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THE FOUNDATION OF THE MYTHE MISSION, TEWKESBURY.

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INTRODUCTION

Two years ago I had never heard of the Marquis and Marquise de Lys, or of the Porter family of Tewkesbury; I knew nothing of Saint Joseph's Church at the Mythe, or of its history. Since then I have been able to uncover a story of remarkable generosity and piety, and to lay the foundations of a more comprehensive history of modern Catholicism in Tewkesbury.

The materials available for this work are at the moment scanty. Some genealogical information has been taken from Burke's Landed Gentry and Peerage. Local newspapers of Tewkesbury and Malvern have at times revealed quite detailed information of some events but then only tantalisingly few details of others. A major source of information has been that part of the Bishop of Clifton's Tewkesbury correspondence which is now lodged with the Bristol Records Office, and I here record my gratitude for access to this valuable archive. The rest has involved hunting for snippets and has taken a lot of leg work.

The Mythe Mission is a particularly interesting parish because of its very small Catholic population and its generous benefactors who made this venture of faith possible. Much more research now needs to be done to fill in the gaps which are all too evident in the story. Several approaches spring to mind, and even if nothing is published for a while the task of obtaining and preserving records and information will go ahead.

I look forward to receiving comments, particularly those saying this or that is wrong - provided I am told what the alternative version is. I am very anxious to obtain genealogical details of the Porter family and the line of the Marquis de Lys. I shall also be pleased to show my Tewkesbury papers to any interested enquirer on written application.

Illez Hough

July 1989

REAWAKENING

Reawakening of Catholicism in Tewkesbury is signalled by an anonymous notice in the Laity Directory of 1834. It read "A gentleman, in the neighbourhood, is willing to assist in establishing a chapel in Tewkesbury, when this desirable object can be entered upon with a probability of success". Although it is unlikely that the result of the advertisement will ever be known, the identity of the cautious "gentleman" can be guessed at, and will be revealed later. For the moment it will be useful to take stock of Catholicism in the Tewkesbury area at about that time.

After the dissolution of its important Benedictine abbey in the mid-sixteenth century, the town of Tewkesbury continued to be a focal market centre and communications juncture. Its famous medieval bridge spanning the Avon provided a link in the road from Gloucestershire on to Worcestershire and the midlands; the Avon itself and the Severn into which it flowed just south of Tewkesbury, were themselves highways to the north, south and east, and barriers also, to be criss-crossed by a series of ferries upstream and downstream of the town. Even though it was such a busy centre, suggesting the comings, goings and stayings of people of all[^]lasses and types, Tewkesbury seems to have shown little appetite for Catholicism. There are indications of the activities of priests in the area in the early seventeenth century, and a handful of names are registered in the eighteenth century of Catholics who persisted in their ways. But at even the most benign times of the penal period there is no substantial evidence of a real Catholic element in the population, or of any Catholic activity within the town. A few landed families within striking distance of Tewkesbury were Catholic, and the homes of some were the centres of religious activity, notably the Beckford home of the Wakeman family, and Wool las Hall, just over the Worcestershire border, home of the Hanfords.

The first few decades of the nineteenth century were to see changes ; a growing - but still very small - Catholic[^] community in the Tewkesbury area; the continuing use of

Beckford Hall as a Mass-centre for the larger area of north Gloucestershire, and then its cessation as the main line of the family was extinguished and the family's influence moved elsewhere; the rising influence of the Eyston family which led on to the opening of a church at Kemerton.

BECKFORD

In the first years of the century for the few Catholics there were in Tewkesbury, fulfilling religious duties and attending Mass involved travelling to Gloucester, Cheltenham or Beckford. The journey to the nearest, Beckford, was some ten kilometres (about six miles) each way, whether by carriage, cart, horse or on foot it was an arduous and probably unpleasant outing to all but a few. At the death in 1836 of William Wakeman, when Beckford Hall passed out of Catholic hands for a period, the long tradition of a resident chaplain ceased, and like their co-religionists the Catholics of Beckford then had to journey to Overbury - no great distance from Beckford, but no less a journey from Tewkesbury, if at all.

OVERBURY

.At Overbury the lady of the manor, Mrs Eyston, had a {private chapel, small but evidently capable of accommodating the handful of Catholics from Beckford and Tewkesbury. Mrs Eyston's chapel was put at their disposal from about 1840 until the building and opening of Saint Benet's church at Kemerton in 1843, and for the travellers from Tewkesbury the journey to Mass was reduced by a kilometre. Among the congregation at the solemn ceremonies to mark the new church's dedication and opening was T.R. Porter, Esq. of the Mythe, accompanied by his family.

