul of chivalry" was kind and supportive, and often visited the community to hearten it. The happiness of the boarding school is proved by the record that three pupils and a maid all entered the Institute. With an increase in numbers, community and school outgrew Malvern House and in 1868 Mother Ignatius was looking for more accommodation. Her choice fell on Suffolk House, a property built on the site of the medieval Franciscan friary, near the church of St. Mary le Crypt. The house was demolished in 1935, but a photograph shows a large square building dating from the mid-nineteenth century, plain in exterior but promising a capacious interior. The old gateway to Greyfriars, the grassy space within and the ruins of the church all suggest that Greyfriars must have been a pleasant area when Mother Ignatius signed a lease for the house. She did not live to make the move, for she died on 18th January, 1869 and was buried in the city that had given her so little welcome.

To her contemporaries her career may have appeared as one of bright promises only partially fulfilled, of excellent work abruptly terminated before completion and of situations in which the proffered hand of friendship was not always grasped. But the tangle of change led the Institute back to the south of England, and brought four members – Sister Teresa Blagden, Sisters Francis and Alphonsa McDonough and Sister Agatha Wheeler – and it was with their help that Mary Ward's wish of having a school in "the great citie" of London was to be fulfilled.

Mother Joseph succeeded Mother Ignatius in Gloucester. She is seen in a faded photograph as a plump young woman with a very determined expression. It fell to her to transfer the Malvern House community to Greyfriars in the spring of 1869, and three years later a more adventurous and significant move was suggested. Prominent among the community's few friends were the Dominican friars of nearby Woodchester, and in 1871 one of them, Father Bertrand

Wilberforce, was elected Prior of the community in Haverstock Hill, London. There he found that the Dominican nuns, who had taught in the parish school as well as running a private school for girls, had recently withdrawn on account of Forster's 1870 Education Act. Bereft of help, he turned to his friend Mother Joseph and on 28th February, 1872 seized his pen and wrote impulsively: "My dear Sister, what would you think of migrating here and setting up your school in our parish? I think you would have a better opening here than in Gloucester. There are many Catholic children in want of a good school." But zeal had out-run practicality, for Father Bertrand had not mentioned his invitation to his community, nor to his Provincial, nor to Archbishop Manning. The Dominican friars, when they heard of it, protested that they would prefer nuns of their own order, but the objection was countered by the fact that no Dominican sisters were available. The Provincial gave a rather grudging consent to the project, writing cautiously: "I do not see why the Gloucester nuns should not succeed, as I understand that teaching is their special object. But be careful to note the pros and cons before we invite them, for if we invite them to London we shall be bound to stand by them in the struggles and difficulties they will no doubt encounter. You must communicate with both Dr. Clifford and the Archbishop on the subject." If Bishop Clifford raised any objections they are not recorded, but Archbishop Manning stipulated that the community should give proof that it could support itself for the first two or three years. This obstacle somehow surmounted, Mother Joseph accepted the challenge and the nuns prepared to move. One last difficulty remained; there was no money to defray the cost of transport. The industrious Sister Francis McDonough came to the rescue, made a patchwork quilt, and by raffling it raised the required sum. Their trunks packed, the company set out for London.

Whoever wishes to animate the Gloucester story by pointing out visible landmarks is doomed to disappointment. A bus depot occupies the site of Malvern House on London Road, and the re-located Eastgate Market stands on that of Suffolk House. Mother Ignatius'

tombstone was destroyed when the churchyard was made into a recreation ground, and her bones lie unmarked under the turf. In the Bar Convent archives a single folder embraces all the known records of the foundation, while an unconvincing portrait of Mother Ignatius does little to conjure up the inspiration its features gave to her contemporaries. The historian might dismiss the whole episode as a failed mission, but that would be to miss the essential fact that it provided a bridge over which Mother Joseph and her little community trod in order to make new and successful foundations on which the great members of the next generation would build.

EGTON BRIDGE
1924 – 1945

Egton Bridge is an attractive little village of stone-built cottages bordering the River Esk, at the foot of the Yorkshire Moors. As the name suggests, a bridge spans the river, and for the more adventurous a series of stepping-stones provides an alternative crossing when the river is not in flood. The villagers are proud of their Catholic tradition, stretching back to stories of Nicholas Postgate and his secret Masses heralded by white sheets laid on the hedgerows. Today they worship in the sturdy church dedicated to the Saxon bishop, St. Hedda, and the children attend the adjacent school.

