Chapter 3
Douai 1818-1903
Alban Hood

1. The beginnings of St. Edmund's at Douai

"Gloomy beginnings are sometimes the forerunners of success,"declared Bishop Bernard Collier in 1887 in a letter to Prior Anselm O'Gorman. "Look at Douai: If you had seen what I had seen of its beginnings, you would indeed have foretold a great fiasco." The Community's beginnings at Douai were certainly gloomy, not least because of the fact that by 1818, it only had three members. Prior Henry Parker, the last prior of St.Edmund's, had struggled on heroically in Paris, endeavouring to maintain a monastic presence there, but his death in 1817, and the unwillingness of the three remaining monks to return to France from the English mission, appeared to sound the death knell of the Community.By this time, both St.Gregory's and St.Laurence's, the other two surviving English Benedictine monasteries of monks had settled in England, at Downside and Ampleforth respectively, as if to signal their faith in an earlier prophecy made in 1800 by Prior Jerome Sharrock that "France will never again serve as a refuge for our monks." St.Edmund's owed its survival to two monks who believed differently. The faith, vision and labours of Prior Henry Parker and the tenacity and courage of Dr.Richard Marsh, formerly prior of St.Laurence's, enabled St.Edmund's to recover from the ravages and horror of the French Revolution and begin to chart a new course, in many ways significantly different from the course pursued in England by St.Gregory's and St. Laurence's.

For a brief period the monks of St.Edmund's had resumed conventual life in their old buildings in Paris. In January 1795, Prior Parker had written to President Cowley that if the revolutionary government "would let us quit this country, it is what we all much desire," but taking possession again of the monastery in 1799, he changed his mind. The Community were forced to leave it once more in 1805, and were never to return there as a group. Prior Parker did eventually repossess the property and reside there himself, but he died in 1817, leaving the remaining three members of his Community on the Mission in England.

In his will, Parker entrusted the St.Edmund's property to Dom Richard Marsh, who had already been working on a scheme for the restoration of his own monastery's property at Dieulouard, as well as the buildings vacated at Douai in northern France by St.Gregory's. Both Parker and Marsh believed that were the English Benedictines to re-establish themselves in France, a school would be necessary, and as Paris was not a feasible location for this, they turned their attention to the buildings at Douai in northern France that had been vacated by St.Gregory's.

Parker did not favour a re-settlement of St.Edmund's on English soil for a number of reasons; he was alarmed by reports of anti-Catholic rioting in England and of the financial difficulties being experienced there by the other two English Benedictine communities. At least in France, the Edmundian monks had pensions to support them, paid by the French government. The Community that had been expelled from the house in Paris had initially moved to various lodgings in the city, where they supplemented their income by teaching. One notable member of this group was Dom John Turner who published a French grammar and compiled a collection of pamphlets relating to the French Revolution, now on permanent loan to the University of Reading. Furthermore, Parker was far from edified by the behaviour of his brethren on the English mission and feared that a new foundation in England would not flourish.

Paris was far from an ideal setting for a re-establishment of the Community. It had been a good centre for Edmundians in the eighteenth century where their life had been greatly stimulated by the literary and scientific currents emanating from the University, but Parker had experienced at first-hand how the Community had become undermined by the later currents of the Enlightenment and radical attitudes to democracy in the person of Dom Cuthbert Wilks. Parker believed that St.Edmund's had more hopeful prospects by moving north to Douai.

There were several significant obstacles to be overcome in bringing this about: firstly, the Community of St.Gregory's under Prior Augustine Lawson expressed a desire to return to their old home at Douai. Secondly, there was considerable opposition within the Congregation to any re-establishment in France. It was expensive enough to

maintain two houses in England, let alone another in France. There was concern that resources would be wasted. Finally there was talk of joining the three houses together, a proposal that was fiercely opposed by Prior Lawson.

The letters exchanged by Prior Lawson and Prior Parker between 1814 and 1816 document Lawson's gradual decline of enthusiasm for a return to Douai. Although he had managed to persuade most of his community to support a return to France, by late 1816 he was at Douai and was alarmed by the dilapidated state of the property. Parker warned that a re-settlement there would encounter several problems, not least the difficulties Parker described as "ecclesiastical exemption, academical subjection and the expense of provisions. " Lawson then succumbed to euroscepticism, concluding that France was "in a wretched state" and that it was extremely unwise for his community to return there.