THE MYTHE

Just to the north-west of Tewkesbury, and linked to it by the medieval bridge and causeway, lies the raised area of land known for centuries as the Mythe (i). Land-holding on the^Mythe has itself an interesting history, and it can be noted in passing that among the

landowners were Beckford Wakemans and their relatives. But understanding land-holding and the ownership of houses on the Mythe is made complicated by the proliferation of the name "Mythe", on its own or in combination with other terms, to designate houses and land. Bearing that in mind, it seems that T.R. Porter Esq. was then resident at that house called "The Mythe", which is still so called today. T.R. Porter - his first name was Thomas, but the middle name is not yet known - was evidently a man of substance and, if not an esquire in the strictest sense, could be bracketed in the report of the opening of Saint Benet's at Kemerton with Berkeleys, Hanfords and Hornyolds. He was moreover a landowner, and had property on the Mythe.

THOMAS PORTER'S ANCESTRY

Little is known of Thomas Porter's ancestry, but there are grounds for believing that it should be at least interesting. He was probably a descendant of successful Tewkesbury merchants; several men called Porter were in trade in Tewkesbury, and further wealth may have been accumulated in a spate of land deals at the end of the eighteenth century. There are slight grounds for supposing a Porter-Wakeman marriage at some stage in the past, and there is speculation of a relationship with the family of Aston-sifb-Edge which gave Sir Endymion Porter. Nevertheless, frm evidence of marriage alliances with neighbouring families of landed gentry and of socially prominent people is wanting, and in view of later marriages, intriguing.

The evidence to suggest that Thomas Porter was married is slight, simply the mention of "family" at the Saint Benet's opening ceremonies. But there is clear indication that he had no children to survive him. And another important query can be raised : was he a convert to Catholicism, or was he the child of Catholic parents ? If the former, what were the circumstances and the manner of his conversion? If the latter, then the implications are of a substantial Catholic presence in Tewkesbury in the eighteenth century which has not heretofore been suspected, successful^ concealed from the authorities, and not declaring itserf as the law demanded.

Thomas Porter must have been born somewhere in the period 1760 - 1780, and he died some time after 1843. He can with certainty be described as the most prominent Catholic layman in Tewkesbury in his time.

CHARLES PORTER

Thomas Porter's heir was his nephew. Charles Porter was born in or about 1796. It is not clear when his parents died, but it could have been quite early in Charles' life, and Thomas Porter can be presumed to have been an important influence on his nephew from an early age. There is indeed little that can be said about Charles' father, beyond the fact that he was a coin-collector. As in the case of his uncle, it is uncertain whether Charles was the son of Catholic parents or a convert. What is certain is that early in life he was a wealthy and discriminating gentleman. And surely, if it was not his uncle who placed the notice in the 1834 Laity Directory, then it was Charles Porter, himself.

By 1825 he was resident at the house called The Mythe, but whether he was the owner, or his uncle was, is unclear; he certainly was the owner later in his life, and the arms on the facade facing towards Tewkesbury (ii) are, if interpreted in strict fashion, probable confirmation of that. The house is a Georgian building (iii), but it underwent considerable refashioning in the earlier part of the following century to give it a Gothick-featured facade to follow what was then high fashion. But it is nevertheless a family house, not built on a grand scale or over-ornate, a comfortable and homely residence situated in beautiful and extensive grounds.

HIS MARRIAGE TO ELIZA WRIGHT

This was to be the marriage home of Charles Porter and his wife, Eliza Wright, whom he married in 1822. This marriage was to connect Charles Porter to many of the prominent and aristocratic Catholic families of England, for Eliza (sometimgi called Elizabeth) was a member of the Wright family of Kelvedon Hall in Essex. His marr-

riage to Eliza brought him a brother-in-law in the person of William Wright (who later changed his surname to that of his mother, Lawson, and was made a baronet in 1841), and his son John, who succeeded him in the baronetcy of Lawson of Brough Hall, was a nephew of whom Charles Porter was undoubtedly fond. Although no glittering prizes and honours were to be awarded to Charles Porter, his life was successful and pleasurable, his business undertakings (which underpinned all else) were manifestly prosperous. He was a member of the Tewkesbury town council - possibly the first Catholic to be so since the Reformation - and he was three times mayor, in 1837, 1839 and 1841. He was also an alderman and a magistrate. A keen and discriminating sportsman, he was the owner of at least three guns by John Manton. He was the father of three daughters of whom he had every reason to be proud, but it would be only natural if he regretted bitterly that there was no son to succeed him.

