

**The English College of Saint Alban Valladolid.
A Story of survival.**

**Michael E. Williams
Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds.**

Both Spanish and English people are often surprised to learn of the existence of an English college in Valladolid, and their first reaction is to ask the question 'Why?'. After one has explained the origins and the foundation of the college in the sixteenth century, there is then the further question 'Why does such a college exist today?'

I want to consider some of the circumstances of its original foundation in 1589 and then indicate some of the historical reasons for its continuance since that date. If others wish to extrapolate or deduce arguments relating to the present or future it should be in the knowledge of the qualities that have made for survival in the past, including a past that is too near to be of interest solely to archivists and antiquarians.

I

Henry VIII'S break with Rome in 1535 and the subsequent changes in religion resulted in a steady stream of people leaving England to take refuge in the Catholic parts of Europe. Apart from the reign of Mary Tudor the flow increased until it reached its peak at the time of Elizabeth I. These Catholic exiles did not go abroad of their own choosing, they were not tourists on holiday nor men of affairs on a business trip. They went because of religious persecution at home and most of them regarded their exile as only for a time. They hoped for a speedy return to their country and a speedy return of their country to the Old Religion and they had no desire to lose their English nationality and become Frenchmen, Italians or Spaniards. Across the English Channel Europe's political divisions and rivalries were now compounded by different religious allegiances and it was the countries governed by the Spanish Monarchy that the English Catholic exiles found the most welcoming. Communities of religious, nuns and monks, took refuge in places where they could continue to live their lives dedicated to God's service without the fear of intrusion by the Queen's officers. Philip II's reorganisation of the Church in the Low Countries according to Counter Reformation ideals included the establishment of a new university at Douai and it was this town that became a centre for exiled English Catholic scholars. William Allen with the support of Philip II founded an English college there in 1568. This became a school and a centre of learning for exiled Catholic scholars from Oxford and Cambridge and also a place for the training of clergy who would be ready to return to England when circumstances permitted.

But even here conditions were not stable and in 1578 the college was forced to leave Douai for a while and go further south to Rheims. But the religious wars in France meant that not even Rheims was safe and so in 1579 a college was opened in Rome. By this time the priority was for places to train clergy for work in England since great numbers were offering themselves for this work. Pope Gregory XIII was generous towards the new college in Rome but his successor, Sixtus V, was a man of more frugal tastes

and because of his economies in expenditure on education, there was no possibility of any expansion in the college at Rome. So it was that Spain came to be considered as a possible place to establish a further college for the training of catholic clergy for work in England.

There were already in the early 1580s individual scholars from the British Isles resident in Spain. Some had been attracted there by the reputation of the universities, but the chief reason was that Spain now lay on the best route from the British Isles to Italy. This was because the wars of religion in France and the tumult in the Low Countries had made the channel ports unsafe. To reach the continent it became common practice for individuals to take ship from the West of England or from Wales, and sometimes by way of Ireland, to proceed down the French coast, calling perhaps at Nantes and eventually landing at Bilbao. From there they could make a safe land-journey across Spain to the Mediterranean coast, from which it was a simple matter to take ship again for Italy. The old capital and university town of Valladolid lay directly on this route across Spain.

The exact course of events that led to an English seminary being established in Valladolid is not easy to reconstruct, but the following points have to be taken into account¹.

- a) It seems certain that there were already scholars from the British Isles living in Valladolid sometime before 1589. Many of these were Irish or had travelled from England via Ireland².
- b) On October 24 1588 fourteen English and Irish students and priests who had been living in Valladolid for more than a year petitioned the Ayuntamiento for help³.
- c) On November 10 1588 three priests, Cowling, Cliburn and Lockwood left the English College at Rheims bound for England. The journey took them via Lisbon and they arrived at Valladolid in 1589⁴.
- d) At Valladolid these three met two others, Sherrat and Gillibrand who had travelled from England via Ireland and Bilbao on their way to Rheims. Unable to find a French ship to take them to France they were persuaded to go to Barcelona, find a ship for Genoa and go and seek admission at the seminary in Rome. The road from Bilbao to

¹ See E. Henson, Introduction. *Registers of the English College Valladolid 1589-1862* VII-XVII. Catholic Records Society. Vol 30. London 1930.

