

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

Jack P. Cunningham*

*Reader in Ecclesiastical History, Bishop Grosseteste University,
Longdales Road, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN1 3DY, UK.
Email: jack.cunningham@bishopg.ac.uk*

Simon Bordley (1709-1799) was a Catholic priest of humble status in rural Lancashire for much of the eighteenth century. Despite his rural location and apparently humble status, he played an important part in supporting the Catholic seminaries in France and Portugal by supplying them with students, material goods and financial assistance. Bordley 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 offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of a churchman who laboured with an impressive level of entrepreneurial skill and independence. This article argues that Bordley defies the common image of the seigneurial Catholic curate in service primarily to a family of the landed gentry in the eighteenth century. 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.

Keywords: Simon Bordley, eighteenth century, Lisbon seminary, Northern district, Douai

Fr Simon George Bordley (1709-99) was an English secular priest who served the northern district in Lancashire for a remarkable sixty-four years. During that time, he was an industrious parish priest, an innovative educator and an energetic sponsor of seminarians.¹ This article draws primarily on Bordley’s own letters, principally, though not exclusively, those written to the English College in Lisbon, beginning in the 1780s when he was still serving actively as a parish priest in his mid-seventies. To these letters can be added many of the replies from his correspondents which survive. Bordley’s letters are written

* 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.

¹ John Westby Gibson, *Memoir of Simon Bordley, author of ‘Cadmus Britannicus’* (London: R. McCaskie, 1890). In addition to all this he is credited with inventing a system of shorthand, earning him the sobriquet, ‘Cadmus Britannicus.’ Cadmus was credited by the ancient Greeks with introducing to them the Phoenician alphabet.

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 those of his correspondents, his letters are more detailed in their discussion of matters of business, and 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 strikes the reader as honest (or at least anxious to present himself as such), 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 first-hand accounts of a highly important aspect of English Catholic history which has previously been somewhat neglected.

A Priest of the Northern District

Fr Bordley has been described by Victorian editors and scholars as an ‘able but eccentric’ secular Catholic priest of the Northern district.² We can learn much about his career from well-preserved letters of his own and of several of his correspondents which are housed in three locations. Firstly, the Lisbon archives, now held at Ushaw College, which received the archives and a good many artefacts of the Lisbon College at its closure in 1973. Secondly, the Lancashire Public Record Office at Preston has material among their collection of local letters and manuscripts. Thirdly, Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral Archives now house manuscripts relating to Lancashire clergy, including Bordley. These originated at St Joseph’s College at Upholland, which closed 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 will focus on the material relating to the major role Bordley played in sustaining the supply of boys for the secular seminaries of Douai in France and the English College in Lisbon in Portugal,³ a ‘business’ he always referred to as his ‘trade in two legged cattle’. In 1991, Michael Sharratt rightly pointed out that the Lisbon institution is little known even to those interested in post-Reformation English Catholicism, though it is worth noting that subsequently Simon Johnson has produced a fine study covering its foundation up to 1761.⁴ Bordley is a crucial, and as yet largely overlooked figure

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.

⁴ Michael Sharratt, *Lisbon College Register 1628-1813*, Catholic Record Society 72 (London: Catholic Record Society, 1991), vii; Simon Johnson, *The English College at Lisbon. From Reformation to Toleration* (Bath: Downside Abbey Press, 2014).

in the college's history. His correspondence offers us important primary source material on the history of the college. They also provide important personal accounts of the workings of a national church at a pivotal moment in its history. English Catholics were making their slow way from persecution, through emancipation, toward something like benign coexistence with the English state and their non-Catholic neighbours. Paul Longford has argued that the state's attitude was one of 'benevolent negligence', 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. Clerics like Bordley subvert the common image of the passive country chaplain of the eighteenth century: 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. The emphasis then moved away from service to the landed Catholic families toward the service of a parish: clergy took a role described by John Bossy as a 'congregational priest'.⁶

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 21 October, 1706.⁸ Simon Bordley was educated at Douai, in the year above Alban Butler (1710-73), on a pension provided by his father. His career to ordination at the seminary can be followed in the seventh college diary.⁹ He was ordained in 1734 and left on September 13 the following year.¹⁰ He served 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 established 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 (1716-68) set up his renowned Sedgley Park School in 1763, eighteen years before the Catholic Relief Act 1791 when, technically at least, the keeping of a

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.

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

⁸ Gibson, *Cadmus Britannicus*, 6.