There is no clear evidence of his religious life or activities. It is certain that he was a reliable and dutiful Catholic, as indeed his wife was, and the three girls were brought up in surroundings of a deeply Christian fervency. Throughout Charles Porter's life, though, there is no evidence to suggest any move towards the foundation of a church at Tewkesbury, whether under his patronage or simply relying on his support. This has its own interest, though, for it shows several things. Firstly, that the Tewkesbury Catholics were still too few in number, and were of necessity largely content to make use of the Kemerton mission for their regular religious duties and requirements. Secondly, there is evidence that some Catholics in Tewkesbury availed themselves of the ministrations of the Benedictines at Saint Gregory's Church in Cheltenham. This raises in turn the question of why this preference was shown - personalities? transport? the desire for a grand church for important ceremonies such as weddings?;¹ A third element is surely the natural desire to found a church in Tewkesbury (already exhibited in the 1834 notice), which must have passed through Porter's mind, at least when he visited,

as doubtless he did, his brother-in-law's chapel at Brough Hall. This was a replica of the archiepiscopal chapel at York Minster, and was opened for worship in 1837. In fact the foundation of the church at Tewkes-bury came some years after Charles Porter's death, but it was doubtless a topic of family conversation, and it was his fortune which in great part financed it.

DAUGHTERS OF CHARLES AND ELIZA PORTER

The three daughters of Charles and Eliza Porter were born about 1830 - Mary Elizabeth, 1832 - Mary Clementina, and 1835 - Catherine. The dates are fairly accurate, for although dates of birth of girls are often concealed, and ladies' ages are subject to their own mathematical laws, death notices usually reveal the truth of the matter. There is confirmatory evidence available in this case, for the record of each sister's entry to school has been found. In earlier times several daughters of the Wright and Lawson families had been nuns at the English Franciscan convent at Bruges, and following this lead it was possible to find in the records of the successor convent at Taunton the enrol -ment of the three Porter girls in 1839, 1843 and 1845, each being at the time about ten years of age (iv).

SISTER MARIE BERNARDINE

How long the sisters remained at school is uncertain, and little can be said about them until 1858, when the second daughter, Mary Clementina, entered the Assumption convent in Earl's Court Road, London. As Sister Marie Bernardine de L'Enfant Jesus, she received the religious habit from Cardinal Wiseman on 15th October 1858, and the following year she made her final vows, on 27th December, at the Generalate of the Religious of the Assumption at Auteuil, near Paris. Engraved in her profession ring is the device ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI, Behold the Lord's handmaid.

The Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption was founded at Paris in 1839; in 1857 Cardinal Wiseman invited the Sisters to start a house of adoration in London, and so ir*was a newly established community

which Mary Clementina joined the following year. The community was occupied with prayer and religious instruction, and at the request of Cardinal Manning opened a school in 1867.

Financial records of the Convent show that Mary Clementina inherited money "from her family" in 1869. Of this money £3000 was used to build the convent chapel, and the rest was returned to the family. This is intriguing, for money she inherited on her father's death, pursuant to his will which was proved in May 1867, amounted to £100, as she had already received from him at her profession as a nun "a sum of £2000 as her portion or fortune". Possibly the money used to build the chapel was inherited from a more distant relative, or possibly it was her father's legacy supplemented by donations from other beneficiaries of his estate.

Returning from Paris to London in 1860, Sister Marie Bernardine rejoined her convent, which in her absence had moved to Kensington Square. She remained there until her death on 23rd November 1892, and was buried in the Congregation's vault at Saint Thomas', Fulham (v).

MARRIAGE OF MARY ELIZABETH PORTER

After Mary Clementina's entry to the religious life the next major event in the family was the wedding of the eldest daughter, Mary Elizabeth, in 1864. On 13th September she was married by Bishop Grant in Saint George's Cathedral in Southwark, to a Breton nobleman some four years her senior..Francis-Gabriel de Lys was the son of Gabriel-Jean-Maria de Lys, a physician who practised in Birmingham, and his wife Barbara Marie Ledsam, of an old Midlands family of the landed gentry. At six years of age Gabriel-Jean-Marie had been taken out of France to avoid the persecution which followed the French Revolution of 1789, in which no less than sixteen of his close relatives were executed. The only surviving representative of his ancient Breton family, he was brought up retaining little of his family's fortunes apart from the title of a marquis, but with evident determination he went on to study medicine. He was held in high esteem by his patients, and was widely mourned at his death in 1831 at about 48 years of age, leaving his widow

with two young children - Francis-Gabriel and Mary Barbara (another daughter having died in infancy). The Marquise Barbara Maria, whose family seems not to have been Catholic, was then in all probability a convert, and at her death in 1857 was laid to rest in the crypt at Woodchester Priory, commemorated with her husband by a stained glass window, in the south aisle of the church.