Parker's trust in the abilities of Father Richard Marsh proved not to be misplaced, for it was Marsh who brought Parker's hopes to fruition. Marsh stood firm against the opposition of the French government, and the General Chapter of his own Congregation. The source of much of the opposition concerned money, and the unwillingness of General Chapter to concede that the money, paid by the French government as compensation to the monks for the loss of their property, had to be spent on education in France. Marsh 's tenacity eventually led to the restoration of St.Edmund's in the recovered buildings of old St.Gregory's at Douai, in the autumn of 1818. It took a further five years for Marsh to officially establish conventual life at Douai, when six postulants were clothed, five of whom were to survive, including the future prior and bishop, Bernard Collier. By 1823 there were 28 boys in the school.

Dom Aidan Bellenger has described the nineteenth-century English Benedictine experience as "a subtle blend of the home and colonial with a strong dose of Euro-scepticism." To a large extent, St.Edmund's did not share this experience. Tucked away behind its high walls in an English enclave in a northern French town, St.Edmund's was "entirely removed in its continental isolation from the whirl and turmoil," of English Catholic life, where euroscepticism increasingly became the order of the day. Unlike the other Benedictine schools at Downside and Ampleforth, Douai did not have to compete with the increasingly fashionable English Protestant

schools. These lacked the funding that the college at Douai enjoyed, for bursaries from the French government enabled English bishops to educate their seminarians at Douai. These bursaries could only be used in France. The character of its College helped to inculcate a strong missionary spirit among the Edmundian familia, for the College forged strong links with the English secular clergy, and provided those trained at Douai with an appreciation of the Benedictine life at a time when Benedictine missioners in England were themselves coming closer to their secular brethren in their style of life.

So-called 'bishops' boys,' destined to be secular priests , came from a variety of backgrounds, middle-class and working-class, from every corner of England, Wales and Scotland. Not all went on to be ordained as secular priests, for as the century progressed, St.Edmund's succeeded in recruiting for itself an increasing number of these students, a phenomenon which was no doubt responsible for the famous Dr. John Lingard warning the English bishops in 1848 to ensure that the young men they sent to Douai "might not be stolen by the monks." Such a diverse spread of social backgrounds helped to create a particular type of Douai monk in the early part of the nineteenth-century period, once described by the late Abbot Gregory Freeman as "not academic, not adventurous and not *monastic.*" Yet as we will see, there were always exceptions to the rule, and paradoxically, the isolated English Benedictine enclave in Douai produced some of the Congregation's finest nineteenth-century leaders, missioners, musicians and scholars.

2. Location and buildings

Douai, later to be so fondly and senitmentally regarded as *alma mater* by successive generations of priests and monks, had before the French Revolution, been the seat of a *Parlement* and a University. By the mid-nineteenth- century it was described as "an old fortress town with a triple line of ramparts", which were dismantled in 1891. It was remembered for its "broad deep moats, roughly paved streets and trottoirs so trying to tender feet, closely shuttered houses, and blue-bloused inhabitants clattering about in sabots", through which ran a "drowsy river where women did their washing and where heroically patient fishermen watched for hours on end for the wild excitement of a bite."

The town proved to be a useful stopping point on the route between the channel port of Calais and Paris. In 1846 the railway linked Douai with the coast and the French capital. According to a contemporary account, Douai's station was built by an English firm and the Douai boys present when the inaugural train steamed out were amused to hear one of the workmen call out to the driver "Let 'er go Bill!" Waving off boys and visitors from the station remained a popular pastime until 1903. Henry Parkinson, the future Rector of Oscott, was a pupil at Douai in the early 1870s and recorded in his diary: "After bidding all goodbye, we proceeded around the ramparts to see the train off and after we had waited a long time we saw it emerge from the station. Our fellows were in the last carriage and as soon as they were well out from the platform red and white handkerchiefs fluttered from every window. We gave three cheers with our usual gusto. "

The monastery buildings previously occupied by the monks of St.Gregory's were situated in the Rue Saint Benôit, but by the time of the arrival of Dr Marsh and his companions in 1818, the church was in a ruinous state, the monastery had disappeared and the cloister had been turned into a barracks. The college building was dilapidated, and a pile of ashes from a recently established furnace on the site, lay in the centre of the quadrangle. Bishop Collier recalled that "one half of the ground floor was let out to carpenters and blacksmiths, and the blacksmiths had a blazing fire when they needed one in the boys' playground. The underground cellar was let out to a brewer whose cart and horses used to bring in or carry out the barrels of beer, as they liked."

