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Fr Simon Bordley, eighteenth-century recusant priest, schoolmaster and trader in ‘two-legged cattle.’¹

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Abstract:

Simon Bordley was a Catholic priest in Lancashire for much of the eighteenth century. Despite only being a rural priest, he played an extremely important part in supporting the Catholic seminaries in France and Portugal by supplying them with students, material goods and financial assistance. He left behind him a lively correspondence relating to these activities which provides us with a valuable insight into the world of eighteenth-century priestly training in the English colleges. It also provides a fascinating glimpse of a Churchman who laboured with an impressive level of entrepreneurial skill and rugged independence. It is argued here that such a figure defies the common image of the seigneurial Catholic curate in service primarily to a family of the landed gentry in the eighteenth century, and in doing so he illustrates an example of the type of energetic cleric who provided a crucial lifeline to a Church that came to rely less and less on its aristocracy as the century progressed.

Key words: Simon Bordley, eighteenth century, Lisbon seminary, Northern district, Douai.

A Priest of the Northern District.

This article draws primarily on Fr Simon George Bordley's (1709-99) own letters, principally though not exclusively, to the English College in Lisbon beginning in the 1780s when he was still serving actively as a parish priest, though in his mid-seventies. Additionally, we have many of the replies from his correspondents. Bordley's letters are written sedulously, in a meticulous hand with seldom any corrections. It is indicative of his fastidious character that he appears to have taken a great deal of care over them. Compared with his correspondents

¹ This article would not have been possible without the generous support of the Holland Fellowship from the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University, for which I am enormously grateful.

they are not only more detailed in their discussion of matters of business but they are also more personal in their description of thoughts, aspirations, trials and frustrations concerning the enterprise of supplying and teaching seminarians in an England that was progressing through the various stages of Catholic emancipation. Their author immediately strikes the reader as honest, sometimes to the point of being abrasive, and seemingly incapable of either disingenuity or circumspection when it comes to his dealings. For this reason, they offer invaluable and convincingly reliable first-hand accounts of a highly important aspect of English Catholic history which has previously been somewhat neglected.

Simon George Bordley has been described as an ‘able but eccentric’ secular Catholic priest of the Northern district.² We can learn much about his career from several well-preserved letters of his own and of several of his correspondents which are housed in three locations. Firstly, the Lisbon archives at Ushaw College, which received the archives and a good many artefacts of the Lisbon College at its closure in 1973. Secondly, Lancashire Public Record Office at Preston has material among their collection of local letters and manuscripts. Thirdly, Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Archives has a good collection of material relating to Bordley since they now house manuscripts relating to Lancashire clergy from St Joseph’s College at Upholland, after its closure in 1992. All of this correspondence offers a rare and fascinating insight into the life of an English Catholic priest of the eighteenth century.

This article intends to focus on the material relating to the major role Bordley played in sustaining the supply of boys for the seminaries in France and Portugal,³ a ‘business’ he

² William Farrer and John Brownhill, *A History of the County of Lancaster* (London: Constable, 1907), 3: 284-91.

³ There is much material in these collections concerning Bordley’s life in the parish which space does not allow for. It is hoped they will perhaps merit their own future article.

always referred to as his ‘trade in two legged cattle’. In his introduction to the *Lisbon College Register*, Michael Sharratt rightly points out that the seminary is little known even to those interested in post-Reformation English Catholicism.⁴ Bordley is a crucial, and as yet largely overlooked figure in the College’s history. These letters offer us important primary source material on the history of the College at Lisbon. They also provide important personal accounts of the workings of a national Church at a pivotal moment in its history as it made its slow way from persecution, through emancipation, toward something like benign coexistence with the English state and their non-Catholic neighbours. A situation which Paul Longford described as ‘benevolent negligence’ of the state, even while prejudice lay barely concealed beneath the surface of tolerance.⁵ It is argued here that Bordley’s resourceful spirit, and that of others like him, played a critical role in maintaining the English Catholic Church during this century. These clerics subvert the common image of the passive country chaplain of this century as they represent instead single-minded entrepreneurs whose resourcefulness provided a crucial service to their Church. In doing so they also provided a model for a future generation of more professional clergy whose vocations were, for the most part, realigned in the nineteenth century away from service to the landed Catholic families toward the service of a parish as what John Bossy would describe as a ‘congregational priest’.⁶

⁴ Michael Sharratt, *Lisbon College Register 1628-1813* (Catholic Record Society, 1991), p. vii.

⁵ Paul Longford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England 1727-1783* (London: Guild Publishing, 1989), 292.

⁶ John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 263.

Simon's father, William Bordley, is listed as one of the Roman Catholics who refused to take the oath of allegiance.⁷ Indeed, William was convicted of recusancy at the sessions held at Lancaster on October 21, 1706.⁸ Simon Bordley was educated at Douai, in the year above Alban Butler, on a pension provided by his father. We are able to follow his career to ordination at the seminary in the seventh *College Diary*.⁹ He was ordained in 1734 and left on September 13 the following year.¹⁰ He served at first at Salwick in Lancashire until sometime in the early 1740s when he became the priest at Moorhall, Aughton in the same county. Here he kept a Catholic school for about forty boys who he boarded out in neighbouring houses.¹¹ He gave up teaching for some time when the celebrated priest and educator, William Errington set up his renowned Sedgley Park School in 1763; a full eighteen years before the Catholic Relief Act 1791 when, technically at least, the keeping of a school was punishable by perpetual imprisonment. Turning his students over to the new school Bordley grumbled that he had 'a great deal of care and trouble with them and they were no benefit to me, but a loss.'¹² In spite of his conceived loss, in the 1780s he built another school at Ince Blundell,

⁷ *The Names of Roman Catholic Non-Jurors* (London: G. Woodfall, 1746), 58.

⁸ John Westby Gibson, *Memoir of Simon Bordley, author of 'Cadmus Britannicus'* (London: R. McCaskie, 1890), 6.

⁹ *Seventh Douai Diary*. Catholic Record Society, 28.

¹⁰ Gibson, *Memoir of Bordley*, 6.

¹¹ For an account of Bordley's career in education see, W. Vincent Smith, 'The Rev Simon George Bordley, Schoolmaster', *Recusant History* 13 (1976): 280-81.

¹² Bordley to Fryer, October 8 1785, Lisbon Collection Ushaw (Hereafter LC)/C636.

near Liverpool, where he appointed a master and educated as many as eighty pupils at a time.¹³

Bordley had a shrewd business head despite what appeared to others as a rather chaotic system of accounting. In 1784, fifteen years before his death, a priest called Marmaduke Wilson described a situation that he believed was a cause for concern.

His papers lay heaped on his table, his maid has free entrance, his money is in a bag on a shelf [and] he told me ‘that was the best way to hide it from housebreakers,’ and if anything happened to him his maid knew where it was. He cannot be induced to make a will.¹⁴

This notwithstanding, Bordley told a correspondent at this time that he has managed to put together a trust amounting to over £5,000.¹⁵ One of his letters tells us that the rent from his lands was £74 per year which he used for, ‘bringing boys to our trade,’ adding that they furnish him with enough money to supply three pensions at £25 per year.

It seems also that benefactors would occasionally leave him considerable sums for the same purpose. In 1786 he wrote that he had recently been bequeathed £1,763.¹⁶ At the age of eighty he boasted to Fr William Fryer, President of the English seminary in Lisbon, that in 54

¹³ Gibson, *Memoir of Bordley*, 7.

¹⁴ Marmaduke Wilson to Matthew Gibson, May 10 1784, Lancashire Archives (Hereafter LA), UC/P45/1/20.

¹⁵ Smith, ‘Bordley, Schoolmaster’, 285.

¹⁶ Bordley to Fryer, Nov 16 1786, LC/C640.

years of missionary work he had, by ‘behaving as a serious priest ought,’ saved the Church and poor Catholics £7,000.¹⁷

The Trader

On June 29 1784 a priest named John Sheppard was writing to Fryer in Portugal in order to let him know of Bordley, whom he says was proposing to furnish him with boys and was prepared to lay out £100 per boy, over five years, providing they can agree upon terms.¹⁸ By way of introduction Sheppard adds, ‘he is a most worthy man with all his oddities, has furnished the mission with more worthy men than any other in England and who were all brought up at Douay.’¹⁹ He goes on to explain that Bordley wants to end his relationship with the French seminary since there the students’ pocket money has been raised to such a level that it has left many of their parents unable to afford it. On the subject of supplying seminarians Sheppard later expressed his opinion to Fryer, ‘I do not know any one a proper judge of such subjects as our Bordley.’²⁰

In fact, Bordley had written his first letter to the President over a week before Sheppard’s introduction. In his characteristic overweening manner, he began by saying, ‘You are a stranger to me, tho’ I am not quite so strange to you, as you must have heard me named many a time at Douay College.’ He describes himself to Fryer as a ‘great trader in two-legged

¹⁷ Bordley to Fryer, October 24 1789, LC/C669.