If nothing is known of the education of the young marquis, it was nevertheless to produce a man of evident sensitivity with a devoutness and enthusiasm for the Catholic Church which were to be complemented by his new bride. The financial situation of the marquis on the eve of the marriage is a matter of speculation; he may have inherited some money from his parents, but it can hardly have been a great sum, even when supplemented by whatever the marriage settlement amounted to. Other factors suggest a modest income from investments, cautiously and prudently managed.

Where the Marquis and Marquise de Lys resided for the first few years after their marriage is unclear; possibly it was at The Mythe, living in company with Charles and Eliza Porter and the youngest daughter Catherine. The daily routine of family affairs and estate management would be punctuated by the religious cycle of Sunday Mass at Kemerton, and this would be an opportunity to discuss the founding of a church in Tewkesbury, for the now ageing Alderman and his wife would have found the journey to Kemerton ever more tedious.

MRS PORTER'S DEATH: CHARLES PORTER'S DEATH

Only a few months after the wedding of Mary Elizabeth the family was plunged into mourning by the death of Mrs Porter at the age of seventy one. She was buried in the churchyard at the east end of the church at Kem-eroton. From this point onwards Charles Porter seems to have been preparing for his own death, his will remade, his alderman's and magistrate's office laid aside. In under two years, on 9th March 1867, he too was dead, and was laid with his wife at Kemerton.

HIS WILL

Charles Porter's will is a long and complex document, but in the context of the foundation of Saint Joseph's Church there are three main provisions: Firstly, Mary Elizabeth, the marquise, became tenant for life of all the property of Thomas Porter which Charles Porter had inherited, and various property bought at different times by her father. This included The Mythe and sundry neighbouring property. Secondly, all his property, with a few minor exceptions, was to be held in trust for his youngest daughter, Catherine. Thirdly, considerable funds were settled on Mary Elizabeth and Catherine.

PLANNING FOR THE MYTHE MISSION; CATHERINE PORTER MARRIES

Although few details of the planning of the foundation of the Mission at the Mythe can be gleaned, this was clearly the stage at which planning would be most intense. At this period, when we can imagine the excitement increasing weekly as decisions were made, and plans put into effect, Catherine was married. The wedding took place at Saint Gregory's Church, at Cheltenham in April 1869, conducted by the Rev. R.A. Wilkinson (Rector), assisted by the Rev P. Ridgway (Missioner at Kemerton). The groom was Frederic Gerard, Captain in the 23rd Fusiliers, a kinsman of the first Lord Gerard, and a member of an ancient Catholic family of Lancashire. This wedding further ramified the Porter's Catholic connections, but an earlier marriage of passing interest is that of Frederic Gerard's sister Mary Anne to Sir John Lawson, Bart.. Charles Porter's nephew, in 1856. The newly-weds took up residence at Atcombe Court at Woodchester, thus making them close neighbours of William Leigh at Woodchester Park. There is explicit evidence that the Mythe Mission was the brainchild of the marquise* Shie was clearly aided and encouraged by the marquis and her sister Catherine, and the newcomer to the family circle was to join enthusiastically in the project and make it a part of his life for many years to come.

DESIGN OF CHURCH AND PRESBYTERY

Although the plans and elevations of the church which was actually built are untraced, there is in the Bishop of Clifton's archive a series of drawings and a plan for the projected church : it shows a hall-church and presbytery of roughly the same dimensions of the church and house actually built. The church, however, has round-headed windows in triplets which give a decidedly Italianate appearance to the elevations, and the house is functional but unimaginative. This design was deservedly rejected, but it demonstrates something of the problem to be solved. The site chosen for the new church and house was a levelled terrace on the western side of the road as it climbed northwards from the causeway from the Avon bridge. This was, or had been, the site of a more or less dilapidated building said to have been at some stage a stable belonging to a former owner of a nearby property, and now part of the Porter holdings. This building was to be demolished, all except a few courses of bricks, on what was to become the south wall of the church (vi). Whatever plan was devised had to fit within the constraints of a rigid site layout, and the obvious solutions to the problem of fenestration were adopted.