⁹ *The Douay College Diaries: the Seventh Diary, 1715-1778*, Catholic Record Society 28 (London: Catholic Record Society, 1928), 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): 280-1.

school was still punishable by perpetual imprisonment. Turning his students over to the new school, Bordley grumbled that he had taken ‘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, near Liverpool, where he appointed a master and educated as many as eighty pupils at a time.¹³

In dealing with his financial affairs, Bordley had what appeared to others to be 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 house-breakers,’ and if anything happened to him his maid knew where it was. He cannot be induced to make a will.¹⁴

Notwithstanding this, he clearly had a shrewd head when it came to business. 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 furnished 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 (1739-1805), President of the English seminary in Lisbon, that in 54 years of missionary work he had, by ‘behaving as a serious priest ought,’ saved the Church and poor Catholics £7,000.¹⁷

The Trader in Changing Times

From 1780 onwards, Bordley began to shift his patronage from Douai toward Lisbon at a point in history that would prove crucially important to their future operations on the continent. The suppression of the Jesuits across Europe, culminating in the papal bull, *Dominus ac Redemptor* in 1773, placed the secular colleges under an even greater burden of responsibility for training priests for ministry in England. On 29 June 1784 a priest named John Sheppard wrote to Fryer, the President of Lisbon College, to let him know of Bordley. He reported that Bordley was proposing to furnish him with boys and was prepared

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

¹³ Gibson, *Memoir of Bordley*, 7.

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

¹⁵ Smith, ‘Bordley, Schoolmaster’, 285.

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

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

to pay £100 per boy, over five years, providing they agreed upon terms.¹⁸ Sheppard added, ‘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 went on to explain that Bordley wanted to end his relationship with the French seminary, since the students’ pocket money has been raised to such a level that it had 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 described himself to Fryer as a ‘great trader in two-legged cattle.’ He stated that though previously he had dealt exclusively with Douai, they had become extravagant with pocket money, with the result that parents refused to pay, claiming it was beyond their means. Bordley set 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 of the circumstances of Lancashire Catholics 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 his letter, Bordley seemed to repent of his initial assessment and presented a more sympathetic consideration, describing to Fryer Catholic families that have become excessively poor. If we accept Bordley’s account, it would seem the Catholic Relief Act 1778, which had allowed for the inheritance of land, had had little positive effect. He told Fryer of the great numbers of Catholics whose fathers had left their sons estates or tenements, only for the sons to have had to sell them since they could not renew the

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, 29 June 1784, LC/A1/4/2/50.

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

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

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

lease. Their only recourse, according to Bordley, 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 was clearly a vexed issue with Bordley, as some years later he informed Fryer that since he was a noted trader, he had many families applying to him from various parts, though frequently their application was 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’s preference was that Lisbon only train boys for the priesthood and not also have lay students, as was the case at Douai. He told Fryer that he had received a letter from Mr William Gibson (1738–1821), President of Douai, claiming that a ‘mixture’ is best ‘to make great men in both states, that they improve one another.’²⁵ Bordley could not agree: he informed 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 attributed to feasts and drinking bouts, and he added 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 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 Bordley was perhaps trying to salve his own conscience for breaking with his old school, or maybe he was smarting after feeling rejected by them. In any case, he used what he saw 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 (1725–1812) in 1784, he frankly asserted ‘The Douay Feasters & Burgundy drinkers are very improper

²³ Bordley to Fryer, 21 June 1784.

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

²⁵ William Gibson 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. Leo Gooch, ‘William Gibson (1738–1821)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*) online edn September 2004 [<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10642>] Accessed 18 June 2022.

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

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

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 said that the information that he had on developments at Douai came 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 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 relations was precipitated more than a decade earlier, when Bordley, in 1770 told a neighbouring priest, John Chadwick, that he judged it proper to turn his attention to Douai and make them some ‘sturdy laws.’ It is not clear whether Bordley completed and dispatched his laws, although there are a 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 (1753-1803), Vicar General of the London District and ex-President of the Lisbon College, to Fryer in 1795. Barnard begged leave to inform Fryer that before Barnard had entered into a contract with Bordley, Bordley had had a similar one with Douai, ‘but when the superiors had learnt by experience, what was the consequences thereof, they dissolved it.’ After that Bordley had appealed to Shepard at Valladolid who, despite his willingness to recommend him to others, foresaw the consequences and would not engage with him. It was only then, Barnard told Fryer, that he applied to Lisbon.³¹ On the other hand, if we are to believe the opinion of a contemporary priest Henry Rutter, a degree of snobbishness on the part of William Gibson may also have played a part. Rutter wrote to his uncle

²⁸ Bordley to Banister, no date, LMC, A/1/22. Banister was a Douai trained priest: Bordley had given him a reference for his pension to Douai in 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.