In 1924 the nuns of the Bar Convent decided to purchase a holiday house, and it is not surprising that their choice fell on a property in Egton Bridge. The beginning of this new foundation can be traced in terse entries in the Journals of the Bar Convent and of Egton Bridge:

"March 11th 1924, Reverend Mother and Mother Alacoque went to Egton Bridge to see Esk Villa which they had heard through the Reverend Fr. Storey was to be sold on March 19th. The place seemed ideal for holidays and as a sanatorium. The Villa was not in good condition.

"March 17th. Mr. Belt, Builder, was sent to Egton Bridge to examine Esk Villa. He valued it at £950, and gave his opinion as to the necessary repairs.

"March 19th. Mr. Wilkinson, Lawyer, attended the sale by auction of Esk Villa, which took place at the Egton Bridge Station Hotel and secured the house for £1,010. The reserve price was £1,000.

"April 6th. We came into full possession of Esk Villa.

"April 7th. Mother Mary Alacoque and Sister Mary Philip went to Egton Bridge to arrange for the papering, painting and repairs of Esk Villa. They stayed the night at the Station Hotel."

After a further excursion we read:

"July 11th . At 8 a.m. Mother Mary Alacoque, Sister Mary John and Sister John Baptist went by car to start the house and arrange the furniture which had gone in vans at 5 a.m."

Thus the foundation was made, and Esk Villa became St. Mary's Convent. It still stands, close to the river and to the stepping stones. It is a tall, rather pretentious house, its style out of keeping with the rest of the village and its four storeys promising plenty of stair-climbing exercise to its inhabitants. This was the home of a small I.B.V.M. community for some twenty years. Despite her prominent position in the above entries, Mother Alacoque did not exchange her office of Mistress of Novices for that of Superior at Egton Bridge. Mother Hilda Haigh is mentioned as Sister-in-charge from 1924 to 1925, and Mother Cecilia Kelly held the office of Superior from 1927 to 1941. The community seems to have numbered no more than four members. Their task was to provide holiday accommodation for the York sisters and, during term time, to take in lady boarders for the financial support of the house. In 1926 the Bishop asked the nuns to

take charge of the primary school. Sister Therese Fitzsimmons was sent from York to fill the post of Head Mistress. There is a photograph, taken perhaps in the late 1930s, of her surrounded – almost swamped – by a crowd of healthy, happy children. Thus the community became thoroughly integrated into the village of Egton Bridge. And if it served the village, it was also indebted to the village. As far back as 1840 the York noviceship had accepted an Egton Bridge girl, Margaret Greenhalgh, into its noviceship. Now another was to follow. Margaret Harrison, the daughter of the village Post Mistress, must have been well known to the sisters, for the little stone Post Office stood on the river bank just opposite the convent, linked to it by the stepping stones. Margaret and her brother were devout young people and it came as no surprise when in 1927 she asked to be accepted into the Bar Convent novitiate, and so began a long religious life of faithful service.

A number of names cross the pages of the Egton Bridge Journal, but it is not possible to establish a list of the community at any one time. Tiny Sister Assisium Connor was the gifted cook for many years, and Sister John Baptist Warren was House Mistress (in charge of domestic affairs) from 1924 until her terminal illness in 1942. It may have been she who kept the accounts that testify to the frugality of the household. For income it depended upon Sister Therese's salary, the lady boarders' payments and the sale of "farm produce", i.e. honey and eggs and perhaps an occasional boiling fowl whose laying days were over. The items under the heading Expenditure are all necessities, cut down to a bare minimum. Each month shows the small credit balance that was Mr. Micawber's essential ingredient for happiness.

We turn to the house Journal for more information about life in Egton Bridge, but find disappointingly little in the neatly written entries. The floods of 1930, 1931 and 1932 provide a little local news with their tale of broken-down bridges and the temporary isolation of the community. National events are rarely mentioned, but the

chronicler abandons her reticence on 3rd December 1936 and writes: "Heard with horror of the King's possible marriage with a twice-divorced woman." And on 10th December she adds succinctly: "Our much-loved King Edward VIII abdicated and went abroad – very sad."