From the earlier drawings and plan it can be deduced that initially the church was intended to serve a small congregation - an estimate of some twenty to thirty parishioners seems reasonable - with presumably an optimistic forecast of growth as time proceeded as seating for about one hundred people was provided. A parish of this size would require one priest to serve the mission or parish, who might have occasional visitors to stay. There is some room for extension of church and house, or both, should the need ever arise. These parameters apply equally to the church actually built. This, however, has a Gothic solution to the problem of style; on the north wall are pointed lancets in pairs with a quatrefoil accompanying each pair; on the west front are two isolated pointed lancets with an elegant niche for a statue between them; the house, though plain, is sympathetic to the Gothic detail of the church. The polygonal-ended staircase to the choir gallery - a feature of the original plan -

is a good addition to an otherwise simple plan. Inside the church the windows were obviously Gothic ; all else was plain and functional, but the decorative treatment of the timberwork of the roof is complementary to the windows, and the plan and shape of the hall are satisfying. The architects of the building were Messrs. Collins and Cull is, of Tewkesbury.

Building commenced, in part using the foundations and, as already mentioned, some courses of brickwork of the earlier building - not enough, however, to justify the assertion sometimes made that the church was a converted stable; it has in point of fact less stable incorporated than the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Because of the simplicity of design it would probably have been possible to use pre-cut stone detail and assemble this with the brickwork without much on-site carving being necessary, thus avoiding some expense and delay. The building completed, the interior was plastered and given a colour wash. In 1870 the church was ready for its consecration; into the central gable of the presbytery was set the impaled arms of de Lys and Porter (vii)

REVEREND T.W. FENN, D.D.

In addition to providing a building the new mission required a priest; this was to be the Reverend Thomas William Fenn, Doctor of Divinity, at this time about forty years of age. A photograph (viii) shows him as a kindly looking young man with a receding hair line. He seems to have received his permanent appointment in 1872.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL DETAILS

Because of the way the Mythe Mission was erected -founded as an act of generosity and encouragement of benefactors who were to act as trustees rather than, as is much more usual, either in response to a large, growing and vigorous congregation, or as an initiative of the Diocese or a missionary order or society - a distinctive and carefully prepared arrangement was drafted and agreed between the Bishop of Clifton and the trustees. In simplest terms, the bishop provided the priest and the ecclesiastical support, and the trustees provided the V

funds from which the mission was financed and its priest paid; the trustees for their part received the benefits of a properly constituted church and clergy, and religious benefits as a particular privilege. This last was in the form of the offering of Masses for the intentions of the benefactors, and in due course for the repose of their souls; mishandling of these last provisions was to cause great distress in the future. The whole structure of the arrangement is complex, and offers some insights into all the parties concerned.

The Bishop of Clifton at the time was the Honourable and Right Reverend William Clifford, who in financial matters, as in most affairs he turned his attention to, is shown in the Tewkesbury arrangement to be competent and shrewd. The trustees and benefactors, were all of them generous and devoted to the project. The marquise, for her part demonstrates a generosity of amazing proportions which was to continue throughout her life. Both the marquis and Captain Gerard were shrewd in financial matters.

It is not possible from the available papers to put a precise figure on the original financial commitment of the trustees; however, based on the expected return of about £100 a year, to be put to church expenditure, at a rate of interest of 1\ per cent, a capital sum of £4000 might be involved. But the variable factors - interest rate, charges, tax, and so on - could put the capital sum as high as, say, £6000. Correspondence of the period does throw some light on the matter.

It is known that Catherine Gerard contributed £1000; according to Captain Gerard, Madame de Lys asked Mrs Gerard if she would give £1000 towards the endowment of the Mythe Mission which she wished to establish, and herself would "do the rest". There was in addition in 1871 a legacy to the Mission from "Miss Wright", probably a sister of Mrs Porter; this money was apparently intended to pay off a debt still outstanding on the Mission. The marquise made at least one further large donation and more have probably not yet been revealed.

Investing the monies donated by the marquise and benefactors was done in two ways : some was lent on

mortgage of property, some in shares. Correspondence provides insights into both methods. £1000 belonging to the Mythe Mission was invested on a mortgage to the "Bear Brewery, Chelsea Villa and Land adjoining" in Bath. On the security of the building the bishop acting as representative of the mission, lent the money, in this case at the rate of 4| percent per annum payable twice yearly. A small deduction, ! per cent of the interest, was deducted probably to pay property tax. (The mortgage in one case is named "W. Pontifex".)

In 1878 grave concern was felt about foreign investments held not only by the diocese but also by the Marquis de Lys. Francis-Gabriel wanted to have an opportunity to discuss with the bishop personally the advisability of selling Russian bonds and buying some other security. The bonds in question may well have been a package of ten £100 bonds in the Azov-Kharkov Railway in Russia which the Marquis and Marquise had donated, and the unease felt at this time doubtless derived from tension in the Balkans which it was feared could escalate into a major war involving most of Europe - the situation which gave rise to the term "jingoism".