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

³¹ Barnard to Fryer, 13 January 1795, LC/A/1/5/13. For Barnard see Croft, *Historical Account*, 91-3.

expressing his admiration for Gibson, then the President, but lamenting that while he made himself agreeable to the gentry, he wished Gibson would show himself a little more so to persons of a country stamp, such as Bordley, whom he heard is displeased with Gibson. He advised 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

On Good Friday 1785, Bordley wrote to Fryer that he had received and been charmed by his letter. He was pleased that the President was maintaining the 'ancient discipline' in his house whilst every day religion 'decays more and more.' He added that he had been a 'missioner' for forty-nine years as well as a constant 'trader during most of that time.' He appraised Fryer of his present situation: whilst he intended to send him 'cattle,' he would have to postpone any such export since he did not want to expose them to the dangers of sea in the winter.³³ He set out his plan to send two boys to Lisbon and two to Valladolid, telling Fryer that they must make as many priests as they can: otherwise it would not be possible to fill the places vacated by the Jesuits, who had numbered thirty in Lancashire at the dissolution of the Society.³⁴ Bordley drove a hard bargain: in return for his funding, he demanded other pensions, including that of the Queen of Portugal's, for his boys. Had this been granted, this would have secured for the mission in Lancashire the pensions that the Queen had established for training English priests. This would later prove highly contentious, but Bordley pressed his point, insisting that if he were not able nominate to these, he would continue to 'trade' with Douai, though they 'allow their students all the liberties that unbridled youth can desire.' He made it clear that the mission had had a surfeit of this type and what they needed now was some Lisbonians or Vallasolletians 'trained up with better principles and more Christian notions.'³⁵ His low opinion of his *alma mater* never left him. In 1790, he expressed concern 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 was never shy of emphasising either his own abilities or the importance of his patronage. He asserted that his commitment to the college would have a beneficial impact beyond simply increasing student numbers. The previous dearth of boys meant

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

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

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

³⁵ Bordley to Fryer, Good Friday 1785, LC/C630.

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

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 assured Fryer that his well 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 Autumn 1785, Bordley informed Fryer that he had been offered ten boys that Spring, and pointed out the added benefit of doing business directly with him. If the college was to accept boys from other priests or bishops, who might send their nephews, these boys would be sent without the thorough examining of their capacities or inclinations that Bordley insisted on. Subsequently, if they proved to be ‘dunces’ then the College’s money would be lost. In contrast, Bordley stressed his vast experience and his 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 pointed out, even supposing his candidates were only equal to those of others, his came with 100 guineas a year and theirs with not one shilling.³⁸

It is not clear what Fryer made of Bordley’s bombast, but he did not 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. Valladolid, for example, had attained financial stability since it had inherited the wealth and resources of Madrid and Seville in 1767.³⁹ Lisbon, meanwhile, had poor relations with the Vicars Apostolic who favoured Douai. College agents found it difficult to secure patronage, meaning that they often had to make do with leftover candidates from the other colleges. At the same time, only rich members of the Catholic community in England could afford to 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 was 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

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

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

³⁹ Michael E. Williams, ‘St Alban’s College Valladolid and the events of 1767’, *Recusant History*, 20 (1957): 223-38.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *The English College*, 284-5, 346.

assess in 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 jewels.⁴¹

Bordley was clearly rattled by the implied criticism and a whole year later he added 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 other occasions Bordley provided more information about his own method of selecting likely candidates for training. This was not entirely inattentive to their background in that his preference was for the sons of the middling sort. In November 1786, he wrote:

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, he repeated this reference to Jeroboam in a letter which 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 cautioned Fryer that if he continued to work without him, he would be bound to receive more candidates like those of his rival, Robert Banister (d. 3 November 1812), who were 'almost safe to fail.' He went on to assert that if the President 'trades' directly with him, and not Banister or the 'Londoners,' he would provide Fryer 'with lads of a better stamp'; giving Fryer that a fuller house and also 'hopefuller' subjects. In addition, Bordley made it clear that he had four likely candidates at his school in Ince Blundell under an excellent master, and he intended to send them out at the end of the Summer as soon as the weather cooled. By way of asserting his credentials, he set out his former successes at Douai: three of his students had gone on to become doctors at Paris. They were now serving the mission and were the only doctors in the Northern division. Another, working in the North, was a Master of Art, having had to give up his doctorate due to ill health. Two further students, a Mr Southern and Mr Daniel, became vice-presidents at Douai. In addition, a Mr Willacy was governor of the Bishop's School (Sedgley Park), which Bordley asserted to be the greatest Catholic institution of its kind in England. 'Let Banister and the Londoners,' he added in a final flourish, 'shew you such a set as these.'⁴⁴ On the subject of his competitors, Bordley was not above