For the most part, however, the entries deal only with the comings and goings of visitors, often adding the exact time of their arrival or departure by train. We should despair of ever being able to picture the life of the community, had not Sister Denis (Winifred) Diamond left us an endearing account of the few years she spent in the convent. It is so ingenuous and realistic that the reader feels drawn into the intimate daily life of the household, and so no apology is made for the length of the quotations.

"In the September of 1936", she writes, "I was sent from York to Egton Bridge ... When I was there we did not have a flood though once it was a near thing. You could watch the trout leap and plop back into the water. Mother Gerard, who later was killed by a bombing raid on York, used to come on holiday and fish for eels which Sr Assisium would cook most deliciously. When we went to the post we usually went across the stepping stones.

"On a Sunday if the weather was nice, I went with Sister Assisium for a long walk up a long hill across through Egton proper, through part of the moors and down the other side and back for tea. She knew all the local history and pointed out the cottages, farms etc. and regaled me with stories of who lived where and who had married whom, and how in the past many had intermarried to keep the faith so most of the villagers and farmers around were Catholic: Benisons, Harrisons and Naggs prevailed. She pointed out the cottage where Saint Nicholas Postgate the martyr used to come periodically to say Mass and baptise, or marry those who gathered there, when a white sheet was hung out to dry and could be seen for miles around. The year before I came, some building operations had broken down a wall and shown the secret hiding place for his travelling vestments, coins,

chalice etc. Some of these were kept in a glass case in our Sacristy until later when a special chapel was built in his honour in the big Church, near the railway station. This had been built freely by Irish labourers who were working on the railway to Whitby, of stone locally quarried. St Nicholas travelled in the guise of a jobbing gardener and I gazed in wonder at a field covered in small daffodils, which had originally been planted by him.

" 'Up top o't'ill was a quiet cemetery where several of our sisters are at rest; in Winter deep in snow, in Spring covered in daffodils. Among them are Mother Cecilia Kelly our superior, Sister John Baptist and Sister Mary Michael.

"The members of our community that year were Rev M. Cecilia Kelly, M John Baptist, M Therese Fitzsimmonds, Sr M Assisium and myself as the sister for the year. Before leaving, the previous sister – Sr Mary Bridget of York – gave me a few lessons – such as how to light the old fashioned stone copper, how to pluck and draw fowl, and how to skin and prepare a rabbit for table! Sister Therese was head-mistress of the village school and also played the church organ and ran the village choir. She taught several generations and knew every family from Grosmont to Glaisdale." (In the late 30s Sister Therese seems to have lost her grip on the school, but her prowess with the needle was undiminished, as Sister Winifred continues.) "She also for several years made a beautiful Richlieu tablecloth and entered it for the 'needlewoman' competition and won so often that in 1936 they decided to close down the event.

"Mother John Baptist did the garden, and kept some laying hens and chickens and some bantams with their little cock, and one white duck who went on the river. Mother John could not go to bed until 'ducky' came home and was shut in away from the fox, but one day sadly she was caught by an otter. Sister Therese kept four hives of bees, helped by Mr. Rowe, a catholic neighbour who did many jobs for us – helping with the garden etc. The honey and most of the eggs were sold. The bantams' eggs went to the kitchen for cooking. We also kept some of the honey. Sister Assisium was the cook. She was 77 that year – she was a tiny little sister and as quiet as a mouse. She

was a very good cook and we made our own marmalade and jams, of which we still had a cupboardful in 1942 when I went back and was cook, and sugar was rationed.

"Every year they had a 'honey week' – the kitchen fire was piled up and blazing and all the bees-frames set on trays before it, and we all crowded into the little kitchen with door and window shut and we sweltered and cut up and extracted the honey – by hand. It was then put into jars and labelled and sold. The whole house smelled of honey and seemed to be sticky for a week. The next job for me was to boil all wax in the laundry copper; skim it off and put it into moulds to be sent to the Bar Convent and Cambridge to be made into beeswax for polishing the floor. Another means of earning our living was taking in lady boarders – about 3 at a time. We did not get many, as the place was so isolated. This was between school holidays because we were the York holiday house. This made quite a lot of work – bed making and laundry etc. and of course cooking. The meals were conveyed in a chain from the kitchen lift. M. Cecilia, M. J Baptist and myself all donned white aprons and in solemn silence it was conveyed to the dining room where I 'waited' on the ladies, with the injunction 'not to speak to them' which was not easy as they very often spoke to me.