The first two decades or so of the Mission's activity seem to have run smoothly; the financial structure which underpinned the venture was secure; Father Fenn conducted the religious business of the parish at least satisfactorily, but certainly not spectacularly. In fact Father Fenn was probably the first to appreciate the problems which were to befall the parish, because from the beginning there were few Catholics to minister to, his health was to decline and his vitality slacken, and financial problems lay ahead. In addition he was to make a grave error of judgement which was to have severe repercussions.

PARISH SCHOOL

At about the time the Mission was established a small school was opened too. Little is known about this school - probably in itself evidence that at first it functioned reasonably well and that there were no disputes or scandals over it -but the finance to run it^ was minimal. Adopting a tone not

normally to be associated with Father Fenn, he wrote on 8th January 1880 to his Bishop, "(On 1st February) I must in the event of its closing (the school) give the usual quarter's notice to the Teacher and the Landlord. Three years ago I offered to give £10 per annum for three years towards the support of the school. I have done so, but am quite unable to do more". The school's location is unknown, but may for convenience have been held in Tewkesbury town; in 1880 its pupils numbered 23, of whom 21 were Catholics, and the letter above indicates a single teacher, whose annual salary by this time had declined to £37. The ultimate fate of the school is not revealed.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Finance continued to be a problem; in 1895 Father Fenn initiated a further attempt to improve matters. He seems to have asked the trustees (of whom now only Captain Gerard and the bishop remained, the marquis having died in 1884) and evidently other benefactors for further funds. Mrs Amelia Pearce-Serocold, a parishioner of means, had been approached with a request to contribute five pounds quarterly to the Mission; the response was a forthright letter to the Bishop, and a revealing one too: "I do not consider the Mission a poor one. I've always understood that the founders of the Mission had endowed it with what ought to bring in £100 a year and that Father Fenn had private means of his own. No doubt the £100 may now be reduced to £80 as everybody's investments are reduced, (word unclear) I did not think that an increase of income was necessary . . . ". Nevertheless she offered to pay the extra amount. The reference to Father Fenn's "private means of his own" is perhaps a mistaken one, for Mrs Pearce-Serocold, without any real insight into the matter, clearly imagined a substantial income, whereas it was in fact minimal. Indeed, poor Father Fenn was in the unhappy position of barely being able to subsidise his own stipend.

The fall in the value of the return on investments by a fifth in the twenty five years since the foundation of the Mission exacerbated a desperate financial situation,

and the marquise, with characteristic generosity, sent to the Bishop a cheque for £400 with the wish that it should be invested in the name of the Trustees, and the income paid to the Priest of that Mission. At about this time the congregation numbered thirty two.

BIRTH OF EDITH GERARD

From the earliest days of the Mission its affairs had been of the utmost concern to the marquise. There had been no children from her marriage, and after the death of her parents her close family consisted only of her husband and her sister Catherine. In April 1869 Catherine had married, and in February 1870 Catherine gave birth to a daughter, christened Edith Mary Catherine.

THE MARQUIS AND MARQUISE MOVE TO MALVERN

In about 1873 the marquis and marquise left the Mythe to take up residence at Kinnersley House in Little Malvern. A major undertaking in Malvern at this time was the foundation and eventual opening of Saint Joseph's Church in Great Malvern. The Marquis de Lys appears in a list of subscribers to the new church, and he (and presumably the marquise) attended the opening ceremonies on 26th October 1876.

DEATH OF FRANCIS-GABRIEL DE LYS

On 3rd December 1884 Francis-Gabriel de Lys died. He was the last member of his line, his sister Mary Barbara having died the year before at the age of 58. Mary Barbara had never married, and little it seems is known of her life. She lies buried in Saint Wulstan's churchyard at Little Malvern in a tomb alongside that of the marquis. The grave of Francis-Gabriel is decorated with his arms and those of the marquise's father, borne on two ovals - a continental practice, and not a general one in England. Below the ovals is a scroll bearing his motto, FLORESCET SICUT LILIUM, May he flourish like the lily, a pun on his family's name; above the ovals is his marquis¹ coronet. His memorial, however, is a magnificent one; a superb window by John Hardman in the north transept of Saint Wulstan's Church, incorporating his crowned arms this time supported by collared greyhounds.

Now a widow the Marquise continued to live on at Kinnersley House. She seems to have relied more and more on Captain Gerard, her brother-in-law, among other things for financial advice. Her generosity was undiminished and she continued to support charitable concerns and appeals in addition to the Mythe Mission.