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

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

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

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

personal criticism. In another letter to Fryer, he painted 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 begged a pension for him from the College and his passage from Bordley.⁴⁵ Nor was Bordley beyond relating gossip: he passed on some scurrilous local chatter relating to a priest that had been one of Banister's boys. There was, he said, an individual from Valladolid lived with a gentleman not a mile away who was 'run mad of a clownish, impudent woman' with whom he met alone several times a day while pretending to teach her to read. He added, 'The town of Ormskirk and all the 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 correspondence, Bordley complained on several occasions of Fryer's negligence. The four boys mentioned previously by Bordley had been 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 lamented 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 middle was the safest way to go).' The finer cloth was liable to be torn to pieces because of their 'romping,' however, Bordley added, Fryer and the 'better sort' of his family (staff) were free to buy the best material.⁵⁰

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

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

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

⁴⁸ Bordley to Fryer, 1787, LC/C648.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

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

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 bad-tempered 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 1789, the National Assembly began its first attack on religion in France. Shortly afterwards, Bordley sent a hefty sum of £100 to Lisbon, 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 missioners, unless things take a better turn than they are likely to at present.⁵³

It seems that Bordley's apprehension was centred on property owned by the Lisbon College in Paris: in a following letter he asked Fryer if the 'rascally National Assembly' had seized any or part of their rents, or the interest owing on them.⁵⁴ These were tumultuous times for 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. 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 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, as indicated

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

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

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

⁵⁴ Bordley to Fryer, 22 September 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* 70, 278/9 (1981): 224.

by the press gangs that were active in London and Liverpool. This concern did not, however, extend to his personal business. He sent two boys overseas, '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 information since he mentioned that there is none to be had by conventional means. It is more than a possibility that his source was a Lancashire Benedictine, Henry Parker (d.1817), 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 told 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. Bordley reported: 'where they have taken their residence I do not know.' St Omer in Liège, which until 1773 had been the Jesuit College, was now in secular hands, and fared even worse. The French Conventionists had reported that a letter was found among them demonstrating that the college had been in correspondence with the Combined Armies.⁵⁹ On this 'pretence', Bordley, wrote, the French had imprisoned members of the college, though he was unclear if that meant only the superiors. Bemoaning the situation, he wrote, 'What they will do with them only time will tell.' Finally, he added 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 shared with Fryer the content of a letter that he had read from a friar named Harry Lovelady concerning the 'infidel French.' He notified Fryer that the friars had left Douai and marched two leagues to an old chateau. When French troops camped in the neighbourhood, six of the community there decided to escape, setting out with 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

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

⁵⁸ Cormac Begadon, 'Responses to Revolution: The Experiences of the English Benedictine monks in the French Revolution, 1789-93', *British Catholic History* 34/1 (2018): 108.

⁵⁹ The *Convention Nationale* was the revolutionary parliament.

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

in a field of beans till the soldiers were retired. In fine they got after many dangers to Orchies, where they got refreshment.⁶¹

Bordley went on to report that the President of St Omer, Gregory Stapleton (1748-1802), and other members of the College had been imprisoned and that he was 'in panic' about four colleagues that he had 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 at Doullens, along with six English Benedictines, as well as the President, staff and fifty-two students of St Omer. Stapleton was the first to be released and he got 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 noteworthy. It would be a mistake to regard his perspective as typical of the *mentalité* of his time. His rather 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. Although ultimately fruitless, they nevertheless demonstrated a good deal of audacity and foresight. He told Fryer that the English College in Rome had been of little use since it had been placed under Italian management following the suppression of the Jesuits, but 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

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

⁶² *Ibid.* Stapleton DD was president at St Omer and later Vicar Apostolic of the midland district. D. Milburn, 'Gregory Stapleton (1748-1802)', *ODNB*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26300> Accessed 15 May 2021.

⁶³ B. Ward, 'Douai', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909). from NewAdvent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05138a.htm> Accessed 14 October 2020.

over their appointment remained a feature of college life.⁶⁴ Bordley told Fryer that, some years previously, he had drawn up arguments to prove the English title to the college as well as the propriety of having English masters teach there. His petition was despatched to Bishop James Talbot (1726-90), '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 Italian rector the college would have an English one.⁶⁵ After this, in 1792, Bordley wrote to his 'beloved disciple', Bishop John Douglas (1743-1812), insisting that the masters teach in the same way that they do at Douai, Lisbon and Valladolid. 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. It did not reopen again until 1818.⁶⁷

The Distance Manager

From his first letter to Fryer, Bordley gave every indication that he had no intention of being a sleeping partner in their proposed 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 allowed them 2d per month. He added that after he had provided students with knives, garters, buckles and handkerchiefs there was little else that they required. All, he said, were 'used alike,' whether sons of gentlemen or 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. Sounding a cautionary note in a letter to Banister, Bordley wrote of a monk he called Mr Raylor

⁶⁴ Chambers, 'Introduction', 15.

