II.

THE ARCHIVES IN THE KEEPING OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER

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The Archives in the keeping of the Archbishop of Westminster, or what are more usually called the Westminster Archives, form a unique collection of ecclesiastical documents of the first importance.

Owing to the break in our Catholic history with the coming of the Reformation in England, there are however very few mediaeval documents in this collection. There is a fairly extensive collection of papers relating to Selby Abbey in Yorkshire dating from the 13th to the 16th century. There are some presentments for heresy in the diocese of Norwich in the later half of the 15th century and an early manuscript copy of the Charter of the Chapter of Wells Cathedral.

The collection becomes a coherent body of documents from 1558. On November 17th 1558 Elizabeth I imprisoned all the Catholic bishops, with the exception of Bishop Kitchin who conformed to the State religion. No attempt was made to appoint anyone to replace the bishops and the religious history of the early years of Elizabeth's reign is largely one of drift. Rome was waiting perhaps in the hope that Elizabeth might be won over while the vacillating Philip II of Spain was striving successfully to dissuade the Pope from any action which might offend Elizabeth.

Very soon « the starvation policy » of Elizabeth began to show its effect. In 1558, William Allen, one time Canon of York and Principal of St. Mary's Hall, Oxford, founded the great College of Douai and in 1574 the first of the Douai priests came back to England to attempt to keep the faith alive in the homeland. For the next two centuries at least, Douai College is one of the great centres from which this heroic struggle was waged.

Pride of place in the Westminster collection, therefore, goes to Douai material. This includes in particular the first two Douai

diaries extending from 1573 to 1593. Later diaries also are preserved together with some early account books of the College. There is too, a fine collection of some forty-two letters of Cardinal William Allen concerning not only Douai College but the affairs of England up to the time of his death at the end of the 16th century. These letters are found in volume 3 of the Main Series.

This Main Series contains some 9,000 documents. The papers are plentiful from 1578 and extend to 1847. The first 50 volumes, covering 1501 to 1798, are bound and catalogued and a microfilm has been made of this catalogue. The papers from 1799 to 1807 are filed and catalogued, while the work of cataloguing the papers from 1808 to 1847 is at present in progress. The Main Series consists principally of papers kept by the Vicars Apostolic in penal times. Upon the restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850 these were handed over to the « Archbishop of Westminster for the time being » for his safe keeping. They may be said to reflect the whole history of the Church in England from the 16th to the mid 19th century.

It was natural that Cardinal William Allen, as the founder and Rector of the English College at Douai, should be recognised as the chief figure in Catholic life in the second half of the 16th century. He became the unofficial leader of English Catholic life and in 1581 was designated Prefect of the English Mission by the Pope.

In 1582 the Jesuits first came to work on the English mission and they were followed in 1602 by the Benedictines and shortly afterwards by the Franciscans. The presence in England of Regular clergy with their own superiors, seen against the background of violent and bitter persecution, was almost bound to lead to complications. As long as Allen lived the work of the Mission proceeded fairly smoothly. Two years after his death in 1596, Pope Clement VIII appointed a Superior of the Secular Clergy with the title of Archpriest. Many of the clergy were not at all satisfied with such an appointment. There were other troubles too and soon we move into a sad period of regrettable squabbles which lasted until the end of the reign of James I. The bulk of the surviving papers concerning this episode, known in English history as « The Archpriest Controversy », are contained in the Westminster Archives.

In 1623 the first Vicar Apostolic was appointed, with Ordinary jurisdiction over the whole country. The first holder of this office, William Bishop, died within a few months and was succeeded by Richard Smith, Bishop of Calcedon. The latter had inherited much of the animosity aroused by the Archpriest controversy and after an unhappy period of office was more or less forced to leave the country in 1631. For the next 54 years England was again without a Vicar Apostolic. In so far as it was ruled at all, the Church in England was governed by the Chapter appointed by the first Vicar Apostolic. After 1631 it continued to perpetuate itself by the simple method of co-option. This Chapter was never recognised or formally confirmed in its powers by Rome but nevertheless it had an agent in Rome who was accepted and who transacted most of its affairs.

This Chapter was careful to preserve its archives, the bulk of which were given in the late 19th century to the Archbishop of Westminster to join the collection already under his care. The remaining papers of these archives are still in the custody of the « Old Brotherhood », the direct heirs of the original Chapter, and are open to the inspection and use of students.

In 1685 John Leyburn was appointed Vicar Apostolic, and three years later England was divided into four Vicariates. The Westminster archives therefore contain perhaps the bulk of the material of an official nature concerning the Church in England from the time of Allen until 1688. From that date until 1840 the archives cover the London Vicariate only. Nevertheless in its early days the London Vicariate also included North America and the West Indies and papers relating to these are to be found in the Westminster archives.

It is difficult to overstress the importance of the Main Series of the Westminster archives.

There is a further or Supplementary Series of papers many of which came into the keeping of the Archbishop in more recent years. Much of the material of this Supplementary Series is of the same nature as that contained in the Main Series, The most important items here are four volumes of letters from the Roman Agent from 1578 to 1630 and another 14 volumes covering the years 1701 to 1804.

In this series can be found the Stafford papers which were deposited at Archbishop's House by Sir Henry Stafford Jeringham

and which relate to the trial of Viscount Stafford who was martyred on Tower Hill on 29th December 1680. There are also some original Stuart papers concerning the Revolution of 1688 and these extend to 1719.

The remaining sections of the archives consist of the few registers which survived penal times, together with manuscripts, some of them of great value as for instance the surviving papers of the Venerable Bishop Richard Challoner.

The printed material found within the archives is likewise of quite considerable importance. There is a collection of 27 bound volumes of pamphlets of the 17th and early 18th century, with their own catalogue, and a magnificent collection of some 48 volumes of controversial tracts covering the years 1686 to 1960. Finally there is a large collection of printed books, some from Douai and others forming an interesting assortment of spiritual writings of the 18th century.

The archives are kept at Archbishop's House Westminster, and are available for consultation by students. Office hours are from 10. a.m. to 5 p.m. on any weekday and access to the archives can be had upon application to the Archivist. Special permission from His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop is required before quotations from the documents can be used in published works. The archives are equipped with a microfilm reader and microfilm of the documents in the Westminster archives can be provided upon application to the Archivist.