¹⁸ William Fryer was President of the College for twenty-three years from 1782 until his death in 1805. Canon Croft, *Historical Account of Lisbon College* (Barnet: St Andrew’s Press, 1902), 109.

¹⁹ John Sheppard to Fryer, June 29 1784, LC/A1/4/2/50.

²⁰ Sheppard to Fryer, August 21 1789, LC/C613.

cattle' and that though previously he has dealt exclusively with Douai recently they had become extravagant with pocket money. Their parents refuse to pay claiming it is beyond their means though Bordley sets out his own assessment of affairs in characteristically frank language.

Now as our Lancashire Catholics by their love for pleasures, drunkenness and neglect of their respective business, have reduced themselves to poverty I, who know all parts of Lancashire perfectly well, know not where to find any family, that can furnish a boy with pocket money at the rate they go on at Douay.²¹

This description is, possibly deliberately, gloomy. There is evidence of growth, particularly in the Catholic middle classes at this time, especially in Bordley's neighbourhood. There were 4,000 Catholics in Preston, Wigan and Liverpool in 1767, a figure twice as large as it had been forty to fifty years previous.²² Later in the letter Bordley seems to repent of his initial harsh assessment and he presents a more sympathetic consideration of the situation describing to Fryer Catholic families that have become excessively poor. If we are to accept Bordley's account, it would seem the Catholic Relief Act 1778, which had allowed for the inheritance of land, had little positive effect. He tells Fryer, the great numbers whose fathers had left their sons estates or tenements only for them to have had to sell them since they cannot renew the lease. Their only recourse was to become farmers (the purchase of land was also allowed under the Act) , though this was a poor alternative since, 'many don't have the wherewith [sic] to stock a farm, which is now also a poor trade.'²³ This is clearly a vexed

²¹ Bordley to Fryer, June 21 1784, LC/C611.

²² Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, 1689-1833* (London: SCM, 1997), 115.

²³ Bordley to Fryer, June 21 1784.

issue with Bordley as some years later he would inform Fryer that since he is a noted trader, he has many applying to him from various parts, though frequently their application is attended by the same problem.

They commonly begin their story thus, I have a fine lad, or there is a fine lad in our neighbourhood, that is hot for being a priest (even squires address me thus). Answer, very good: what do you propose to give towards his education? Reply, nay they can give nothing.²⁴

Bordley prefers that Lisbon only trains boys for the priesthood rather than also having lay students as was the case at Douai. He tells his correspondent that he has a letter from Mr William Gibson, President of Douai²⁵ claiming that a 'mixture' is best 'to make great men in both states, that they improve one another.' Bordley cannot agree that this is the right way, informing Fryer that during his time, '...a greater number that were educated at Douay, both of Priests and Gentlemen of the world to my knowledge have died martyrs to Bacchus and Intemperance, than the Popes will be able to canonize of real saints in two hundred years to come.' This he attributes to making feasts and drinking bouts and he adds for good measure that if 'they teach them to be drinkers at Douay, we can soon teach them to be complete drunkards in Lancashire.'²⁶ Philip Perry, the rector at Valladolid, had expressed similar

²⁴ Bordley to Fryer, January 17 1788, LC/C646.

²⁵ William Gibson (2 February 1738 - 2 June 1821) was President of Douai from 1781 to 1790. During his administration there was a major refurbishment and a modernisation of the syllabus. Whilst this was popular among the collegians many of the alumni in England abhorred what they saw as his extravagance and liberalizing. See entry by Leo Gooch in *ODNB* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10642>

²⁶ Bordley to Fryer, June 21 1784, LC/C611.

concerns in 1770 when it was proposed that his students take courses at the university. Perry feared they would learn, ‘worldly and wicked habits of some of their colleagues.’²⁷ In Bordley’s case, he was perhaps trying to salve his own conscience for breaking with his old school, or maybe he was smarting after feeling rejected by them, whatever the case he uses what he sees as their indulgent lifestyle as a particular stick with which to beat them. It was a stick he was unafraid to wield, writing to a priest named Robert Banister he frankly asserts, ‘The Douay Feasters & Burgundy drinkers are very improper men to reform a drunken nation as ours is.’²⁸ He was far from a lone voice in this respect. In 1768 Banister himself had written that a spirit of ‘foppery’ prevailed at Douai. Shortly after, Joseph Shepard, while teaching at Valladolid, complained that the students who arrived there from Douai were so spoilt that they needed to be ‘courted and caressed.’ He added that he preferred to procure ‘little sharp boys’ directly from England.’²⁹

In a later letter Bordley says that the information that he has on developments at Douai comes directly from his own students.

Why I forsake my Mother to apply to the daughter, is because my Mother begins to dote, her discipline is relaxed every year; so that the more conscientious sort of boys (one at the end of Rhetoric whose letter I read the other day) complained of

²⁷ Michael E. Williams, *St Alban’s College, Valladolid: Four Centuries of English Catholic presence in Spain* (London: C. Hurst and Comp., 1986), 88.

²⁸ Bordley to Banister, no date, LMC, A/1/22. Robert Banister (1725-1812) was a Douai trained priest- Bordley had given him a reference for his pension to Douai -1741. Leo Gooch, *The Revival of English Catholicism; the Banister-Rutter Correspondence 1777-1807* (Wigan: North Western Catholic History Society, 1995), 3.

²⁹ Williams, *St Alban’s College*, 76.

the relaxation of discipline and another who had been Gen[eral] Prefect for two years gives the same account. Your house (praise be to God) walks in the good old paths, I hope you will keep them in it while God pleases to keep you safe.³⁰

It is possible that this apparent breakdown in their relations was precipitated more than a decade earlier when Bordley in 1770 told a neighbouring priest, named John Chadwick, that he judged it proper to turn his attention to Douai and make them some ‘sturdy laws.’ We cannot now say whether Bordley completed and dispatched his laws but there are few instances in his correspondence where he does not do what he says he is going to do. If he did send them, they can have done little to endear him to the College superiors. The apparent eventual breakdown in relations appears to be confirmed by a letter from James Barnard, Vicar General of the London District and ex-President of the Lisbon College, to Fryer in which he begs leave to let him know that previously before he entered into a contract with Bordley he had drawn up a similar one with Douai, ‘but when the superiors had learnt by experience, what was the consequences thereof, they dissolved it.’ After that he appealed to Shepard at Valladolid who, and despite his willingness to recommend him to others, foreseeing the consequences would not engage with him. It was only then, Barnard tells Fryer, that he applied to Lisbon.³¹ On the other hand, if we are to believe the opinion of a contemporary priest named Henry Rutter, a degree of snobbishness on the part of Gibson may also have played a part. Rutter wrote to his uncle expressing his admiration for the President but lamenting that while he makes himself agreeable to the gentry, he wishes he would show himself a little more so to persons of a country stamp such as Bordley whom he

³⁰ Bordley to Fryer, August 5 1785, LC/C633.

³¹ Barnard to Fryer, January 13 1795, LC/A1/5/13. For Barnard see, Croft, *Historical Account*, 91-3.

hears is displeased with him. He advises his uncle that, ‘Unless the clergy can humour the old man more than at present, I fear the monks [Douai Benedictines] will come in for a good share of his money...’³²

In his communication on Good Friday in 1785 Bordley writes to Fryer that he had received and been charmed by his letter. He finds it pleasing that the President is maintaining the ‘ancient discipline,’ in his house whilst every day religion ‘decays more and more.’ He adds that he has been a ‘missioner’ for forty-nine years as well as a constant ‘trader during most of that time.’ Appraising Fryer of his present situation he says that whilst it is his intention to send him ‘cattle,’ he will have to postpone any such export since he did not want to expose them to the dangers of sea in the winter season.³³ He sets out his plan to send two boys to Lisbon and two to Valladolid telling Fryer that we must make as many priests as we can otherwise it would not be possible to fill the places vacated by the Jesuits who had numbered thirty in Lancashire at the dissolution.³⁴ Bordley drove a hard bargain, in return for his funding he demanded other pensions, including the Queen of Portugal’s, for his boys. If granted this would mean that he could have availed of pensions that the Queen had established for training English priests thereby securing them for the mission in Lancashire. This would later prove highly contentious, but Bordley pressed his point insisting that if he cannot nominate to these he will continue to ‘trade’ with Douai, though they ‘allow their students all the liberties that unbridled youth can desire.’ He makes it clear that the mission has had a surfeit of this type and what they need now is some Lisbonians or Vallasolletians

³² Letter 31, Rutter to Banister, 11 October 1784. *Banister-Rutter Correspondence*, 71.