⁶⁵ Anthony Laird, 'The English College, Rome under Italian secular Administration, 1773-1798', *Recusant History* 14, no. 2 (1977): 127-47. Charles Cronin, 'The English College in Rome', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, online version (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). 2020 [<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05472b.htm> Accessed 14 October 2021].

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

⁶⁷ Cronin, 'English College.'

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

from Preston who supplied a boy with a pension to study at Douai. The boy's father was supposed to provide his money but was unable when 'he failed in the world.' Consequently, the young student was unable to continue his studies, so that Mr Raylor was able to poach him for one of the houses of his order. Bordley pointed 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 students experienced with the regulars was only part of the problem. English clerical students had long been vulnerable 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. This was not least because the missionaries in the orders would almost certainly serve their time in supportive communities which in turn were more likely to attract lay endowments and consequently also tended to be comfortable.⁷⁰

Bordley's attempts to steer the course of college affairs went far beyond the limits of pastoral concern for his own students. A notable issue for him was the lack of wine at breakfast. In the first instance he advised Fryer that although he was not an advocate of luxuries, he felt that a little wine would take the rawness from the water. He reminded 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 seemed to have had a peculiar significance for Bordley, and his endorsement of wine at breakfast is a refrain which he continued 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 added: '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. In 1787, early in his relationship with Fryer, he asked him to enquire from a student named Wagstaff what books he was using for

⁶⁹ Bordley to Banister, 1 July 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.

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, 5 July 1795, LC/C744.

Humanities, Figures, Syntax, Grammar, Poetry and Rhetoric. He let the President know that he might have been of some assistance in this direction since he has been in the business of schooling for more than 60 years.⁷³ A short time later, Bordley sent the College a manuscript 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, and which he called *Contraction of the Sacraments*. According to Bordley, this book, which had been copied down by John Moore, a contemporary seminarian of his, explained all that was necessary with regard to their administration. He maintained that this work was, 'the most necessary part of Divinity to make a good missionary for our country.' He never lost his enthusiasm for this text and in 1793 he advised 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. He gave 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 'the whole course of Douay College Divinity', by ship from Liverpool. This 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, Bordley also requested that the older boys be assigned to the newer students to help them with their study.⁷⁶ Despite favouring the Lisbon College over other institutions, he frequently compared their study with the latter in unfavourable terms. Amongst other things, he bewailed the fact that at Lisbon the students' training was complete in four years whilst at Douai and the Jesuit College students received 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, Bordley 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 make him a good priest.'⁷⁸ Bordley's

⁷³ Bordley to Fryer, 17 May 1787, LC/C643.

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

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

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

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

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

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, 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. Bordley was 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 towards his students. This would sometimes express itself in terms of discipline: he ordered 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 went on to warn the ‘careless rascals’ of the consequences of going into arrears, ‘I will disown them, as Bastards—slips unworthy of my notice.’⁸² However, 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 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 occasion this oversight was extended to individual cases. In one instance, he expressed his concern for a certain student he called Mr Ashton, who got up early and sat up at night to study. He instructed him to do neither, urging him instead to take recreational walks around the city. He added: ‘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

There are instances when he betrayed real affection for his ‘cattle’. He wrote to Fryer in a letter accompanying three boys on their journey, that the boys were most dear to him, ‘*eo quod in senectute meae generi meos*’ (because there in old age will be my family). He added,

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

⁸⁰ Bordley to Fryer, 1787, LC/C648.

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

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

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

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

'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 made sure to pass on his fulsome, and sometimes self-deprecating, praise. He wrote to Fryer on 12 October 1783, '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.'⁸⁶ In particular, he was impressed by one student who came last in class in the Christmas exam, but who asked for one of Bordley's elder students to be his tutor, and subsequently achieved second place in the next exam. Bordley was moved to write, 'But my mind, who pretends to be a mighty wise Cricket, says that James Brown is far the best of them. Her reason is, because he speaks of himself with so much humility, sincerity, simplicity etc.'⁸⁷

Bordley also made a good deal of effort to involve himself in the building projects which took 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.⁸⁸ In 1790, Bordley was told by one of his students about plans to add another storey to the college. Once more, he had strong feelings on the matter and, after consulting with several 'discreet men', urged the President to build a wing instead. Reminding him of the devastating earthquake in 1755, he pressed Fryer to remain operating on a single level.⁸⁹ Two years later, it seemed that the extension had been completed, but only by an overspend. Fryer turned 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: he roundly castigated the President, advising him that he would have been better to have read Luke 14 before he began his work.⁹⁰ He then became more amenable, assuring Fryer that he would take care to read his petition at their annual meeting before adding a pessimistic warning

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

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

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁹ Bordley to Fryer, 10 March 1790, LC/C674.