PEARCE-SEROCOLD MEMORIAL WINDOW

About this time the most distinctive decorative feature of the Mythe church was installed, the window commemorating Walter Serocold Pearce-Serocold. He was a member of a Cambridgeshire family of wealthy landowners, and had married the daughter of a Canadian judge, His Honour, Judge Duval. (His widow, Amelia Pearce-Serocold was the lady writing from Forthampton, who recorded her strong feelings about being asked to increase her contribution to the Mission's funds.) The window is particularly fine and depicts the Annunciation; in the left hand lancet is the Archangel Gabriel, in the right the Blessed Virgin; in the quatrefoil at the top of the window is a crucifix.

STATE OF THE PARISH, 1882

An informal note in early 1882 contains a few details of the parish and its church. There were between 30 and 40 Catholics; none of these were converts received by Father Fenn, but there were two "old converts". Even at this date the distance from the town of Tewkesbury was recognised to be a factor adversely affecting attendance. The note gives a few details of plate and vestments belonging to the church. There was apparently at this date no font in the church. Probably at this period also the original altar of wood was replaced by one of stone, for in October 1883 Father Fenn wrote to the Bishop asking for permission to dispose of " an old wooden altar and gradual for candles" to Lady Mostyn.

A NEW TRUSTEE

The Marquis Francis-Gabriel having died in 1884, it was suggested by Father Fenn some years later that the vacant position of trustee be filled by Captain Case Walker. Sometimes known as Ashton Case, the Captain had bought Beckford Hall, and as he was a convert to Catholicism,^

the Hall was thus restored after a brief interlude to Catholic ownership. He evidently accepted the trusteeship, for shortly afterwards, a solicitor for the diocese was briefing him on the financial affairs relating to the Mythe Mission. There are some indications that Father Fenn was on good terms with the Captain and his family, but a mention of his visits to Beckford about this time records that he was then thought to be suffering from heart disease.

MARRIAGE OF EDITH GERARD

For the Marquise probably the last great celebrations of her life were the marriage of her niece, Edith Mary Catherine Gerard, to Edward Charles Riddel 1, a member of the Northumberland Catholic family, and the births and christenings of their first children.

THE AFFAIR OF THE MASSES

Two events were however to sadden her last years. In 1904 it became apparent to Captain Gerard from a letter sent by Father Fenn to Mrs Gerard that the Masses which it had been solemnly agreed in 1870 by the Bishop would be said for the intentions of the founders and the benefactors, and ultimately for the repose of their souls, had in fact never been said. Father Fenn's letter is not available, but Captain Gerard's angry correspondence about the matter is; it gives some idea of the thrust of Father Fenn's letter, and also probably reflects accurately the appalled feelings of both his wife and his sister-in-law over the matter. Captain Gerard then wrote to the Bishop, now Doctor Burton, appraising him of the matter. With the correspondence is a transcript of the agreement relating to the Gerards written out in Bishop Burton's beautiful handwriting the arrangement in their case was that there would be "for ever hereafter... in every year at the Catholic Chapel at the Mythe... six Masses three (for Frederic Gerard, and three for Catherine Gerard). A similarly-worded agreement was drawn up for Francis-Gabriel and Mary Elizabeth de Lys, but in total 12 Masses were to be said. Authorization of the Masses was "in consideration of certain benefactions to the Catholic Church in this diocese", and there is no

reference to any other financial stipulation. According to Captain Gerard, Father Fenn had written that "with the exception of about four (Masses) annually asked for by Mrs Gerard, none have been said, and he has no intention of saying any in future without an offering." Father Fenn's defence was that he never knew about the agreement relating to the Masses. In due course Bishop Burton confirmed the arrangements made in 1870, and authorized the "arrears to be made up for the Marquis de Lys." At this the Captain declared the family satisfied, but added "As far as they are concerned they would prefer the matter to end there, as Father Fenn is now an old man and would of course feel it intensely if he were to be removed from the Mythe."

FATHER FENN RETIRES

Nevertheless, when the dust had settled the decision was taken that Father Fenn should be retired. Probably his declining health was more telling a factor in the decision than the unfortunate affair of the Masses, for there is evidence of him suffering from arthritis, and perhaps his mental faculties were beginning to deteriorate.

In June 1905 Father Fenn retired; he was replaced by Reverend Arthur Jackson, once a priest of the Plymouth diocese and chaplain to the Countess Nelson, and a former member of the Society of Jesus. He was briefed in particular on the Masses for the founders and benefactors of the mission, and began to survey his new parish. In January 1906 he wrote to the bishop giving a useful report after four months in post : "There are 60 resident Catholics 40 attend Mass on Sunday...There are 20 children, nearly all under six, so there is something to start with. On my arrival I found the greater number of the people had lost all interest whatever in the Church ; three families and (Mr?) Dowdeswell were the only regular attendants".