³³ Bordley to Fryer, Good Friday 1785, LC/C630.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Pope Clement XIV had officially disbanded the Jesuits in 1773. They had been expelled from Portugal in 1759.

‘trained up with better principals and more Christian notions.’³⁵ His low opinion of his *alma mater* never left him and in 1790 he is afraid that masters recruited to Lisbon from France would have a corrosive effect, ‘I’m afraid of Douacians coming among you. Lest they should corrupt it [the College], and introduce *libertanisme* and extravagance, as one rotten sheep may infect a whole flock.’³⁶

Bordley’s correspondence is never shy of commending either his own abilities or the importance of his patronage. He asserts that his commitment to the College would have a beneficial impact exceeding simply adding more students since the previous dearth of boys meant that it had been difficult for them to keep up their spirits so that several threw up their training and returned home ‘*re infecta*’ (tainted). He promised that his supply of seminarians, along with the Queen’s pension, would fill the Lisbon house and ‘enable you to lift your heads again.’ He assures Fryer that his was a well that was unlikely to run dry, ‘Being a great trader I have plenty cattle offered me, more by one half than I can provide for.’³⁷ In the Autumn of 1785, Bordley lets Fryer know that he had been offered ten boys that Spring and he points out the added benefit of doing business directly with him. If the College was to accept boys from other priests or bishops, possibly a nephew, they would send them at random without examining them on their capacities or inclinations. Subsequently, if they prove to be dunces then the College’s money is lost. On the other hand, Bordley points out both his vast experience as well as a watertight process of selection, ‘Now I neither choose for favour or affection, but such as I judge proper subjects, and such as I think not proper for us, I reject, let who will recommend them.’ Besides, he points out, even supposing his

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Bordley to Fryer, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

³⁷ Bordley to Fryer, June 21 1784, LC/C611.

candidates were only equal to those of others, his come with 100 guineas a year and theirs with not one shilling.³⁸

It is not clear what Fryer made of Bordley's bombast but if he found it off-putting it would never have been offensive enough for him to reject the offer of a steady stream of pensioned and well-vetted students. This would have been important to Lisbon because of its impecunious situation in comparison with other English colleges. In comparison, Valladolid had attained financial stability since it had inherited the wealth and resources of Madrid and Seville in 1767.³⁹ In addition, Lisbon had poor relations with the Vicars Apostolic who favoured Douai to such an extent that college agents found it difficult to secure patronage, meaning that they often had to make do with leftover candidates from the other colleges. Beside this, the Catholic community in England was so hard pressed that only the rich could send their sons abroad and they would choose St Omer or Douai. For the less wealthy, sending a son as far as Portugal was not within their means.⁴⁰ For this reason, it took little time for Bordley and Fryer to establish a working relationship, though, predictably it was not a completely harmonious one. When Fryer complained that two brothers sent over to him arrived in a ragged and dirty condition Bordley's answer is sharp,

...it is not fine feathers that make the fine birds; and that Father Simon strives to send fine lads, without regard to cloaths, leaving it to others to send their assess in

³⁸ Bordley to Fryer, October 8 1785, LC/C636.

³⁹ Michael E. Williams, 'St Alban's College Valladolid and the events of 1767', *Catholic Record Society*, 20 (1957): 223-238.

⁴⁰ Simon Johnson, *The English College at Lisbon. From Reformation to Toleration* (Bath: Downside Abbey Press, 2014), 284-5, 346.

fine trappings. And as to their dirtiness, I hope and with that if you will take pains to wipe the dirt and grit off them, you'll find them two jewells.⁴¹

Bordley was clearly rattled by the implied criticism and a whole year later he adds curtly that, 'there is enough water in the Tagus, you may take them and swill them in it to wash the grit off them.'⁴²

On another occasion Bordley gives us more information about his own method of selecting likely candidates for training, which was not entirely inattentive to their background in that his preference was for the sons of the middling sort.

You must know I cannot persuade myself to go Jeroboam's way to work by picking up boys *de extremis populi*, neither would I choose out of Gentlemen's families; but to succeed to my mind, I would choose boys out of honest, industrious yeomen's families, as those are the likest [sic] to make good labourers.⁴³

The following Spring of 1787, he repeats this reference to Jeroboam in a letter which clearly demonstrates that there was a good deal of competitive spirit among English priests who sponsored hopeful seminarians and vied for the patronage of the continental colleges. Here he cautions Fryer that if he continues to work without him, he is bound to receive more candidates like his rival's, Robert Banister's, who are 'almost safe to fail.' He goes on to assert that if the President 'trades' directly with him, and not Banister or the 'Londoners,' he

⁴¹ Bordley to Fryer, October 24 1789, LC/C669.

⁴² Bordley to Fryer, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

⁴³ Bordley to Fryer, November 16 1786, LC/C640. This reference is to King Jeroboam who set up two altars to idols at Dan and Bethal. There he appointed priests that were not from the Levites and therefore not sacred. 1 Kgs 12: 29-32.

would ‘furnish you with lads of a better stamp’; meaning that not only would he have a fuller house but also ‘hopefuller’ subjects. In addition, he makes it clear that presently he has four likely candidates at his school in Ince Blundell under an excellent master. It is his intention to send them out at the end of the Summer as soon as the weather cools. Bordley, by way of asserting his credentials, sets out his former successes at Douai where three of his students went on to become doctors at Paris. They now serve the mission and are the only doctors in the Northern division. Another working in the North is a Master of Art having had to give up his doctorate due to ill health. Two of his students, a Mr Southern and Mr Daniel were later vice-presidents at Douai. In addition, a Mr Willacy is governor of the Bishop’s School (Sedgley Park), which is the greatest Catholic institution of its kind in England. ‘Let Banister and the Londoners,’ he adds in a final flourish, ‘shew you such a set as these.’⁴⁴ On the subject of his competitors Bordley was not above personal criticism. In another correspondence with Fryer, he paints a disdainful picture of his competitor’s *modus operandi*, ‘Busy Banister goes thus to work, he persuades some poor beggarly thing to be willing to go abroad (indeed he can find no better in that part of the country where he lives).’ That done Banister begs a pension for him from the College and his passage from Bordley.⁴⁵ Nor is Bordley beyond relating gossip as he passes on some scurrilous local chatter relating to a priest that had been one of Banister’s boys. There was, he says, an individual from Valladolid lived with a gentleman not a mile away who was ‘run mad of a clownish, impudent woman’ with whom he had such familiarities that several times a day she was with him *solus cum sola* under the pretence of teaching her to read. He adds, ‘The town of Ormskirk and all the

⁴⁴ Bordley to Fryer, May 1 1787, LC/C643.

⁴⁵ Bordley to Fryer, August 24 1792, LC/C712.

countryside around cry a shame of it?’⁴⁶ Such petty intrigues are perhaps unedifying, but they serve to illustrate the fact that though these enterprises were ecclesiastical in nature, and the people involved in them no doubt viewed them as sacred duties, they were also business, and business seldom comes without hardnosed competition.

Bordley and Fryer’s correspondence could only ever have been described as cordial rather than warm. Indeed, during the course of their relationship Fryer seems to be negligent with regard to their correspondence causing Bordley to complain on a number of occasions. The four boys mentioned previously by Bordley were sent out in October 1788, but he had learnt nothing of their arrival for fourteen weeks causing him great concern. In some obvious anguish he laments that the lack of news, ‘put me in great pain for them, fearing they were either swallowed up by the sea, or what was worse, were taken by the Algerines and carried into slavery.’⁴⁷

Bordley’s support of the College went beyond the sponsorship of seminarians. In addition to financial aid, he also arranged for ‘correspondents’ in Liverpool to supply Fryer with goods such as cheese, butter and woollen cloth. This service was maintained into old age and ill-health. In 1787 he was making these arrangements at the age of eighty-one even after a recent illness had left him not expecting, ‘by course of years to survive very long.’⁴⁸ Most remarkably, Bordley expected no payment for these services telling the President that it was enough in return that he fed his lads.⁴⁹ With regard to cloth, Bordley sent a ‘middling sort’ for the younger boys declaring that his motto in such matters was ‘*media tutissimus ibis* (the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Bordley to Fryer, Jan 17 1788, LC/C646.