² M.B.Blake, *The Irish College at Salamanca, its early history and the influence of its work on Irish Education*. Unpublished M.A. thesis University of Liverpool 1951. T. Morrissey S.J., *The Irish Student Diaspora in the Sixteenth Century*. *Recusant History* vol 14 p242.

³ D.M.Rogers. Introduction to Gregg Reprint of Diego de Yepes, *Historia Particular de la Persecución de Inglaterra*. (1791). Libro de Actas del Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 28 de Abril de 1589.

⁴ T.F.Knox (Ed), *First and Second Diaries of the English College Douay* p221. London 1878. J. Blackfan, *Annales Collegii Anglorum Vallesoletani*. London 1899. H. More S.J., *Historia Missionis Anglicanae Societatis Iesu*. S.Omer 1660.

Barcelona lay through Valladolid and finding more students there, they decided to stay ⁵.

- e) On May 8 1589 three more left Rheims; Blackfan, Floyd and Bosvil, they travelled via Nantes and Bilbao and arrived at Valladolid to complete the studies they had already begun in France ⁶.
- f) On May 15 1589 three priests, Stillington, Fixer and Lovelace left Rheims for Spain with the intention of acting as professors and directing the studies of the students now gathered in Valladolid ⁷. All of this indicates that there was some intention on the part of Rheims college to start another seminary at Valladolid.

Meanwhile the English Jesuit, Robert Persons, had come to Spain from Rome on business for the General, Claudio Aquaviva. He had recently served a term as Rector of the English College in Rome and knew of the need for another seminary in addition to those at Rheims and Rome. While in Spain he learnt of the existence of English students at Valladolid and it was due to his efforts that this group of men living in lodgings and in need of money was formed into a college with property, funds and official permission from the authorities to reside in the town ⁸. Money was raised by obtaining permission to beg for alms, first in Spain and then in Portugal. The response was extremely generous. Not only did the King and Council promise money including a viaticum (travelling expenses) for the journey back to England of ordained priests, but regular monetary donations ranging from two to over two hundred ducats a year were promised by various individuals. Mass offerings were given and annual foundation masses were set up. There were property bequests often in the form of *censos* and *juros*. Not all of these were realised immediately, but within a very short time sufficient money was obtained to found a college and acquire housing on the present site of the college. One should note that although the King gave generously as did English exiles like Jane Dormer the Duchess of Feria, the bulk of the funds did not come from governmental sources, nor from England and certainly not from Rome, but from the alms and generosity of the people, rich and poor, from all over Spain and especially from this city of Valladolid.

Money is one thing, but equally important is securing permission of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to establish a college, especially a college for foreigners who did not intend to remain in the country but to return after ordination to work in England. There was; opposition on two grounds a) Politically, England and Spain were at war; it was less than a year since the ill-fated Armada of 1588 and in April and May La Coruña and Lisbon had

⁵ Yepes. *ibid* p746.

⁶ Knox, *Douay Diaries* pág. 224.

⁷ Knox, *Douay Diaries* pág. 224.

⁸ For the refusal of the Confraternity of S. Cosmé to accept the English see: Archivo General de Simancas. Estado 166 bis. n^o 133.

been raided by the English. The spy network of Secretary Walsingham was widespread and the Spanish Crown had suffered from its presence not only in the Netherlands but also in the ports of the Iberian Peninsula. What was there to prevent Walsingham from using the college at Valladolid as a centre of espionage? b) From the religious point of view, were these Englishmen who intended to study in the city really safe and orthodox, or had they become tinged with the heresy that was rife in their native land? To overcome these difficulties the college was placed under the care of the local ecclesiastical superior, Alonso de Mendoza, the 'Abbot' of the collegiate church, (Valladolid was not yet a diocese of its own, it was within the diocese of Palencia) and the Rector of the Jesuit College of San Ambrosio which the students were attending for their studies. That a college for the diocesan clergy should be administered by a religious order, the Jesuits, was not unusual. The college in Rome had encountered difficulties when first opened and a satisfactory solution was found in asking the Jesuits to run it. Persons' rapid and business like approach to the whole enterprise can be seen from the fact that when three priests who had been designated to conduct the studies eventually arrived from Rheims they found that the college was already opened and their services were not needed as the college was already staffed.