"Life in our little convent was very strict. The silence was kept except on feast days and holidays – we talked at dinner and tea and recreation, which was at 8.00 after the supper wash up, which was my job. We had our own little chapel with the Blessed Sacrament and Mass was said there by Father Storey the parish priest once a week; otherwise we went out to church. I don't remember us having any public prayer perhaps we said the Litanies. The rosary was private. I had a timetable given to me of my housework, laundry, prayer etc. and it had to be rigidly adhered to. Spiritual reading was at 3 o'clock and could be done in the garden if the weather was fine. Every Friday I knelt at Mother Cecilia's knees for 'culpa'- what I did not remember she filled in – and I seemed to have done an awful lot of bad things in the course of one week, including letting the laundry copper boil over and went its way down the hill to meet us coming back from Church!

"The laundry was outside the back door. I was up at 5.30am, made my meditation and went out with my candle to scrub one copperful and light the copper fire before going out to Mass. Sometimes I would manage to get Mr Rowe to keep a friendly eye on it for me, to lift the lid if it boiled! At recreation we did our mending and got all the news of village and schools. Even Mother Cecilia would laugh when Sr Assisium would start 'when I was shaking a duster out of my window' for hers was a tiny high room and a great vantage point, and of course dear Sr Assisium would never dream of looking out of her window except to shake her duster!

"In the chapel was a small statue of our Lady of Victories, on a wall bracket, behind it, tucked in between it and the wall were all the letters M Cecilia had received from the Northern Electricity Board. She had been appealing for electricity to be brought to the village. They said it was an almost impossible task; it had to come from Newcastle and over the moors. So Our Lady was in charge and the year I was there it came – with tremendous difficulty – as they would dig for days before placing a pylon and then find rock. Anyway, it came and was 9d a unit. Very expensive, and we had to be very sparing of it! The Church and Manor House had generated their own until then. We had used candle and beautiful aladdin lamps which gave a soft light. These had shades, glass funnels and mantles which would disintegrate at a touch, so one had to be very careful. Sr John Baptist cleaned and filled these herself once a week – we had them in the dining room cum community room, chapel, kitchen and ladies dining room and we had tiny ones in our bedrooms by which you could barely see.

"We rented a field from Maudie to hang out our washing. Maudie was a very large woman with a very pretty face, and spoke in broad Yorkshire. She kept house for 'me dad' whom I never saw and had two cows in an adjoining field. I used to carry the washing up her hill field to hang it out to blow in the breeze; or in the winter to freeze quite stiff. She told me her cow once 'ate Nun's chemises' and warned me not to lay them on the hedge. She was very amusing.

"Every year there was a famous 'Berry Show' in the Church Hall at which they showed specially grown gooseberries which would be

weighed and measured and given prizes for the largest or largest pair of twins – some were 2-inches round. After the show, some of these would be donated to the convent by our kind Mr Rowe or the Harrisons or others, as all the people liked 'T' Nuns'.

"The next time I was sent to Egton Bridge I was a little older and mature. It was in 1942. I went with Rev Mother Joseph Hewett, who had returned from Rome and needed a rest. I was to cook and also to help her when I could. Mother Cecilia Kelly had died. Sr Anthony Coffey was the laundry and house sister and nurse to Mother John Baptist, who, by now was bedridden. Sister Benedicta Berkerey came with me from Ascot, she had TB and had had several severe operations. She was a good deal in bed, when downstairs she was always cheerful, never complaining and did beautiful needlework supplied by Mother Monica which went back to York to be sold for some good cause.

"Sr Therese was still running the school. The night York was bombed I got out of bed to see the enemy planes go over, high in the sky. Next day we had no post and no trains ran and we heard York City had been bombed. In the evening some of our sisters came and they were all dirty, bedraggled and white faced, real refugees. They broke the sad news to us of our convent being hit and that some of ours had been killed. They were sisters Veronica, de Sales, Michael, Mary John and M Paula.

"Life was not quite so lonely but I still had a few problems, among them how make five mutton chops do the whole community. I solved it with a stew. The fish van came from Whitby each week and I bought monks fish and other varieties which the fish-monger told me were usually thrown back into the sea. I made rolls and bread sometimes as Sr M Assisium had taught me. We were still using the bantam eggs for cooking. Sr Anthony now looked after the hens so Mother Joseph got leave from York to stop selling eggs and this was a great help."