⁴⁸ Bordley to Fryer, 1787, LC/C648.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

middle was the safest way to go).’ The finer cloth was liable to be torn to pieces because of their ‘romping,’ however, Fryer and the ‘better sort’ of his family (staff) were free to buy the best material.⁵⁰ Additionally, Bordley chased up pocket money from the parents and relatives of the students, even to the point of employing a little intimidation. He asked Fryer to acquaint one Willy Hurst of Paris that he orders him to pay both his nephews’ stipends assuring the President, ‘you’ll be safe of that as Willy dares not for his ears disobey my orders.’⁵¹ That year Hurst wrote to Fryer a rather grumpy letter saying that, ‘... it seems I must answer for the pocket money of the two brats with you.’ The uncle promised to do this though he insisted that it must be ‘proportioned to their merits.’⁵²

Bordley and the French Revolution.

In August, the National Assembly began its first attack on religion in France, shortly after Bordley sent a hefty sum of £100 to the Lisbon College because of the ‘French situation.’ He was deeply concerned about developments there and he pressed Fryer for information.

I should be glad to know what usage you meet with from the National Assembly; they use *alma mater* [Douai] very roughly, as also the Benedictine monks: so that our dependence hereafter will be chiefly upon your house and Valladolid, and a house that the English monks have in Germany to supply our unhappy country with missionaries, unless things take a better turn than they are likely to at present.⁵³

⁵⁰ Bordley to Fryer, October 24 1789, LC/C669.

⁵¹ Bordley to Fryer, May 14 1789, LC/C658.

⁵² From Mr Hurst to Monsignor Fryer, June 20 1789, LC/C660.

⁵³ Fryer to Bordley, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

It seems that Bordley's apprehension was centred on property owned by the Lisbon College in Paris since in a following correspondence he asks Fryer if the 'rascally National Assembly' has seized any or part of their rents, or the interest owing on them.⁵⁴ These were tumultuous times for the Catholic exiles in France and invested parties were right to be concerned since only a handful of colleges survived the revolution to re-emerge in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ However, financial losses aside, there seems to have been little impact on the colleges in Spain and Portugal. Elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula, Monica Henchy tells us that the Bastille fell, 'but no ripple of this upheaval' seems to have reached the Irish College at Salamanca.⁵⁶ Bordley's own business also appears to have been little troubled by international events at this time. In 1790, as international tensions escalated, he expressed concern about sending goods to Portugal since the Spanish fleet were in the Bay of Biscay and there were growing rumours of war between England and Spain indicated by the press gangs that were active in London and Liverpool. This concern did not however extend to his personal business as he had sent two boys 'expecting that if the Spanish do take them they'll possibly send them to you when they know what they are designed for.'⁵⁷

In September 1793, his letter to Lisbon provides us with some quite detailed information about developments in France. It is not clear from where Bordley was procuring his

⁵⁴ Bordley to Fryer, Sept 22 1790, LC/C681.

⁵⁵ Liam Chambers. 'Introduction,' in, Liam Chambers and Thomas O'Connor, eds. *College communities abroad: education, migration and Catholicism in Early Modern Europe* (2018), 1.

⁵⁶ Monica Henchy, 'The Irish College at Salamanca', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* vol. 70, no. 278/9 (1981): 224.

⁵⁷ Bordley to Fryer, September 22 1790, LC/C681.

information since he mentions that there is none to be had by conventional means. It is more than a possibility that his source was a Lancashire Benedictine named Henry Parker who was in Paris at the time. Parker managed to provide a synchronised and highly effective channel of communication between France and Catholics in his homeland.⁵⁸ Bordley tells Fryer that after the taking of Valenciennes by the Duke of York the inhabitants in Douai, ‘trembled for themselves thinking it might be their turn the next.’ With this in mind, they turned all ‘useless people,’ including the English, Scottish and Irish out of their town with only twenty-four hours’ notice. All of the friars had made it out of France, but twelve English monks had been captured. As for the English College, out of sixty residents, six managed their escape whilst the remaining were ordered to march into the interior of France, though, ‘where they have taken their residence I do not know.’ St Omer in Liège, which had until 1773 been the Jesuit College was now in secular hands, fared even worse since the French Conventionists⁵⁹ had reported that a letter was found among them demonstrating that the College had been in correspondence with the Combined Armies. On this ‘pretence’ the French had imprisoned members of the College, though Bordley is not sure if that means only the superiors. Bemoaning the situation he writes, ‘What they will do with them only time will tell.’ Finally, he adds despairingly, ‘So you see our houses in France are useless to us at present, and if they are never restored to us again our mission in England will suffer greatly from it.’⁶⁰

The following month he passed on to Fryer the content of a letter that he had read from a friar named Harry Lovelady concerning the ‘infidel French.’ He notifies him that the friars had

⁵⁸ Cormac Begadon, ‘Responses to Revolution: The Experiences of the English Benedictine monks in the French Revolution, 1789-93’, *British Catholic History* 34, no. 1 (2018): 108.

⁵⁹ The *Convention Nationale* was the revolutionary parliament.

⁶⁰ Bordley to Fryer, September 20 1793, LC/C720.

now left Douai and marched two leagues to an old chateau but when French troops camped in the neighbourhood six of them decided to escape setting out with faithful guides at dusk.

They Scamper'd thro fields and roads as well as they could, but at length were perceived by the centuries stationed. Upon which a hue and & cry was raised; but the six poor friars took to a ditch full of briars. After that they lay two hours in a field of beans till the soldiers were retired. In fine they got after many dangers to Orchies, where they got refreshment.⁶¹

He goes on to report that the President of St Omer, Gregory Stapleton, and the other members of the College had been imprisoned and that he is 'in panic' about four colleagues that he has lost trace of for 'fear they will be badly used by the French infidels.'⁶² In fact, the President and members of the College had been imprisoned together with six English Benedictines, as well as the President, staff and fifty-two students of St Omer, at Doullens. Stapleton was the first to be released and he managed to get to Paris where he secured the return to England of the other prisoners. They arrived back at Dover onboard an American vessel in 1795.⁶³

So devastating was the Revolution for the interests of English, Scottish and Irish Catholic émigrés that Bordley's attitude in these letters appears practical to the point of sanguinity. It would be a mistake to regard his perspective as typical of the *mentalité* of his time. His rather

⁶¹ Bordley to Fryer, October 12 1793, LC/C724.

⁶² *Ibid.* This is Gregory Stapleton DD (1748-1802) who was president at St Omer and later Vicar Apostolic of the midland district. See article by D. Milburn in the *ODNB*.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26300>

⁶³ B. Ward, 'Douai', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909).

Retrieved October 14, 2020 from NewAdvent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05138a.htm>

stark pragmatism seems to have been much influenced by the stated primary purpose of his vocation, as well as his approach to his work. Bordley regarded the principle aim of his career as the provision of priests to serve the mission in his district. It was an aim that he pursued in a practical and stoical manner. Inevitably, when he observed the events across the English Channel, he was alarmed at the dangers posed to individuals and the loss of resources, but his response was practical rather than emotional. He could perhaps be forgiven for reasoning that others less responsible for mitigating the damage could afford the luxury of a more passionate reaction, he on the other hand could permit himself no such privilege.

Bordley's despairing tone with regard to the situation in France notwithstanding, it appears that he had previously taken some practical and bold measures to address the problem of priest shortage in England, measures that, although ultimately fruitless, nevertheless demonstrated a good deal of audacity and foresight. He let Fryer know that since the English College in Rome had been of little use after the Italians had taken charge of it at the suppression of the Jesuits, he had made some efforts to recover it. The Irish Collegio Romano was in a similar situation. Here too, after 1773 the Jesuits had been replaced by local secular clergy and controversy over their appointment remained a feature of college life.⁶⁴ Bordley told Fryer that, some years previously he had drawn up a list of arguments to prove the English title to the College as well as the propriety of having English masters teach there. This done he had sent his petition to Bishop James Talbot, 'desiring him to lay my arguments before his Holiness.' The bishop obliged and remarkably was successful in procuring an assurance in 1783 from the College for Propaganda that after the death of the incumbent

⁶⁴ Chambers, 'Introduction', 15.