But the master-stroke of Persons in these early days was his concession that although the English college was for Englishmen who would go back and work in England at the completion of their studies, yet the Rector would not only be a Jesuit but a Spaniard, thereby ensuring both orthodoxy and loyalty to the Crown. Apart from a very brief period in the early 1600s the Rector was always a Spanish Jesuit right up to the expulsion of the order from Spain in 1767.

In this connection it is interesting to note that while many of the students on their return to England were imprisoned and put to death for their religion, there is no evidence that the fact of their having studied in Spain ever became of itself the basis of a special accusation of treason. The college remained remarkably a-political. There were Catholics who favoured a close alliance between England and Spain and those who later favoured a French alliance, but to have studied in Spain did not necessarily mean that one's political sympathies lay on one side. In fact, some Valladolid trained priests were politically attached to the French cause considering that this would result in a more favourable treatment of Catholics by the English Crown.

These then, are some of the reasons why and how an English college came to be established in Valladolid. Basically it was an act of hospitality and generosity to a persecuted community. The college could not have begun or continued without the good will and shared religious belief that overcame national and political rivalry. In the last analysis we are here not because of the will of the Pope, nor the will of Philip II, nor of Robert Persons, but because of you. And you could trust us because one of your men was in charge.

II

So much for the original founding of the college. But, we are still here after 400 years. Have we overstayed our welcome? Why are we still here?

This is not the place for some philosophical justification for our continued presence nor for an argument in favour of the perpetuity of St Alban's. But there is need to say more, because over the years the situation has altered considerably from the circumstances that prevailed in 1589. With the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the political situation began to change and there became less reason for Spain as a political power to show any interest in English catholics. On the other hand, English catholics knew that now there would be no restoration of the old faith with the help of Spanish arms and they had begun to look elsewhere for assistance. What happened as far as the college was concerned however, was not a drawing apart from Spain, rather the opposite. Under the direction of Spanish Jesuits the college became more and more part of the religious and local scene. The continued devotion to the *Vulnerata* not only sustained the students who themselves were to go back to England where a similar mutilation awaited them, but it also fired the zeal and piety of the people of the town. Here in their midst they had a reminder of their suffering co-religionists in other parts of Europe. Although catholics had been spared such persecution in Spain they could express their solidarity with less fortunate countries. The rebuilding of the chapel in the seventeenth century and the travels of Father Calatayund across the length and breadth of Spain begging money for a worthy shrine to the *Vulnerata* made the college known as a place of prayer and devotion. The college chapel is a monument to this popular feeling. So it was that, whereas usually English foundations abroad dating from the days of persecution tended to be inward-looking groups of people, eager to go back home at the earliest opportunity, the English college in Valladolid became part of the local scene and suffered the fate of many an exile. To which country did it really belong? There were complaints from England that the training given in Spain did not pay sufficient attention to the needs of missionaries in England. However the catholic religion was still outlawed in England and so there was no alternative to the seminaries abroad since it was not possible to educate priests in the catholic religion at home.

A crisis accrued when the Jesuits were expelled by Charles III in 1767. The administration of the college was taken over by the government literally overnight. There was need to prove that although the college had been administered by the Spanish Jesuits, it did not belong to them but to the catholics of England. Despite the tense political situation then existing between the two countries, secret negotiations took place and English secular priests were sent out to take charge of the college. New students arrived and the college remained open. The English Vicars Apostolic were glad to get their hands on the administration of a college that was still needed for the training of priests and they had long been dissatisfied with the way in

which the Spanish Jesuits had been performing. For both Spain and England there were no longer advantages in having the Society in charge. But approval of the host nation was still necessary, but for different reasons from those obtaining in 1589. Then, it was a matter of making sure that the college was not a threat to Philip II. Now, it was a question of being ready to cooperate with Charles III's plans for the reorganisation of clergy training. There was a virtual refounding of the college with a new constitution and the incorporation of the defunct English colleges of Madrid and Seville. Some of the implications of the reforms of Charles III were not fully appreciated by the English and there was a difficult period as they began to realise the extent of the control they had to accept from the government.