Early students of the house recalled the pump and trough that stood outside for morning ablutions and recalled also the unfortunate boy, with long common towel twisted around him, whose duty it was to thaw the ice in the pump and break the ice in the trough at five o'clock in the morning, "pumping with all his might to keep up a supply of water for half the boys at a time." Although a new lavatory block was installed in 1863, it was 1894 before hot water baths were installed, heralded by a contemporary student as "one of the chief glories of our generation. " Gas was first installed in 1846. Internal telephones were installed 1895 and electricity in 1897.

Successive generations of Dowegians remembered the inadequately heated buildings: "In winter we had to endure cold which went to the very marrow of our bones," remembered one. "On study days fires were not lighted in the play-rooms and warmth had to be generated by vigorous games." Lack of heat was still evidently an issue for boys in the school as late as 1900. Writing in *The Douai Magazine*, one of the senior boys reported an interview with the Procurator, whose views " were sought on the burning question of hot-water pipes for the private rooms." Clearly it was not a very productive interview, for he remarks: "A pointed remark and a gesture of a like nature brought the interview to a hasty conclusion."

There was a desperate shortage of space. The *Chauffoir* had to be used as a chapel until the 1840s and then became successively the study hall, and the Community common room. Successive priors initiated a number of changes and additions to the buildings, but apart from the chapel, the only substantial building projects were those financed by the generosity of Edmund Granville Ward, the most significant benefactor to the Community, who provided the funds to build a new cloister and guest wing to the monastery.

It was 1840 before the foundation stone for a proper chapel was laid. The renowned architect Augustus Welby Pugin was commissioned to draw the plans. Prior Placid Burchall proudly declared in December 1842 that the chapel was "creeping slowly up the hill of perfection," although it was to be another nine years before the building was officially opened. The chapel reflects the nature of St.Edmund's at this time as a *petit seminaire.* Thus the building was a collegiate chapel of a type common to Oxford and Cambridge and the English seminaries of Ushaw and Ware, whose decorated chapels Pugin was to design later in the 1840s. Externally it did not blend in well with the earlier monastery to which it was attached. In the early days it was intensely cold, especially in the winter. One former student recalled that whilst serving Mass one winter's morning the cruets "froze tightly to the cruet stand, and between the *Lavabo* and the priest's communion I had to break them away from the ice 'ere I could serve the 'first ablution.'" As the numbers in the College increased later in the century, conditions in the chapel became cramped, especially after 1900 when it became an abbey church, and St.Edmund's first abbot was enthroned on a temporary throne which had to be moved into the centre of the sanctuary.

Nonetheless the chapel was fondly remembered by old Dowegians long after the expulsion in 1903. Altar boys recalled its "simple beauty" and how they "longed for and eagerly put on the scarlet boys' cassocks." The statues and windows depicting the great Benedictine saints spoke of a rich tradition, recalling "the prayers and influence of those sons of Douai who drank in their martyr's spirit and their unity of object…" This was the "fountain head" successive generations of students "imbibed… when every morning we knelt together in that College chapel."

The cramped conditions provided too little space for games and recreation. The boys became used to "roaming the country with a beer- bottle and basket of sandwiches and cold pudding" slung on their backs. A significant benefit to both boys and monks was the purchase of a country house and park at nearby Planques in 1885. Here the boys could indulge to their heart's content "in fishing, boating, bathing and roaming about the fields and woods." The estate was later graced by tennis courts and sports fields which became the setting for fiercely fought games between the monks and the boys. On 25 October 1900 the community annalist gloomily recorded the result of the annual football match: "The religious did not play well together- result boys 4 – religious 1."