Italian rector they would have an English one.⁶⁵ After this, in 1792, Bordley wrote to his ‘beloved disciple’ Bishop John Douglas pressing another point that the masters teach in the same way that they do at Douai, Lisbon and Valladolid. The same year Douglas answered him that, ‘he fear’d it would be a difficult matter to compass it, as the Propaganda had as good an opinion of their Roman masters’ teaching as we have of ours.’ Bordley responded that whilst he had no doubt that the Italian priests were good to qualify priests for Italy where they had ‘not troubles with heretics,’ they were of little use in preparing priests for the English mission.⁶⁶ In 1797 the Protector, Cardinal Baschi, wrote to Bishop Douglas notifying him that the Rector was about to resign. However, history was not to favour the petitioners, before they could replace him Rome was invaded by the French and the College was seized. The College did not reopen again until 1818.⁶⁷

The Distance Manager.

Even in his first letter to Fryer, Bordley gave every indication that he had no intention of being a sleeping partner in their proposed business arrangement. His first piece of ‘advice’ involved the vexed issue of pocket money. He told Fryer that when he ran a school he clothed, paid school fees and boarded his students and after that allowed the 2d per month. He adds that after he had provided them with knives, garters, buckles and handkerchiefs there was little else that they required. All, he says were ‘used alike,’ whether sons of gentlemen or

⁶⁵ Anthony Laird, ‘The English College, Rome under Italian secular Administration, 1773-1798’, *British Catholic History* 14, no. 2 (1977): 127-47. Charles Cronin, ‘The English College in Rome’, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 5. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). 14 Oct. 2020 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05472b.htm>>.

⁶⁶ Bordley to Fryer, September 20 1793, LC/C720.

⁶⁷ Cronin, ‘English College.’

otherwise. Not to do so would allow jealousy and discontent to creep into the house.⁶⁸ Experience had also taught him that it was possible to lose students to the religious orders if the right balance was not struck. Giving a piece of cautionary advice to Banister he writes of a monk he calls Mr Raylor from Preston who supplied a boy with a pension to study at Douai. His father was supposed to provide the boy's pocket money but was unable when 'he failed in the world.' Consequently, the young student was unable to continue so that Mr Raylor was able to poach him for one of the houses of his order. Bordley points out the crucial difference between secular and religious approaches to maintaining their charges.

At the monks they provide students with everything they want & allow them to have no money in their keeping, their parents don't need to send a farthing. Jesuits follow the same rule. If we did this we might make three priests out of the money we spend on two.⁶⁹

Bordley would have been aware that the comparatively comfortable training student experienced with the regulars was only part of the problem. English clerical students had long been susceptible to poaching because the Jesuits and Benedictines could promise a more alluring life on the mission and consequently their members were always going to be more attractive recruiting sergeants.⁷⁰

Bordley's attempts to steer the course of College affairs went far beyond the limits of pastoral concern for his own students. Rather an unusual issue with him was the lack of wine at

⁶⁸ Bordley to Fryer, June 21 1784, LC/C611.

⁶⁹ Bordley to Banister, July 1 1784, LMC A/1/21.

⁷⁰ Simon Johnson, *English College at Lisbon from 1622-1761: A Missionary College from the Reformation to the Age of Enlightenment*. Ph.D Thesis, York University (2006), 284-5.

breakfast. In the first instance he advises Fryer that although he is not an advocate of luxuries, he feels that a little wine would take the rawness from the water. He goes on to remind him of St Paul's advice to Timothy, '*Noli adhuc aquam bibere, sed modic vino utere, propter stoachum et frequentes tuas infirmitates.*'⁷¹ The issue seems to have had a peculiar hold on Bordley and his endorsement of wine at breakfast is a refrain which he continues to the end of his correspondence with Fryer. In 1795 he wrote to the President that it is the practice of Valladolid, and they never have to send a boy home sick in the breast or stomach. He adds,

I allow water alone might do well enough for such as follow some working business, or travelling on journeys; but no man can convince me that it will do well for persons that are immediately to sit to their studie.⁷²

Bordley was also interested in having a hand in the formation of the seminarians. Early in his relationship with Fryer in 1787 he asked him to enquire from a student named Wagstaff what books he is using for Humanities, Figures, Syntax, Grammar, Poetry and Rhetoric. He lets the President know that he may be of some assistance in this direction since he has been in the business of schooling for above three score years.⁷³ A short time later, he was sending the College a manuscript which he found at a friend's house in Preston. This was a version of a text that he had made great use of himself at Douai which he called *Contraction of the Sacraments*. According to Bordley, this book, which had been copied down by a contemporary seminarian of his called John Moore, explained all that was necessary with regard to their administration. He maintained that this work was, 'the most necessary part of

⁷¹ No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:23).

⁷² Bordley to Fryer, July 5 1795, LC/C744.

⁷³ Bordley to Fryer, May 1 1787, LC/C643.

Divinity to make a good missionary for our country.’ He never lost his enthusiasm for this text and in 1793 he was advising Fryer and his masters to use their ‘shamefully long’ vacation in order to copy and bind the *Contraction* so that the philosophy students will be able to take it with them into their divinity studies. It was his opinion that, ‘no difficulty can occur to a priest in regard of the sacraments, but what may be resolved by it.’⁷⁴ A year later he sent over by ship from Liverpool ‘the whole course of Douay College Divinity’, which had again been written down by Moore who had found it difficult to keep up with the master due to his ‘heavy, slow disposition.’⁷⁵ In addition to this, he requested that the older boys be assigned to the newer students to help them with their study.⁷⁶ In spite of his favouring the Lisbon College over other institutions he frequently compared their study with the latter in unfavourable terms. Among other things he bewailed the fact that at Lisbon the students training was over in four years whilst at Douai and the Jesuit College they receive six years with two months less annual vacation. In addition, the other Colleges taught Greek as well as Latin.⁷⁷ Aside from Classical languages, on a more mundane level Bordley placed enormous stock in English language development since it was a common complaint of families of boys returning from their continental studies that their English was poor.

On the other hand, he was decidedly unhappy when he heard that boys were keen to pursue activities that he regarded as frivolous distractions. When he discovered that a student named Jack Wharton had requested various joinery tools from his parents he categorically forbid them to send them out telling them, ‘I did not send him to be a joiner, but to get learning to

⁷⁴ Bordley to Fryer, October 12 1793, LC/C724.

⁷⁵ Bordley to Fryer. August 8 1788, LC/C651; Bordley to Fryer, August 22 1788, LC/C652.

⁷⁶ Bordley to Fryer, Feast of the Assumption 1787, LC/C644.

⁷⁷ Bordley to Fryer, April 20 1792, LC/C706.

make him a good priest.’⁷⁸ Bordley’s attempted moratorium on extra-curricular activities was not limited to practical subjects, when two boys requested casting (arithmetic) books Bordley was far from acquiescent, calling them ‘blockheads’ he instructed Lisbon that their rooms ought to be regularly searched and any such material seized and burnt.⁷⁹ Clearly anxious that he should get a return on his investment he also told Fryer to examine individual boys now and then, ‘And if after several examinations and trials he has no vocation to our trade... pack him off and I’ll send you another in his stead.’⁸⁰ In 1790 he learned that one of his charges by the name of Greenough had requested that his brother send money to hire donkeys in order, as Bordley put it, ‘to ride tantara-rara’ about the country when at the College’s rural retreat. His sponsor is far from impressed calling them ‘two-legg’d asses’ or as St Jerome might say ‘*bipedes asellus*.’⁸¹

Despite the rough terminology that Bordley employed with regard to his ‘cattle’ there is a good deal of evidence of affection and what at times amounted to an almost parental disposition. This would sometimes express itself in terms of discipline as he orders Fryer to ‘rap my cattle over the fingers,’ if they fell into debt, explaining that to do so is ‘a sure sign of a knavish disposition.’ He goes on to warn the ‘careless rascals’ of the consequences if they go into arrears, ‘I will disown them, as Bastards- slips unworthy of my notice.’⁸² However, if he was ever harsh in this respect, he was at the same time careful to let them know via their President that he took seriously his duty of care, ‘tell my lads if they want anything they shall

⁷⁸ Bordley to Fryer, Jan 17 1788, LC/C646.