⁹⁰ 'For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?' Lk 14: 28.

about the likelihood of success, ‘tho I fear they cannot do much for you.’⁹¹ Fryer had evidently urged Bordley to extend his appeal to the local Catholic gentry, but Bordley was even less optimistic about this enterprise, and claimed that he had no acquaintance with the country squires. Besides, he added,

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.⁹²

Bordley had reason to be sceptical: the deteriorating condition of the aristocracy, 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 and 1790, seven members of the House of Commons renounced Catholicism.⁹³ 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.’⁹⁴ However, even taking this into account, Bordley’s reply seems deliberately pessimistic, 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.’⁹⁵

This makes an interesting comparison with divisive response of the Vicar General of the London district, James Barnard (1733-1803). In a letter to Fryer, he let 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, Barnard indicated that the cause of hostility to the appeal was a tension between the English Church and the continental colleges, a strain that had its roots

⁹¹ Bordley to Fryer, 16 March 1792, LC/C702.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Alexander Lock, ‘Catholicism, Apostasy and Politics in late Eighteenth-Century England: The case of Sir Thomas Gascoigne and Charles Howard, Earl of Surrey’, *British Catholic History* 30/2 (2010): 275.

⁹⁴ J. C. H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), 258.

⁹⁵ Bordley to Fryer, 27 September 1792, LC/C713.

in the suspicion of the bishops who were inclined to regard the seminaries as too autonomous.

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 determin'd 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'd at the persons who would make use of that as an argument to induce them to it.⁹⁶

Bordley's surliness aside, his active support of the Lisbon College was in stark contrast to the attitude of some of his contemporaries, and one of his most noticeable idiosyncrasies was that he was often more generous in deed than in word. It is worth noting indications of a wider trend at this time relating to fundraising amongst the Catholic gentry at this point in time. There were two fundraising campaigns in Dublin for the Irish College in Lisbon, in 1782 and 1789. They raised £415: as in Lancashire, traditional sources of financial support were failing, but other donors were found among the newly prosperous urban merchants and businessmen.⁹⁷

In 1793, Barnard reported to Fryer that whilst Bordley had sent funds for the completion of the college building, he was 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.'⁹⁸ The addition of scientific instruments was by no means unusual, even in colleges with tight purse strings: a student in the Irish College in Salamanca noted that they had an excellent library, microscopes and astronomical instruments.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, later that year, Bordley provided some forthright advice concerning the astrological venture, telling 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.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Barnard to Fryer, 19 March 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.

⁹⁷ 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* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 105.

⁹⁸ Barnard to Fryer, 19 March 1793, Agents Account Papers 3, LC/C717.

⁹⁹ Henchy, 'Irish College', 224.

¹⁰⁰ Bordley to Fryer, 20 September 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.

Bordley would also 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 let Fryer know that he regretted, ‘... that I have thrown away above £300 upon boys in your college in which [I] might as well have thrown into the sea.’ He went on to say that all the boys he had sent had already been tested for their ability and disposition in his own school. He reminded Fryer that his duty as College President was to watch over his charges and by friendly counsel halt inclinations that might prove to be their ruin. He confessed 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.’¹⁰¹ For good measure he added:

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.¹⁰²

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, although he added that the Scots may be as good at ‘physic’ as the French, or even better, ‘for ought I know.’ He went on to instruct that Jerome Allen (1730-1815), 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. He advised Allen to convey that the advice came from, ‘a venerable old man who has served his country fifty years.’¹⁰³ Bordley then provided a lengthy description of the benefits of Paris as well as advising 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].’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Bordley to Fryer, June 1795, LC/C760.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Jerome Allen was born in London to a Portuguese diplomat named Antony Gomez and an English mother. He was therefore bilingual. Croft, *Historical Account*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Bordley to Fryer, 22 September 1790, LC/C681.