3. The Monastic Community

From the original small Community begun by Marsh, the numbers began to rise steadily, from 6 in 1826 to 93 in 1899. The Community which carried on at Douai had few links with the house at Paris; only the notorious former radical, Father Cuthbert Wilks, was to know both communities. He was to die at Douai in 1829. Father John Turner, the last of the Paris monks, who died in 1844, lived to see an Edmundian familia of over thirty professed members. From 1838 the majority of the Community were engaged in pastoral work on the English mission. In 1850 there were 12 members of the Community thus so engaged, and by 1899 this had increased to 36. The size of the Community resident at Douai remained small, although numbers rose from 18 in 1850 to 26 in 1903.

From 1838 there was always a small number of laybrothers in the resident community. Their labours on the fabric of the building were acknowledged as saving the college a small fortune at a time when its resources were severely stretched. Notable characters were Brother Joseph Binnell (1814-1893) who “brought with him from his native city of Birmingham a remarkable degree of varied talent. He was the plumber, glazier, painter, decorator, and jack of all trades. In addition to his skill in cookery and gardening. “ Janitorial duties for much of the century were the responsibility of the Frenchman, Brother Didace Six who “ knew most of the *habitants de Douai* and most of the *habitants* knew him. “ The laybrothers were treated separately from the other monks. It was only in November 1855 that they were permitted to eat lunch and dinner with the Community – but were still segregated by being required to sit at a separate table!

Despite the useful work done by the laybrothers, successive priors of St.Edmund’s frequently complained to their counterparts in England that the house was short of human resources. Prior Appleton, superior at Douai from 1836 to 1841, anticipated the radical agenda of the monastic reformers of fifty years later, expressing the view that “such evils will not cease until interests of monasteries are more attended to.”

4. Benefactors

Throughout the century, despite the regular income from the bursaries provided by the French government, the financial state of the Community was precarious and it became increasingly dependent upon benefactions. St.Edmund’s most generous benefactor was undoubtedly Edmund Granville Ward (1853-1915), a character as colourful as he was generous. Ward was the eldest son of the famous Ultramontane convert W.G Ward. His father died in 1882 and Edmund inherited his fortune, which included his father’s estate on the Isle of Wight. His brother Wilfrid Ward wrote of Edmund: “He was at once very able and a very eccentric man; his education had failed to develop his ability and had fostered his eccentricity…” His brother related that early in life Edmund thought of being a priest: “All his tastes were ecclesiastical. But ecclesiastical tastes do not make a vocation, and with Edmund they were just tastes. He had played at Church as a child – he continued to play at it as a man.” He spent most of his time in colleges abroad, where his chief pleasure in life was to

attend and stage-manage interminable liturgical services. According to his brother, "dressed whenever possible in a surplice, or better still, a cope, Edmund would hover round the priests as master of ceremonies, or himself intone the psalms at Vespers." Ward's chapel at Weston on the Isle of Wight for a time served as the parish church, and here "groans of dismay attended the announcement of 'the Squire's' return – for it meant that Sunday High Mass, at normal times a matter of an hour and a half beginning at eleven, might now last until four in the afternoon."

How and when Ward first appeared at Douai is not certain, but it seems he visited the College in January 1894 on his way to Rome. In 1895 he gave £100 for the establishment of a new library. In 1896, he provided the funds for a new cloister, and for laying out the cricket field and tennis courts at Planques. Later he gave money to build a new lavatory block and guest wing, but probably his most famous benefaction was the gift in 1896, of a fine set of vestments to commemorate the beatification of the English Benedictine martyrs the previous year. The set consisted of " chasuble, dalmatic, tunicle, humeral veil and cope…made by the firm of Grossé of Bruges… probably no modern set of vestments has been made with more thought or care," commented Everard Green in an article in the *The Douai Magazine.* "They are liturgical and historical to a degree, and teach all who see them that these deep blood-red vestments are chiefly designed for the great feast of Pentecost, the feasts of apostles and martyrs, in an English Benedictine church." In an expression of gratitude, the Council Book records that on 15 November 1896 the Fathers decided that during his lifetime, the first Mass of Christmas would be offered for the intentions of Edmund Granville Ward. Nonetheless this generous benefactor would at times proved to be a source of irritation to members of the Community.

5. Community life

The Community resident at Douai may have been small, but there are indications that it was not always harmonious. Bishop Collier recalled that in its early days, the monastery was called the "Botany Bay of monks," for "unruly and dissatisfied monks were sent there: they gave no end of trouble." Archbishop Benedict Scarisbrick, himself a Douai monk, wrote to Prior Anselm O'Gorman in 1874: "I am sorry to hear

that the Douai community is full of broken down soldiers – this is so damaging to the religious spirit of young aspirants."