⁷⁹ Bordley to Fryer, April 20 1792, LC/C706.

⁸⁰ Bordley to Fryer, 1787, LC/C648.

⁸¹ Bordley to Fryer, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

⁸² Bordley to Fryer, June 26 1795, LC/C741.

be furnished with everything, if it is in my power to help them to it, that I would wish for if I was in their situation.’⁸³ On occasions this oversight was extended to individual cases. In one instance he expresses his concern for a certain student he calls Mr Ashton who gets up early and sits up at night to study. He instructs him to do neither urging him instead to take recreational walks around the city. His motto he adds is,

I would rather have a lad return home from college with a sound head and a sound body with less stock of learning; than to return with crackt brains and a shatter’d constitution with greater stock of learning.⁸⁴

He also held them in high regard and there are instances when he betrays real affection. In a letter accompanying three boys he lets the President know that they are most dear to him, ‘*eo quod in senectute meae generi meos*’ (because there in old age will be my family). He adds, ‘Our B. saviour had three favourite apostles; Peter, James and John; and I send you here three favourite lads.’⁸⁵ He was not only often proud of them, but he made sure to pass on his fulsome, and sometimes self-deprecating, praise. Writing to Fryer he instructs him, ‘You’ll be pleased to tell my two-legg’d Cattle, that everyone of their performances without exception please me exceedingly...at their age and with the same stock of learning that I have, I could not compose a letter fit to be compared to any of them.’ In particular, he is impressed by one student who wrote that he came last in class in the Christmas exam, whereupon he asked for one of Bordley’s elder students to be his tutor and achieved second place in the next exam. Bordley was moved to write, ‘But my mind, who pretends to be a mighty wise Cricket, says

⁸³ Bordley to Fryer, July 11 1794, LC/C730.

⁸⁴ Bordley to Fryer, July 5 1795, LC/C744.

⁸⁵ Bordley to Fryer, August 1792, LC/C712.

that James Brown is far the best of them. Her reason is, because he speaks of himself with so much humility, sincerity, simplicity etc.’⁸⁶

Bordley also made a good deal of effort to involve himself with the building projects which were taking place at the end of the eighteenth century in order to mitigate the loss of the French colleges. During this time £7,000 was spent extending the Lisbon College from its twenty-five-student capacity to forty, for the most part drawing on funds raised by Fryer and also supplied by the Misericordia of Rio de Janeiro.⁸⁷ In 1790 he was told by one of his students of plans to add another storey to the College. Once more Bordley had strong feelings on the matter and after consulting with several ‘discreet men’ he urged the President to build a wing instead, reminding him of the devastating earthquake in 1755 and pressing him to remain on a single level.⁸⁸ Two years later it seems that the extension had been completed but only by overspending causing Fryer to turn once more to his benefactor in Lancashire via whom he sent a rather desperate appeal to the Northern district for financial assistance. The reply contained what by now had become a trademark of Bordley’s approach as he roundly castigated the President advising him that he would have been better to have read Luke 14 before he began his work. After this ticking off he became more amenable, assuring Fryer that he would take care to read his petition at their annual meeting before adding a pessimistic

⁸⁶ Bordley to Fryer, October 12 1793, LC/C724.

⁸⁷ Croft, *Historical Account*, 102. The Misericordia is a state charity or custodian of pious works originating in medieval Portugal. The Misericordia owned the College since its founder, Dom Pedro Coutinho, had wanted his work to be kept in trust for the good of the faith.

⁸⁸ Bordley to Fryer, March 10 1790, LC/C674.

warning about the likelihood of success, ‘tho I fear they cannot do much for you.’⁸⁹ Fryer had obviously urged Bordley to extend his appeal to the local Catholic gentry, but the letter is even less optimistic about this enterprise as he says that he has no acquaintance with the country squires. Besides, he adds,

I know no good they would do either you or me, being mostly a pack of worthless fellows, several having shut their estates, and the rest having nothing to spare. And as the greater sort set an example, the inferior sort shut their small estates and effects in drunkenness and extravagance as fast as they can. I call drunkenness the Roman Catholic distemper, they being more addicted to it than any people whatever, at least in our part of the country.⁹⁰

Bordley had reason to be sceptical, the deteriorating condition of this class, which had been so important to the welfare of post-Reformation English Catholicism, was a cause of serious concern. In 1791 there were only seven Catholic peers left. Between 1754-90 seven members of the House of Commons renounced Catholicism.⁹¹ The great Benedictine historian, J. C. H. Aveling described a situation in the eighteenth century in which nine apostasies, and eight natural extinctions were regarded by the Catholic population as ‘abnormal and horrific.’⁹² However, regardless of this alarming decline Bordley’s reply seems deliberately pessimistic,

⁸⁹ Bordley to Fryer, March 16 1792, LC/C702.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Alexander Lock, ‘Catholicism, Apostasy and Politics in late Eighteenth-Century England. The case of Sir Thomas Gascoigne and Charles Howard, Earl of Surry’, *British Catholic History* 30 no. 2 (2010): 275.

⁹² J. C. H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 258.

having more to do with making a point than anything concerning what might be raised as he was evidently annoyed that his building advice had not been taken. In 1792 he wrote to Fryer to let him know that his appeal at the clergy meeting in Preston, perhaps buoyed by the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Act the previous year, had raised £26 15s 6d. Tellingly, he was less successful with the gentry raising only £5 5s from a Charles Stanley, ‘the only person in my neighbourhood that can afford anything.’⁹³

This makes an interesting comparison with the Vicar General of the London district, James Barnard’s derisive response to the College’s appeal. In a letter to Fryer, he lets him know in sardonic tones that whilst his request that the faithful contribute to the upkeep of the colleges might seem reasonable to the ‘men of piety’ his committee would not only not contribute but they would oppose his scheme. Interestingly, he indicates that the cause of this hostility to the appeal is a tension between the English Church and the continental colleges.

Perhaps it may not be rash judgment to think that there are some one or more who would wish all your establishments abroad utterly broken up. I ground this idea on their determined and constant opposition to the bishops. As to what you say, that their contributions would become a seed of blessings, I am confident there are some who would laugh at the persons who would make use of that as an argument to induce them to it.⁹⁴

⁹³ Bordley to Fryer, September 27 1792, LC/C713.

⁹⁴ Barnard to Fryer, March 19 1793, LC/C717. James Barnard had been President of the College 1776-82 and had been largely responsible for putting it on a sounder economic and managerial footing. This may have also contributed to his reluctance to contribute if he regarded the issue as hinged on mismanagement. Croft, *Historical Account*, 91-3.

Bordley's surliness aside, his active support of the Lisbon College was in stark contrast to the attitude of some of his contemporaries and it appears to be one of his most noticeable idiosyncrasies that he was often more generous in deed than in word. It is worth noting indications of a trend at this time as two fund raising campaigns in Dublin for the Irish College in Lisbon in the years 1782 and 1789 had raised £415, but as in Lancashire, as traditional sources of financial support were failing new suppliers were found among the newly prosperous urban class of merchants and businessmen.⁹⁵

In 1793, Barnard wrote to Fryer that whilst Bordley has sent a collection of funds for the finishing of the College building, he is far from enamoured with the proposed observatory.

He finds very great fault with your design to erecting an observatory on the top of your house; he says it will distract the minds of your students, make them lose their time: put you to expenses: and introduce a relaxation of discipline into your house.⁹⁶

The addition of scientific instruments was by no means unusual, even in colleges with tight purse strings. At a similar time, a student in the Irish College in Salamanca wrote that not only did they have an excellent library but also microscopes and astronomical instruments.⁹⁷ Later that year Bordley provided some forthright advice concerning the astrological venture

⁹⁵ Thomas O' Connor, 'The domestic and international roles of Irish overseas Colleges, 1590-1800', in L. Chambers and T. O'Connor, eds. *College Communities abroad. Education, Migration and Catholicism in Early Modern Europe* (2018), 105.

⁹⁶ Barnard to Fryer, March 19 1793, Agents Account Papers 3, LC/C717.