Father Fenn lived for a short time in retirement in % Fairview area of Cheltenham, hobbling to Mass at Saint Gregory's Church when he was able to; in 1908 he died.

DEATHS OF CATHERINE GERARD AND MARY ELIZABETH DE LYS

In May of 1906 Catherine Gerard died, and two months later, on 11th July 1906, the Marquise Mary Elizabeth de Lys also went to her rest. Her funeral three days later, was conducted at Saint Wulstan's Church, Little Malvern, by Dom David Bede Ryan OSB, Prior of Our Lady and Saint Edmund's, Malvern, assisted by Dom Jarne Bernard Murphy of Saint Wulstan's Priory, and her body was laid alongside that of her husband, who had died twenty two years earlier. The whole of her estate passed to her niece, Edith Riddel 1, whose father, Captain Gerard predictably acted as executor for the late Marquise.

TO THE PRESENT DAY

After the death of the Marquise only Captain Gerard remained of those who had planned and set up the Mythe mission and built its church, and Mr and Mrs Riddeli, the Captain's daughter and son-in-law continued the family's generosity towards the upkeep and management of the parish. But the work of foundation was now complete, and the further history of the parish towards modern times is still a matter of memory for many of the older members of the Church. Nevertheless there is still much groundwork to be done for further research into the history of Saint Joseph's Church.

In 1977 the parish sold the Church on the Mythe, having earlier acquired more convenient premises in the centre of Tewkesbury, which had formerly belonged to the Post Office telephone service; the telephone exchange building became the new church, and a modern bungalow was built as a presbytery. There is nevertheless a firm continuity from the Mythe Mission days and Masses for the founders, trustees and benefactors continue to be said. May their confidence in the future of the Catholic Church in Tewkesbury never be disappointed. May it , as the motto of the Marquis de Lys has it, flourish as the lily - which might aptly have suggested the dedication to Saint Joseph right at the start.

NOTES

- (i) The word "mythe" signifies the area of land between two rivers where they come to a confluence, and has interesting linguistic connections, through Anglo-Saxon, "(ge)mythe", to German "Gemunde" and "Munde" (Geoffrey H. Burrows : The Pall Wavy and some other Armorial Confluence Symbols (unpublished). See also Charles Hilton : A Short history of the Mythe, Tewkesbury, Lackland Books, 1985)
- (ii) Gules on a fess between in chief a bird (of uncertain type; possibly a dove or pigeon, but identified also as a falcon) close and in base two stag's heads couped at the neck argent three roses of the first. Crest : A stag's head c.ouped (tincture?).
- (iii) I am grateful to Mrs Pitcher of The Mythe for this important detail, which corrects a much later date proposed by some authorities.
- (iv) Letter dated 5th December 1987 from Sister Francis-Agnes Onslow, OSC of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, Woodchester.
- (v) Letter dated 8th February 1989 from Sister Mary Ormerod of the Convent of the Assumption, Kensington Square, London. "The Religious of the Assumption", (Living Tradition series) is a useful review of the history and apostolate of this Order.
- (vi) In describing the church the tradition of calling the end at which the altar is situated the east end, and naming the other parts of the church in relation to the east end, is observed. In fact the axis of the church is approximately north-south, the liturgical east end being at the geographical southern extremity.

- (vii) Published in 1907 in the Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic; implied there to have been taken in 1852, but a somewhat later date should probably be ascribed to it.
- (viii) The arms of the Marquis de Lys were Gules on a fess argent four ermine spots sable, and in chief two fleurs de lys of the second (De gueules a la fasce d'argent chargee de quatre mouchetures d'hermines de sable, et accompagnee en chef de deux fleurs de lys du second). For arms of Porter, see note (ii) above.

THE ARMS OF THE MARQUIS DE LYS

The Gloucestershire and North Avon Catholic History Society was founded in October 1986. Since then it has grown steadily in membership and reputation. Membership is not just for professional or even dedicated amateur historians as the majority of members merely share a common interest in local Catholicism through the centuries. Membership is not limited to Roman Catholics as there are a number of non Roman Catholic members whose contribution to the work of the Society is greatly valued.

During the last two years the Society has arranged over twenty lectures on local, national, mediaeval, recusant and more modern themes as well as trips and other informal members' meetings. The Society spear-headed local celebrations marking the Beatification of the Eighty Five Martyrs. As a result of the work of members various documents have been given safe custody, parish registers transcribed and advice given to those compiling parish histories, researching their family or other enquiries.

A feature of the Society is its quarterly Journal which has already brought together over twenty articles on local themes besides book reviews, reviews of meetings and other news.

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