Another crisis in the college's history came with the War of Independence and the political instability that followed. The college shared in the disasters of the Napoleonic occupation. Being English, the French made it an object of special hatred and in those days Spaniards and Englishmen were united against a common foe. But the college survived and even though the students had to return to England there was always one of the superiors present at Valladolid hanging on as best he could. But the Restoration did not bring civil peace. During the nineteenth century the Catholic Church in England began to experience a revival; penal laws against catholics were repealed and soon the hierarchy was restored which meant that for the first time since the Reformation catholics in England were to be once more ruled by their own bishops in communion with Rome. This contrasted strongly with Spain where the Church was now under considerable pressure and suffered various forms of persecution from successive liberal governments. St Alban's College being English, escaped from the full effects of the mortmain laws, but it could not stand aloof from the sufferings of the people and there was one period when the English and Scots colleges were almost the only ecclesiastical establishments left unmolested in the town. They began to exercise a religious role that would have appeared inconceivable to the original founders of the colleges. As they had not been affected by the decree of October 11 1835 which had forbidden prelates to confer major orders on the grounds that there were more than sufficient clerics already, an ordination held in the English college chapel became an opportunity for showing that popular religious piety had survived the anticlerical legislation⁹.

III

The history of the college provides many other examples of how St Alban's survived throughout the last four hundred years, but before I end I want to deal with events that took place forty or fifty years ago as they are recorded in letters and other documents in the college archives.

⁹ For an account of the ordination of John Guest see St Alban's Archives Serie III legajo 9.

The college has always considered itself to be under the patronage of the Spanish Crown, although the understanding of this has varied. During the nineteen twenties there was a protracted dispute about the appointment of a new rector and a stumbling block was the refusal of the king to approve of the appointee of the English bishops. Much of the dispute was due to the determination of Alfonso XIII to stand by his rights at a time when Spanish interests were being flouted in Morocco and elsewhere, and also the lack of appreciation on the part of the English bishops of how to conduct business with the Spanish government. The matter was eventually solved amicably, but then, in 1931, the king departed from the country and the Second Republic was proclaimed. The ensuing political instability in Spain led the Rector, Don Edwino Henson, to appeal to the protection of the British Embassy in Madrid. There was no doubt about its responsibility for the English inmates of the college, the question however, concerned the college as an institution. The reply was not helpful. The legal position was that the college was Spanish with no legal personality under English law and so could not expect special treatment. This placed Henson in a difficult position since there was a real danger that the college property would be confiscated and suffer the fate of other Spanish ecclesiastical institutions. Yet by its very nature the college was exempt from the jurisdiction of the Spanish hierarchy. As Henson put it in a letter to the British Embassy he "did not want to be lumped together with the catholic church in Spain". This was not just a wish for self preservation but a statement of the different traditions and histories within catholicism itself. It was a recognition that the college and its students were for the service of the church in England not for Spain. Fortunately the course of events proved to be on the side of the college. The outbreak of hostilities in 1936 placed Valladolid very soon in the hands of the 'nationalists' or 'insurgents' as they were known in England and the Rector was able to compare the conditions obtaining after the summer of 1936 favourably with the unrest and anticlericalism of the previous months. The college's view of the Spanish conflict was from the vantage point of Valladolid. Here, there was now certainly a place for a catholic seminary and he made known to the English bishops that they could provide more students for the college. He was convinced that the nationalists had a just cause and were conducting a crusade, in this he shared the opinion of many in this part of Spain. When writing to his friends outside Spain he expressed these views with conviction and they made an impression in certain quarters in England. The general opinion reflected in the British Press of the day (and shared by the government) was that it was a case of a rebellion against the lawful government of the Second Republic and that as this was the lawful government it should be supported and not the rebels. However, among catholics in England there was hesitation in following this line because of the stories and reports of persecution of the church and the antireligious activities taking place since 1931. The idea that rebellion could sometimes