⁹⁷ Henchy, 'Irish College', 224.

when he told Fryer, ‘I think the best work you can do will be to demolish it, as you may do so with less expense than you can finish it.’⁹⁸

On other occasions, Bordley would adopt a censorious tone with Fryer over his management of students. In 1795 it appears that the President had sent home a student named Thomas Haydoe who had been accepted at Lisbon on the recommendation of Bordley after fleeing Douai. In an irascible communication Bordley lets Fryer know that he regrets, ‘...that I have thrown away above £300 upon boys in your college in which [I] might as well have thrown into the sea.’ He goes on to say that all the boys he has sent have previously been tested for their ability and disposition in his own school. He reminds Fryer that his duty as College President was to watch over his charges and by friendly council halt inclinations that might prove to be their ruin. He confesses that if this conduct had not been followed by Richard Challoner at Douai, then he himself would have gone home, ‘... in quest of a better education.’⁹⁹ For good measure he adds,

In one word it is my opinion that no person who seriously reflects on the great sums of charitable money spent upon boys at college, or upon the great want of labourers in the vineyard of the Lord will ever dismiss a boy until he has tried every means possible to reclaim him.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Bordley to Fryer, September 20 1793, LC/C720. The ambitious aim to have a functioning observatory was fulfilled, though the desire to appoint a full-time astronomer was later abandoned. Croft, *Historical Account*, 104.

⁹⁹ Bordley to Fryer, June 1795, LC/C760.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Bordley's desire to influence affairs in Portugal extended much further than the business of the College. In 1790 he was at his most Quixotic after he had learned that the Queen of Portugal was intending to set up a 'seminary' for the training of doctors in 'physic and surgery.' The question remained whether to establish the college in Edinburgh or Paris. Regardless of this being outside the scope of his expertise, Bordley was insistent that he had something important to contribute to the matter. He confidently told Fryer that Paris was better for surgery, though he was generous enough to add that the Scots may be as good at 'physic' as the French, or even better, 'for ought I know.' He goes on to instruct that Jerome Allen, at that time a superior of the College, be sent to the Court to communicate with the Queen in Portuguese what may be good for her and her subjects, being sure to add it comes from a venerable old man who has served his country fifty years.¹⁰¹ There then follows a lengthy description of the benefits of Paris as well as a warning that there they will be in less danger of losing their religion and therefore maintain, 'more grace than either Huguenots or Jansenists, or take up Voltaire's or Rousseau's religion [Deism].'¹⁰²

Jealousy and Competition among the English Districts

Complaining in a sharp letter to Fryer in 1794 about the contract that Bordley had set up with the College superiors, Barnard laments that for several years past the Lancashire priest had been sending boys to Lisbon, paying their pensions for five years, and then allowing the College to pay for their remaining training. He informs Fryer that, 'This contract, Sir, is the ground not only of a great many murmurs, but also of a great injustice by violating the rights

¹⁰¹ Jerome Allen was born in London to a Portuguese diplomat named Antony Gomez and an English mother. He was therefore bi-lingual. Croft, *Historical Account*, 79.

¹⁰² Bordley to Fryer, September 22 1790, LC/C681.

of several individuals.’¹⁰³ He queries Fryer’s claim that Bordley only has nine students at the College when he himself claims that he has thirteen. He goes on to recall the President to the fact that some years previously he had passed on Thomas Talbot’s complaint that Lisbon had not sent any priests to his district and now he has learnt from Bordley himself that he has sent two more boys out which will bring the total number of his candidates to thirteen. Barnard reminds him that there are four districts to supply and that the College could maintain only as many as twenty-six students and that therefore those sent by Bordley are ‘double the number’ of the proportion belonging to any other district. A clearly incensed Barnard asks Fryer where he could possibly find the money to pay for Bordley’s students without ‘violating the rights of individuals’ since the endowment given by the Founder would scarcely support the superiors and repair the house. Besides the benefactors who established the funds also reserved to themselves and their heirs the right of nomination to pensions. Barnard had become the President of the College in 1776 and had seen first-hand the damage caused by the great earthquake twenty-one years previously; he concedes that the College had been through straitened times due to unavoidable losses, but it had also been damaged by a mismanagement that he had inherited. However, since this was no longer the case, he points out that ‘natural justice’ and Fryer’s compact with the founders of the pensions should allow the present nominators to resume their rights. Adding however, that this is impossible since Bordley has already filled the house, so that what was intended for the ‘general good of all England is now almost turned into a College for the Northern District.’ Whilst he is prepared to concede that Bordley is ‘as well qualified as any man in England’ to choose such boys, nevertheless ‘this good quality ...does not authorize him to deprive me or any other Nominator.’ Barnard adds by way of a solution that if Bordley were willing to allow his boys

¹⁰³ Barnard to Fryer, London July 1 1794, Agent’s Account Papers, LC/A1/5/12.

to be sent either to the London or Western districts then he would personally be ready to receive two of them.¹⁰⁴ A year later Barnard was writing again after being told that Bordley's boys were paid for after five years of study out of three funds, the first from a woman named Anna Perez, the second from a family named Nicholson, and the third was the Queen's pension.¹⁰⁵ Barnard acknowledges that the right to nomination to the first two resides with the College, however he warmly asserts that this is not the case with the third. With regard to the Queen's bequest, '... every body here thinks that it must certainly have been the intention of her Majesty that every District in England should receive an equal share of her benevolence.' Concluding his case, he acknowledges that whilst the President has insisted that he wishes to deprive no man of his right to nominate, the names of those entitled to do so are well recorded and '... no vague Pretender should be permitted to use such a right.'¹⁰⁶

Barnard clearly had a point, after the demise of Douai the Lisbon College had taken on an even greater importance as a source of English priests and it would have been imperative to defend the right to benefit from its existence. On the other hand, Bordley was a reliable source of a considerable amount of much needed revenue, and it is easy to see why Fryer was keen to patronise him. There is evidence that Barnard's criticisms may have hit home since a letter one year later from Thomas Caton in Lancashire is a stinging rebuke of Jerome Allen. Caton's complaint concerned a priest named Webster who had newly arrived in the North though it seems only after Allen, Fryer and several others had pressured him to go to London

¹⁰⁴ Barnard to Fryer, London July 1 1794, Agent's Account Papers, LC/A1/5/12.

¹⁰⁵ The second from the College benefactor, Francis Nicholson had in fact been left specifically for the education of boys from his native Lancashire. The third is from Catherine of Braganza.

¹⁰⁶ Barnard to Fryer, January 13 1795, Agent's Account Papers, LC/A1/5/13.

instead. Caton writes that on hearing this ‘we thought you certainly must all be mad.’

Bordley, he adds, is only kept from falling out entirely with Lisbon through the exhortation of himself and other priests. He goes on to demand a letter of assurance before their next clergy meeting with the threat that if this is not received, he will petition the bishops and have the President removed.¹⁰⁷ A threat which was in fact empty since, as Allen would have been well aware, the College was a Pontifical institute was under the power of the Holy Office.

Simon Bordley, *praemisit in tempore*.

In 1798 a Catholic landowner called James Orrell in the neighbourhood of Aughton requested that the Lisbon College send over a priest called James Dennet who had been their professor of Classics to be an assistant to the obviously failing Bordley.¹⁰⁸ The College obliged and Dennet arrived the same year. In a letter to Jerome Allen, the new arrival told him that in Lancashire, ‘I found a poor decrepit, deafish, dim sighted old man considerably impaired in his intellectual faculties.’ The new arrangement did not get off to an auspicious start. Dennet wrote that after he was welcomed with civility, he asked the next morning for a few days leave in order to collect his belonging at Liverpool whereupon, Bordley lost his temper calling him, ‘after his old fashioned way a thousand abusive names.’ Shortly after he dismissed Dennet saying that his health was much improved and that he could not afford to keep him. Only the intervention of Orrell prevented Dennet leaving and he was retained on the salary of £10 per year.¹⁰⁹ However, their relationship did not improve and shortly after Bordley’s death Dennet unburdened himself once more to Jerome Allen describing his

¹⁰⁷ T. Caton to Allen, Early 1796, Agent’s Account Papers, LC/C751.

¹⁰⁸ Barnard to Fryer, August 14 1798, LC/C779. James Dennet had been made procurator of the College in 1795 and the next year Classical master.