The chronicle ends with a light-hearted story that may be apocryphal: "The old Canon who was an early Parish Priest of Egton

Bridge always chose the baby's name at a christening. Mrs Harrison of Grosmont had several children and twins arrived and were duly taken to be baptised. When the father came home from work he asked his wife, 'well, mother – what did Canon call this one?' Mother could not quite remember and she said 'summat like Organ and Armonium'. It turned out to be Urban and Honorius. Urban was a elderly man in my year and ran the Berry Show."

The Egton Bridge house was closed towards the end of the war, and when peace came the York community declared its preference for sea air and beaches rather than unspoilt countryside. So Eskdale was exchanged for the Whitby coast, and Esk Villa was sold in favour of St. Hilda's, Chubb Hill. Some years later the ill-sited, unlovely St. Hilda's was in turn exchanged for St. Mary's-on-the-Cliff. This latter house, with its uninterrupted view of a whole stretch of the North Sea, is greatly loved. For much of the year it serves for retreats, but in the Summer the sisters gather here for holidays that frequently include a visit to Egton Bridge.

SHERINGHAM:
1921-1940 and 1966-1999

Sheringham, a pleasant town on the north Norfolk coast, was first associated with the Institute in 1921 when a small community settled there for a solely educational purpose. Very little documentation has survived, but it is evident that the parish priest, Father (later Canon) Thomas Walmsley-Carter was anxious to put his elementary school under the care of a religious order, and that Mother Cecilia Marshall, Superior of St. Mary's Convent Ascot, offered to supply a member of her community to that end. A letter from Father Walmsley-Carter, dated 29th May 1921, to Bishop Keating of Northampton thanks the Bishop for sanctioning the new foundation in his diocese, and on the back of the letter, under the heading "Memo", the Bishop gives a formal permission in his own hand. Below his signature and the date, 1st June 1921, there was barely space for Mother Cecilia's handwritten statement, which runs: "We agreed to make a foundation at Sheringham, this year 1921, according to the conditions herein stated." This too is signed, and dated 6th June 1921.

Thus, with due formality and great economy of paper, the foundation was authorised. The "conditions herein stated" have not survived, but Mother Cecilia lost no time in acquiring 'The Close', a house next door to the church, and the community took up residence there on 3rd November. Mother Dominic Davis, the Superior was supported by Sister Teresa McCabe, Sister Winifred Cornelius and Sister Martha Reaney. Sister Teresa was at once installed as Headmistress of the elementary school and, except for a short break in 1923-24, remained at her post until December 1934 when the school was closed for lack of Catholic pupils.

Meanwhile, however, Mother Cecilia had other agenda in mind. The school at Ascot was so successful that it could no longer accept all the promising pupils who applied, and the time was ripe for the

founding of a sister boarding school. This project may even have been Mother Cecilia's priority, as a significant sentence in Father Walmsley-Carter's letter suggests. It reads: "The Mother General had told them not to miss the opportunity." So in 1922 an independent school under the care of Sister Winifred was opened for boarders and day children. The honour of being the first pupils fell to Ronnie and Patsy Hewett, whose family had already given five members to the Institute. Patsy was to be the sixth.

If the school was intended to be a second Ascot, it must be written off as one of the Institute's failures, for it remained remarkably small and undistinguished. It was established in an attractive area of the healthy east coast, and much was done to further its development. Land behind The Close was purchased and money generously poured out on building accommodation that included not only class-rooms and bed-rooms, but also a concert hall, music room and panelled chapel. Tennis courts were laid down, each child had a small garden to cultivate, and a beach chalet was hired every summer. Nor were the school fees excessive, at £26 a term for boarders and £8. 8s. 0d. for day pupils. Yet success evaded all efforts, and the school numbers were so woefully low that when the community was questioned about them they had to have recourse to evasive replies. No school registers are extant, but we have access to a series of reports on the community and school sent biennually to Rome. It is not complete, but provides some interesting statistics. For at least three years (1924, 1925, 1926) the number of boarders remained obstinately at four, and it never reached more than eleven. The number of day children (mostly non-Catholic) fluctuated between three and fourteen. Using the incomplete statistics and the evidence of the school photograph, we can assert that the average total of pupils was fourteen. The lowest number, in 1932, was ten and the highest in 1937 was seventeen. Viewing these merciless figures, we may well ask, What went wrong? Sadly, the answer must lie, in the first place, in the appointment of Mother Dominic as Superior. This valiant and cultured woman must not be belittled. She had borne much of the burden and the heat of the

day in England's Lane, helping to rebuild the school there after Mother Joseph Edwards had transplanted half the community and the whole boarding school to Ascot in 1885. She was subsequently Superior in England's Lane for nineteen years (1901-1920), so that when appointed to Sheringham she was aged sixty-three and was a religious of nearly forty years standing, with her tastes, principles and scale of values set firmly in a Victorian mould.