be justified was not at all foreign to traditional English religious thought. Henson did not originate enthusiasm among English Catholics for the nationalist cause, but he did a great deal to support it. The Association of former students of the College of St Alban at their annual reunion in 1937 in England were given a graphic account of the situation in Spain by the Vice Rector. The Rector made his views known to influential friends of his in England. John Petit who had been for a time vice rector in Valladolid was now head of the Catholic house of studies at Cambridge and this became a centre in the University that supported Franco. Bernard Grimley who had been a student at Valladolid was now the Editor of *The Catholic Times* and this paper was unequivocal in its support of the Franco cause. The Bishops of England Wales relied on their own man in Valladolid for their information on what was happening in Spain. But all this must be put in context. The Civil War created a great wave of support and sympathy for Spain throughout Britain. But it was not all on one side, the view of Catholics made sure that there was no section of the Spanish people that did not have its British supporters. This then was the contribution of the college to the Civil War, though we should also mention that three students left the college to join the colours, one being killed in action on the Castellon front.

The elation in April 1939 at what was seen as a victory of the forces of Christianity was short lived. Later that same year Britain was at war with Germany. Here was a test of the college's Catholic patriotism. How far did its enthusiasm for the New Spain involve support of Germany and Italy who had supported Franco? Providentially the college had no time to consider this matter since from the very beginning the British Government was aware of a service that the college might render. Despite divergent sympathies during the 1936-1939 conflict, the college, in the person of the Rector, was now asked to cooperate in keeping Spain from repaying her debt to Germany by entering the European war. Henson was at first very reluctant to do anything that might abuse his position as a guest in the country by providing information other than the source already possessed by the British. Lord Perth, a Catholic member of the House of Lords who was one of the permanent officials at the Ministry of Information in London wrote to him saying: "It is clear that if friendship and understanding are to be established between England and Spain it must be largely through the Catholic Church... in this question of approach to the Spanish episcopate Cardinal Hinsley feels that there is no one else who possesses your special opportunities and qualifications". Such a request was hard to refuse, it was an errand of peace-making and friendship rather than one of war. One of the first practical suggestions was to get the letter of Pope Pius XI condemning Nazism, *Mit Brennender Sorge* issued in 1937, distributed in a good Spanish translation. The existence of this encyclical was practically unknown in Spain at this time. With the assistance of the Ministry of Information in London this was done and copies of the encyclical were distributed by

Henson and others. Henson's advice also led to an important appointment. The German government supported two catholic priests in Madrid, and the French and Italians each had a chaplain, but there was no priest or chaplain for English catholics in Madrid although priests from Valladolid visited the capital from time to time. Joseph Mulrean of the diocese of Gibraltar who had studied and been ordained in Madrid and had been a chaplain to the Requeté during the Civil War was *persona grata* to Mgr. Eijo y Garay Bishop of Madrid-Alcalá. Mulrean was appointed chaplain to the English catholic residents and worked closely with both Henson and the Embassy especially with Bernard Malley at this time the assistant press attaché, who was an English catholic.

Henson was often forthright in criticising the bulletins of news items put out at regular intervals by the British Embassy, for their tone and unsuitability to win any sympathy from the Spanish people. As the war progressed, the overseas broadcasts from the BBC assumed a great importance, here too Henson's advice was taken. He gave information to London about what wavelengths were interfered with by the Spanish authorities, he assisted in the import from Britain and distribution of radios that were capable of receiving the broadcasts, he wrote to London criticising errors in Spanish grammar and pronunciation by British newscasters. In 1940. Sir Samuel Hoare was appointed British Ambassador to Spain and was especially sensitive to the position of the Church. On October 21 1940 at a ceremony at the Santuario Nacional he handed over church plate and other valuables that had been in the possession of the family of the Dukes of Wellington since the War of Independence. That this act of reparation should have been in Valladolid and not Madrid and through the intermediary of the Church authorities was a deliberate calculation. Incidentally, it was on this occasion that for the first time since the founding of the college, a British Ambassador and his wife spent the night at the English college.