¹⁰⁹ Dennet to Allen, November 23 1798, LC/C784.

situation as a war in which he had two tough enemies in Bordley and his apparently infamous housekeeper 'Old Grace.' Dennet wrote that whilst Bordley was the more formidable she was the more implacable, spiteful and peevish. He tells Allen that the old oak trees of the neighbourhood could bear witness to the fact that he often returned to the house with as much horror as if he had been entering a house of correction.¹¹⁰ The new incumbent clearly struggled with the forceful personality of Grace and it is obvious from his letter that she exercised considerable control over the domestic arrangements and access to Bordley himself. In fact, Grace offers us a glimpse of an under-discussed class of important people in the history of Catholicism: that is the priest's housekeeper. Anna Battigelli has drawn our attention to the important role of women in eighteenth-century English Catholicism, as they advanced the cause as mothers, wives, caretakers, and educators.¹¹¹ This is a significant and overlooked point, what was happening domestically among women was surely as crucial to the survival of Catholicism as that which was happening publicly among men. Battigelli may have added to her list of roles that of priest's housekeeper. 'Old Grace' is an example of a Catholic woman wielding considerable power and influence at a parochial level. The potential strength of Catholic women did not go unnoticed, there is evidence that some quarters in the Church were threatened. When in 1791 a petition was gathered for a greater voice for laymen in the Catholic Church, a mocking counterpart was put forward from a

¹¹⁰ To Jerome Allen, Lisbon from James Dennet Aughton, Dec 15 1800, LC/C801.

¹¹¹ Anna Battigelli, 'Eighteenth-Century Women and English Catholicism', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 31, no. 1/2 (2012): 10.

fictitious committee of 'Ladies, Widows, Wives and Spinsters; Housekeepers, Cooks, Housemaids and other Female persons' demanding similar rights.¹¹²

In the end Dennet offered this summary of Bordley's character.

Mr Bordley had always been [of] an odd, churlish, cynick disposition. He might perhaps be admired for his virtues; but he could never have been loved for his kindness, good nature and affability. Tho' I have often heard him say he was always reckoned a good natured thing. By himself perhaps, not by others.¹¹³

It is perhaps unjust to judge Bordley by reports of what he became in old age and sickness. However, there is sufficient evidence from earlier in his life that he was never an easy person to deal with. He appears to have lived a busy but friendless existence, though it was not entirely without displays of emotion. Fryer had been informed of Bordley's death in a letter the previous year that simply adds without comment his name to a list of five brethren who had recently died, there is no record of the President's reaction.¹¹⁴ Bordley would have been a useful rather than a close companion. He was highly successful in what he called his trade, but he lacked the diplomacy that would have made him an equally successful Churchman. It is undeniable that he served the mission in the north of England exceptionally well throughout his long life which spanned much of the eighteenth century. It is also doubtless that in this respect his work of furnishing and sustaining the training of students at Douai and Lisbon was his single greatest endeavour in respect to his vocation. In 1790, at the age of

¹¹² M. D. R. Leys, *Catholics in England 1559-1829. A Social History* (London: Longmans, 1961), 141. This petition is contained in *The Month*, February 1960.

¹¹³ From Dennet to Allen, Dec 15 1800. LC/C801.

¹¹⁴ James Barnard to Fryer, November 3 1799, LC/C794.

eighty-one, he told Fryer that he had always endeavoured to serve his country to the best of his powers, 'our nurseries abroad seem'd to me to claim my chiefest care, as God's true worship and welfare of our country chiefly depends upon them.'¹¹⁵

Fr Bordley gets a rare mention by John Bossy who described him as giving 'a clear impression of the secure status, down-to-earth concerns and unforced conscientiousness' of a type of priest that was 'becoming common' at the first half of the proceeding nineteenth century. Bossy goes on to describe him as a '*laudator temporis acti*' (one who looks to better past times).¹¹⁶ This is an entirely accurate assessment of one facet of his personality, however the Bordley we encounter in these letters, with his business acumen, his great sense of parochial duty and his insistence on the importance of education as a foundation stone for future development is also paradoxically *praemisit in tempore* (ahead of his time). These qualities that he displays were all features of a type of Catholic churchman who were servicing a distinctly different English Church in the century after Bordley's. The paradox lies in the fact that the great innovators of the nineteenth century were able to adapt to an ever-changing Church because they looked back to what they perceived to be better times, allowing them to draw with confidence on their own heritage. Bossy describes them as recapturing the 'buoyancy of earlier years' by drawing on two centuries of experience which furnished them with energy and devotion. He goes on to claim that their chief attribute was a close relationship between prayer and active service, characteristics of a Counter-Reformation that was now resurfacing.¹¹⁷ Bossy holds Bordley up as an example of a cleric

¹¹⁵ Bordley to Fryer, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

¹¹⁶ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, 263.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 263-4.

that appeared in Lancashire and Yorkshire in the eighteenth century as forerunners of a later more congregational priest.

We can see this most clearly when we consider the two main challenges that faced the nineteenth-century English Catholics. In the first instance there was a need to improve the government of their Church, something that was considerably augmented by the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850. It is worth noting that the innovating bishops of this century were ultramontanes, who like Bordley took their inspiration from what they regarded as better past times. They wrested the reins of leadership from the Catholic gentry and in doing so played a major role in allowing the clergy to refocus their ministerial obligations on their parishioners; a development Bossy called ‘a tonic for the priesthood.’¹¹⁸ From what we know of Bordley’s curmudgeonly independence there is no doubt he would have rubbed up against any authority, secular or episcopal, yet in many respects Simon Bordley anticipated the new freedom that allowed for a parish-facing priesthood. He was a rural cleric, but his letters seldom mention his neighbouring landlords, except to complain that they are of little use to his enterprises. Our focus here has been on education and space here does not permit us to draw on the many illustrations from his letters of his industry at a parochial level, but it is enough to say his service would not have been out of place in the century that followed him.¹¹⁹

Education was the second major challenge that faced the nineteenth-century Church, and it is in this respect that Bordley shows himself to be preeminent as a *praemisit in tempore*. It is probably true to surmise that Bordley would not have anticipated the episcopal attitude that

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Bordley’s vivid descriptions of his parochial life are a fascinating insight into eighteenth-century life in the Catholic Northern District and will be the focus of future work.

that was far from sorry to see the demise of the rather too independent continental colleges, however in most other major developments and pronouncements of this era, we find echoes of Bordley's own concerns. Faced with a rapidly expanding Catholic population the training of candidates for the priesthood became a priority. Almost immediately after the restoration of the hierarchy they expressed a desire to establish a constitution for the three seminaries, just as Bordley had attempted single-handedly to do with Douai. A synod of 1852 set about providing guidance for the running of the colleges which essentially attempted to set up what Peter Doyle described as an '*hortus conclusus*' (enclosed garden).¹²⁰ Deep suspicion of the World underpinned much of what they advocated, such as their warning against unsuitable, worldly reading which wasted the time and energy of the students. It also set out an ideal scenario in which seminarists would be isolated from contemporary developments and taught apart from secular students.¹²¹ All of which would have been applauded by Bordley. Outside of the seminaries secular Catholic education was also developing in the charity schools on the basis of the Lancastrian Plan, which employed monitorial teaching in which more able pupils taught other students. The motto of Joseph Lancaster, who had formulated this system, was '*Qui docet, discit*' (Who teaches, learns).¹²² It was a system that the letters above had successfully pressed upon the Lisbon College in the previous century. With all these improvements in mind it is hardly surprising that there was an ever-pressing demand on

¹²⁰ Peter Doyle, 'The Education and training of Roman Catholic Priests in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 35, no. 2, April (1984): 219.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* In fact educating the seminarians separately from secular students was to prove prohibitively expensive.

¹²² Mora Dickson, *Teacher Extraordinary: Joseph Lancaster, 1778-1838* (London: Book Guild, 1986): 233–56.

clergy to raise money to build schools, an understandably more taxing challenge and it is not surprising that it was not until late in the century that sufficient funds had been gathered to improve the religious and secular education systems.¹²³ In this respect, perhaps surpassing all others, Bordley's entrepreneurial talents set a precedent.

John Bossy succinctly described the fundamental difference between Bordley's Church and that of the next century. In 1770 the community was dominated by secular aristocracy, in 1850 their rule was superseded by the clergy.¹²⁴ Bordley was in many ways a harbinger of these developments, the great irony of the nineteenth-century revolution in ecclesiastical government was that it was by nature retrospective, casting off the pervading cisalpine spirit it instead looked back to the glories of its Tridentine past. Our Lancashire priest possessed enormous levels of vitality and confidence because in just such a manner his vision of the future was based on an idealised image of the English Catholic past.

¹²³ Cheryl E. Yielding, *Emancipation and Renewal: English Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century*, PhD Thesis, Old Dominion University (1982), 103.

¹²⁴ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, 323.