Two other factors militated against the healthy development of the school. First, it was geographically distant from the parent house at Ascot and communication, which should have included advice and criticism, seems to have been very scanty. Secondly, the successful, overbooked Ascot school tended to turn over to Sheringham the children of lesser ability. These were welcomed with open arms if they bore illustrious names, for though there was no entrance examination, the pedigree and social standing of would-be pupils were carefully scrutinised. Mother Dominic's avowed intent (in notes written in her own hand) was to educate "the Catholic elite", and an advertisement in the Catholic Directory of 1924 describes the school as "for Catholic girls of the higher classes." This was the canker that stunted all growth. The school became a Victorian vignette, ruled by a Superior who, in figure and character, might easily have passed as a cousin of Queen Victoria herself.

The school photographs, taken annually, provide interesting viewing. They complement the overall numbers, without distinguishing between boarders and day children, and give some idea of the age range which seems to have been between about six and sixteen. The ability range too was very wide, for the slow learners from Ascot sat in class with some very bright day children who put in short appearances. Among the latter were all the little sons and daughters of the philosopher E.I. Watkin, including Christopher who later became Dom Aelred, sometime Head Master of Downside School. A further perusal of the names below the photographs reveals many that must have rejoiced Mother Dominic's heart, for we find the

families Kerr, Gerard, Bedingfield, Wykeham-Fiennes, Elwes, Sitwell and Buxton all represented, while foreign aristocracy puts in an appearance in Olga de Tchitchagoff.

With such disparity of age and ability, efficient teaching would, in any circumstances, have been hard to achieve, but the devoted, hard working nuns had no pedagogic qualifications, and only occasionally did Mother Dominic employ a secular teacher who could add B.A. or M.A. to her name. So the standard of education remained sadly low and life in this period-piece setting was usually uneventful, but on one occasion it was enlivened by a Victorian-style elopement when the daughter of an eminent family ran away with the riding master!

Lest the little community should be considered hopelessly snobbish and unapostolic, it must be recorded that it held an evening class for girls who had left the elementary school, coached some who needed, for instance, extra Arithmetic in order to qualify for Post Office employment, and provided an organist for every church service that required an organ.

But the ethos of the convent was as Victorian as its pedagogy. Whenever a sister was sent with a message to Canon Carter, she had always to begin "Reverend Mother presents her compliments to the Canon ...", and strict discipline matched the quaint etiquette. The nuns were kept on a very tight rein, any exercise of initiative being frowned upon if not actually condemned as disobedience, and every feature of daily life had a monastic stamp.

When Mother Dominic paid an occasional visit to Ascot, her short, stout figure and remarkably slow gait drew derisive smiles from the irreverent young sisters who knew nothing of her past contribution to the Institute, and the novices invented stories about her, telling the gullible latest arrival: "If Mother Dominic smiles at you, you are doomed for Sheringham." But even if such a fate did befall a young nun, it was short-lived. Mother Dominic had a habit of making out an urgent case for extra help, but if (as usually happened) she did not approve of the member sent, she would return her to Ascot, saying, "I don't think we really need Sister X. We can manage without her," only to complain to the Provincial a few months later, "You never replaced Sister X." Thus there was a considerable turnover of personnel. The community seems to have averaged about six members, with a stable core of three who were genuinely fond of their Superior.

It is a matter of conjecture how long this little establishment could have survived, had not political events dealt it a death-blow. World War II broke out in September 1939; for non-combatants there were at first no signs of hostilities, but by the early summer of 1940 air-raid sirens were constantly heard, and the east coast was judged to be a danger zone. So in June the school was closed. The boarders were offered places at Ascot, where war-time circumstances had depleted the numbers, and the nuns were dispersed among other communities, where they were warmly welcomed. This ended the Sheringham anachronism.