Although England was still accessible by seaplane via Lisbon no new students had arrived at the college since 1940 and it was decided in 1942 that the remaining students should be transferred to the college in Lisbon. But there was an exception. It was arranged that one of the students should go to Comillas (Santander) for a course in Canon Law with the Jesuits. From the start there seems to have been an ulterior motive behind this decision. Extant correspondence shows that the student in question kept his rector informed not only of current rumours but of the general drift of public opinion in church circles. He was able to circulate copies of the Embassy bulletins, the text of the pastoral letter of Mgr. Fidel García Martínez, Bishop of Calahorra, and to obtain for the students copies of the Spanish translation of *Mit Brennender Sorge*. At the same time his presence in Comillas was proof that not all Englishmen were protestants, and catholic seminarians had much in common with each other whatever their country of origin.

In 1939 the Rector's sympathies had been with the new Spanish government and when the English catholic newspaper *The Universe* asked him about the priests that were reported to have been imprisoned by Franco, he brushed it aside saying they were 'only Basque separatists'. But as the European war progressed he became aware that the Civil War had not put an end to the difficulties of the Church in Spain. The private correspondence between him and Bernard Malley at the Embassy is illuminating as it reveals that the British authorities took a keen interest in the appointment of new bishops, as sees in Spain fell vacant. In fact, as an English catholic layman, Malley was shocked at the control the government wished to exercise over the episcopate. He wrote on March 30 1943: "Have you heard of the oath the new bishops are requested to take?... Is the Spanish church going protestant? It sounds like the oath of uniformity which most anglican bishops assent to". Sir Samuel Hoare, the Ambassador, put it even more bluntly in his memoirs where he spoke of the imposition of an oath of alliegence "against which Sir Thomas More would have gone to the block" and the acceptance of a decree "emulating the worst features of the Tudor Act of Supremacy that placed the circulation of Papal Bulls and Encyclicals in Franco's control"¹⁰.

The Rector of the English College could appreciate the irony of the situation since it was for reasons such as these that 350 years previously English catholics had come as refugees to Spain.

IV

Over the past four hundred years the College has existed at times when there were no students, it has existed when there was no rector and when there were two rival rectors. It has existed when there was religious persecution in England and at times when there was religious persecution in Spain. It has existed when England was at war with Spain, it has existed during wars in Europe. It has existed during civil war in England and during civil war in Spain. It has existed when the universities were closed and all clases had to be given in the house. It has existed when there were no catholic bishops in Valladolid. None of the above are issues today. There is a rector, there are students, there is a place where they can take degrees in theology, Engand and Spain are at peace with each other, there is no religious persecution in our two countries, there are no civil wars. Yet we must not be complacent. We do not know what new crises lie before us. We cannot predict the future but we can at least open our eyes to the present and there are two situations already with us.

- a) The continuing effects of the Second Vatican Council have included calls for a reorganisation of ecclesiastical studies, a reevaluation of

¹⁰ Samuel Hoare, Viscount Templewood. *Ambassador on Special Mission*. London 1946 pág. 290.

the seminary system and the relationship between candidates for ordination and the parishes and people from which they come and to which they are going to minister. There is a return to thinking in terms of the local church. All this is timely, but unless watched, it can easily promote an insularity and narrowness of outlook that is contrary to the idea of a universal church.

- b) As a corrective to this we have the second situation. The Single European Act will come into full effect in 1992. Excessive nationalism has been the bane of Europe and it is still with us. We must see to it that religion does not encourage this divisive force. A united Europe does not mean the abolition of local and national traditions and customs. But it does call for an understanding of these differences and the common humanity that unites us all. It calls for an autonomy whereby we are able to acknowledge our own identity and live our own lives because we value other people's place in the scheme of things.

And this is something that the English College has been trying to do here in Valladolid for the last four centuries.