Competition among the English Districts

In a sharp letter to Fryer in 1794, Barnard complained about the contract that Bordley had set up with the college superiors. Barnard lamented that for several years past Bordley had sent boys to Lisbon, paid their pensions for five years, and then allowed the college to pay for their remaining training. He informed 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 of several individuals.'¹⁰⁵ He queried Fryer's claim that Bordley only had nine students at the college, stating that he had thirteen. He went on to remind the President that some years previously he had passed on the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District, Thomas Talbot's (1727-95) complaint that Lisbon had not sent any priests to his district; he had now learnt from Bordley himself that he had sent two more boys, bringing the total number of his candidates to thirteen. Barnard reminded him that there were four districts to supply and that the college could only maintain twenty-six students: on those grounds, Bordley had sent 'double the number' in comparison to any other district. An angry Barnard asked Fryer where he could find the money to pay for Bordley's students without 'violating the rights of individuals', since the endowment of the founder would scarcely support the superiors and repair the house. Moreover, the benefactors who established the funds also reserved to themselves and their heirs the right of nomination to pensions. Barnard had been President of the college in 1776, and had seen first-hand the damage caused by the great earthquake twenty-one years previously. He conceded that the college had been through straitened times due to unavoidable losses, but it had also, he argued, been damaged by mismanagement, which he had inherited. However, he added, since this was no longer the case, 'natural justice' and Fryer's compact with the founders of the pensions should enable the present nominators to resume their rights. He added, however, that this was impossible because Bordley had already filled the house, so that a college intended for the 'general good of all England is now almost turned into a College for the Northern District.' Whilst prepared to concede that Bordley was 'as well qualified as any man in England' to choose such boys, Barnard stressed that 'this good quality . . . does not authorize him to deprive me or any other Nominator.' Barnard proposed a partial remedy: if Bordley were willing to allow his boys to be sent either to the London or Western districts then he would personally be ready to receive two of them.¹⁰⁶ A year later Barnard was writing again. He had

¹⁰⁵ Barnard to Fryer, London 1 July 1794, Agent's Account Papers, LC/A1/5/12.

¹⁰⁶ Barnard to Fryer, London 1 July 1794, Agent's Account Papers, LC/A1/5/12.

been informed that Bordley's boys were paid for after five years of study out of three funds: from a woman named Anna Perez, from a family named Nicholson, and from the Queen's pension.¹⁰⁷ Barnard acknowledged that the right of nomination to the first two resided with the College, but asserted that this was not the case with the third. When it came 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 acknowledged that whilst the President had insisted that he wished 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.'¹⁰⁸

Barnard clearly had a point. After the demise of Douai the Lisbon College had assumed 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 considerable 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 a Thomas Caton (1756-1826) in Lancashire included a stinging rebuke of Jerome Allen. Caton's complaint concerned a priest named Webster who had newly arrived in the North, although apparently only after Allen, Fryer and several others had pressured him to go to London instead. Caton wrote that on hearing this 'we thought you certainly must all be mad.' Bordley, he added, was only kept from falling out entirely with Lisbon through the exhortation of himself and other priests. He went on to demand a letter of assurance before their next clergy meeting; were this not received, he threatened to petition the bishops and have the President removed.¹⁰⁹

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 (1767-1850), who had been their professor of Classics, to be an assistant to the obviously failing Bordley.¹¹⁰ The college obliged and Dennet arrived the same year. In a letter to Jerome

¹⁰⁷ The second from the college benefactor, Francis Nicholson (bap. 1650-d. 1731) had in fact been left specifically for the education of boys from his native Lancashire. The third is from Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705).

¹⁰⁸ Barnard to Fryer, 13 January 1795, Agent's Account Papers, LC/A1/5/13.

¹⁰⁹ T. Caton to Allen, Early 1796, Agent's Account Papers, LC/C751.

¹¹⁰ Barnard to Fryer, 14 August 1798, LC/C779. James Dennet had been made procurator of the College in 1795 and the next year Classical master.

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 for a few days leave to collect his belongings at Liverpool. Bordley responded angrily, calling him ‘after his old fashioned way a thousand abusive names.’ Shortly afterwards, he dismissed Dennet, claiming that his health was much improved and he could not afford to keep him. Only the intervention of Orrell prevented Dennet from leaving and he was retained on the salary of £10 per year.¹¹¹ However, their relationship did not improve. Shortly after Bordley’s death, Dennet described his situation there as a war, in which he had two tough enemies in Bordley and his apparently infamous housekeeper ‘Old Grace.’ Dennet wrote to Jerome Allen that whilst Bordley was the more ‘formidable’, she was the more ‘implacable, spiteful and peevish’. He claimed 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.¹¹² Dennet clearly struggled with the forceful personality of Grace, who exercised considerable control over the domestic arrangements and access to Bordley himself. In fact, Grace offers us a glimpse of an overlooked figure in the history of Catholicism: the priest’s housekeeper. Anna Battigelli has shed light on the important role of women in eighteenth-century English Catholicism, as they advanced the cause as mothers, wives, caretakers, and educators.¹¹³ What was happening domestically among women was as crucial to the survival of Catholicism as that which was happening publicly among men. The role of priest’s housekeeper might also be added to Battigelli’s list. ‘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, and there is evidence that some quarters in the Church felt 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 fictitious committee of ‘Ladies, Widows, Wives and Spinsters; Housekeepers, Cooks, Housemaids and other Female persons’ demanding similar rights.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Dennet to Allen, 23 November 1798, LC/C784.