Mother Dominic somewhat disconsolately accepted the hospitality of Ascot, where for several years the diminutive figure, now almost spherical, moved slowly up and down the corridors. At last she took to her bed and, succumbing with characteristic slowness to old age, she died on 19th July, 1947.

In 1945, when the war was over, the Sheringham convent was sold to Bishop Parker, who set up a Babies' Home there under the Bon Secours nuns. The IBVM maintained a link with it, for the school in Cambridge adopted the Home as one of its charities, and the children used to visit it every summer. At least one "baby" became a pupil at Cambridge. When the Home was closed in the 1970s the buildings were adapted as a Youth Hostel, which was said to be haunted by the ghost of a stout little nun.

The Institute returned to Sheringham in a mood very different from that of the 1930s. The Second Vatican Council made sweeping changes in religious life, and Reverend Mother General Ethelburga decreed, inter alia, that every member of the Institute should have three weeks' holiday a year. Since "home leave" was not yet a general concession, and the numbers of the English Province were at their height, this ruling put a strain on the two existing holiday houses at Whitby and Summerley. The Cambridge community therefore decided to have its own seaside pied à terre and after consultation it purchased Inglewood in Cremer's Drift in 1966. It is impossible to exaggerate the happiness this delightful house provided. Since it was considered something of a luxury, it seemed appropriate to set it up with a minimum of expenditure so all the indoor decoration was done by the enthusiastic community. Parties went over at week-ends to paper, paint and lay tiles, while in Cambridge curtains were made, old bedroom furniture was re-painted and chairs were mended and upholstered for use in Sheringham. Every room was an object of pride and delight, and in the garden weeds were uprooted and bulbs planted. For the holiday maker Sheringham offered swimming, walking, the exploration of lovely Norfolk churches, picnics,

gardening or just sitting in the shade of the beech trees; and all these pleasures were enjoyed to the full. For twenty five years Inglewood was loved and cherished as a place of rest and relaxation and many friendships were made with neighbours – with Phyllis and Freddie, who lived just around the corner and with Mr. Ashby, who seemed never to rest from working in his garden opposite. The house also provided week-end accommodation for sixth form biology courses, and children's retreats, and for a long time there was an annual staff party there.

But it had to be admitted that the house was not fully used. Shortly after its purchase came the ruling that nuns could go home for their holidays, and many made their way to Ireland or elsewhere in the summer. The Cambridge community still went joyfully to Sheringham for every half-term and for breaks at Easter and Christmas, but this was not enough to justify the upkeep of the house, and it became obvious that Inglewood was at the top of the Province's "hit list". There was, however, a stay of execution. For some years the Generalate had been urging the foundation of Houses of Prayer and in 1991 it was decided to establish Inglewood as such. So a small community (Sisters Thomas Williams, Margaret Kelly and Brenda Noone) took up permanent residence there and welcomed nuns of all orders, priests and seculars for retreats or periods of rest and prayer. In the parish Sister Thomas undertook considerable work, instructing converts, preparing children for the Sacraments and giving Bible courses to adults, while Sister Margaret and Sister Brenda endeared themselves to many lonely and sick people whom they visited. But still the large house was not fully used and in 1996 the original community was withdrawn, leaving Sister Helen Butterworth who took over the parish work and hoped, too, to attract foreign I.B.V.M. nuns who wished to learn English. But few such students arrived, the spectre of closure came ever nearer, and in 1998, regretfully, Inglewood was sold. By then, however, the parish so valued the presence of the Institute, and Sister Helen was so dynamic and loved a member, that a flat was purchased for her and she continued her good

work there. Though centuries separate them, a parallel can be drawn between Sister Dorothea, who in Mary Ward's lifetime ploughed a lonely furrow in East Anglia, and Sister Helen, who for a brief time was the solitary representative of the Institute in a corner of the same area. With her sudden death on Maundy Thursday 1999 the link between Sheringham and the I.B.V.M. was broken, but many happy and affectionate memories survive.

EPILOGUE

The story of each of these houses is so stamped with its own individuality that no adequate summary is possible. It may be observed, however, that each community was engaged to some extent in education, as Mary Ward would have wished, and each bears its share of suffering, as she did. No judgement may be passed, for where failures are apparent for all to see, the seeds of spiritual success often lie hidden. The celestial arithmetic must be left to the recording angels.