¹¹² To Jerome Allen, Lisbon from James Dennet Aughton, 15 December 1800, LC/C801.

¹¹³ Anna Battigelli, ‘Eighteenth-Century Women and English Catholicism’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 31. 1/2 (2012): 10.

¹¹⁴ 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.

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.¹¹⁵

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 added without comment his name to a list of five brethren who had recently died, there is no record of the President's reaction.¹¹⁶ 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 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.'¹¹⁷

Fr Bordley has rarely been the focus of scholarly attention, with the exception of John Bossy, who described him as offering '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 nineteenth century. Bossy claimed him as a '*laudator temporis acti*' (one who looks to better past times).¹¹⁸ This is an accurate assessment of one facet of his personality. However, the Bordley we encounter in his 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). The qualities displayed in his letters were all features of a type of Catholic churchman who served a distinctly different English Church in the century after Bordley's. The

¹¹⁵ From Dennet to Allen, 15 December 1800, LC/C801.

¹¹⁶ James Barnard to Fryer, 3 November 1799, LC/C794.

¹¹⁷ Bordley to Fryer, Ascension 1790, LC/C680.

¹¹⁸ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, 263.

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 went 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.¹¹⁹ Bossy holds Bordley up as an example of a cleric 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 nineteenth-century English Catholics. Firstly, there was a need to improve the government of their Church, which was considerably augmented by the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850. The innovating bishops 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.'¹²⁰ From what we know of Bordley's curmudgeonly independence there is no doubt he would have rubbed up against any authority, secular or episcopal. In some respects, Simon Bordley anticipated the new freedom that allowed for a parish-facing priesthood. He was a rural cleric, but his letters seldom mentioned his neighbouring landlords, except to complain that they were of little use to his enterprises. Our focus here has been on education and space 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.¹²¹

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*. Bordley would have been unable to conceive of the supply of priests coming via any other route but the colleges based on the continent: this was the traditional solution, in place since the late sixteenth century. Nor did Bordley seek to advance a different approach. In this sense he diverged from the bishops of the nineteenth-century church, who viewed the colleges with suspicion. Bordley would not have anticipated the episcopal attitude that was far from sorry to see the demise of the rather too independent continental colleges. In other respects, however, Bordley's innovations

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 263-4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ 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.

found an echo in the Church that came after him. Faced with a rapidly expanding Catholic population, the training of candidates for the priesthood became a priority in the nineteenth century. Bordley's focus was on the overseas colleges as the means to provide priests for England; in contrast, the bishops would have viewed them as dangerously independent. Both parties however, were fully aware of the importance of education, and would have agreed that the training of candidates for the priesthood was a priority to serve a rapidly expanding population.

Almost immediately after the restoration of the hierarchy, the bishops 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 attempted to set up what Peter Doyle described as an '*hortus conclusus*' (enclosed garden).¹²² Deep suspicion of the world underpinned this approach, which included 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: elements which would have been applauded by Bordley.¹²³ 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).¹²⁴ It was a system that Bordley had successfully pressed upon Lisbon College in the previous century. With all these improvements envisaged, there was demand on clergy to raise money to build schools. This was a considerable challenge: and it was not until late in the century that sufficient funds had been gathered to improve the religious and secular education systems.¹²⁵ In this respect, perhaps surpassing all others, Bordley's entrepreneurial talents had offered a precedent. It is perhaps hard to envisage Bordley working comfortably with the new strain of authority in the nineteenth-century Church, but certainly in terms of education he reflects the profile of the English Catholicism that developed in that time.

John Bossy succinctly described the fundamental difference between Bordley's church and that of the next century: in 1770 the

¹²² Peter Doyle, 'The Education and training of Roman Catholic Priests in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35/2, April (1984): 219.

¹²³ *Ibid.* In fact educating the seminarians separately from secular students was to prove prohibitively expensive.

¹²⁴ Mora Dickson, *Teacher Extraordinary: Joseph Lancaster, 1778-1838* (London: Book Guild, 1986): 233-56.

¹²⁵ Cheryl E. Yielding, *Emancipation and Renewal: English Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century*, PhD Thesis, Old Dominion University (1982), 103.

community was dominated by secular aristocracy, in 1850 their rule was superseded by the clergy.¹²⁶ Bordley was in many ways a harbinger of these developments, most especially in clerical education, the great irony of the nineteenth-century revolution in ecclesiastical government was that it was by nature retrospective: casting off the pervading cis-alpine spirit, it instead looked to the glories of its Tridentine past. Bordley, in contrast, possessed 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.

¹²⁶ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, 323.