Dr. Marsh recorded that on the day, 12 October 1823, that the first novices were clothed, the small Community "began to keep choir and follow all monastic discipline, as in the other houses." The annals are silent in regard to the substance of this monastic discipline. The wearing of monastic habits were certainly not part of the routine. There was nothing strange in this, for the English Benedictine habit was not worn at Downside until All Saints Day, 1846. Dom Joseph Kitchin notes in his diary at Douai on 21 August 1852: "the religious all have scapulars – the latest fashion." In the earliest days of the re-settled Community, secular dress was the order of the day - cravats, cutaway coats, knee breeches, long stockings and buckled shoes. Dr.Marsh and his companion Dom Charles Fairclough, it was recalled, wore "swallow-tailed coats with collar reaching almost to the ears, a broad white neck-cloth, trousers straight up and down without any pretence to elegance, and their heads crowned with tall silk hats." Such secular attire was typical of the English Benedictines of this period, who considered their apostolic work to be far more important than their monastic observance. This emphasis can be clearly seen in the preface to the 1784 Constitutions which regulated the life and work of English Benedictine monks until almost the turn of the century. The preface specified that the special character of the English Benedictine Congregation was its missionary apostolate.

The Constitutions stressed that frequent sermons and spiritual talks should be given by the Superior. Topics for the chapters given to the Douai Community by Prior Oswald O'Neill in the 1870s included the importance of study, treatment of schoolboys and the dangers of women. He regarded study an important feature of monastic life, for "people are actually drawn away from High Mass on account of the bald and often meaningless sermons" given in church. In 1887 he urged the brethren "be very careful in your relation to the opposite sex…it is not becoming for a monk to write affectionate letters to young ladies."

The day for the monastic community began with the rising bell at 4.30am. All were expected to be in the chapel for meditation at 5.00am. Dom Cuthbert Doyle noted that

before the Meditation, the keen eye of Prior Placid Burchall, who was superior from 1841 to 1854, "glanced for an instant along the benches…. Any vacant space was at once detected and the defaulter sent for." The little hours were recited after this and then began a succession of private Masses before the Conventual Mass. There was an allotted time for Spiritual Reading and a mid-day visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Vespers were recited in the mid-afternoon and the evening was taken up with a Community chapter given by the prior followed by Compline. A different horarium seems to have been operated during school holidays and on the major feasts.

7. Spiritual life and liturgy

Monks by nature instinctively shrink from writing about their own inner life, so it is perhaps not surprising that we can gain little insight in to the spiritual life of members of the Community in this period. One particularly challenging area for future research would be to assess the extent to which their spirituality was in any way affected by the fact that their monastery was located in France rather than in England. In her monograph, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England*, Mary Heimann asserts the view that although the devotional tastes of nineteenth- century English Catholics were influenced by contemporary French piety, English Catholicism tended to be resistant to the more extreme forms of continental devotion that stressed the sanctification of suffering. In the mid-nineteenth century, the sanctity of the Belgian stigmatic, Louise Lateau, attracted the curious interest of many thousands the world over, some 200,000 of whom flocked to seek the support of her prayers. It was only in 1995 that a letter to the Abbot of Douai revealed that in the year 1872 several members of the Community had made the short journey across the border from Douai to consult the young stigmatic. The names of Prior O'Gorman and President Placid Burchall, are listed among those of other Douai monks in the Visitors' Book kept by Lateau's local curé.

French Catholic devotion in the period preceding the Revolution had been greatly affected by Jansenism, with its emphasis on the perverseness of the human will, and consequently led to the custom of receiving Holy Communion only infrequently, and only when preceded by sacramental Confession. As late as the 1850s "a tinge of Jansenism still lingered" at Douai, according to a student of the time who remembered

that "there was a rule which set apart the afternoon of the last Saturday in each month for confession preparatory for the monthly communion on the following day." The writer observes that "the old regulation fell into desuetude within a year of the time I am speaking of . Little by little without apparent cause voluntary and more frequent approach to the Sacraments came about…marked increase of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady became general."

The Constitutions also regulated how the Divine Office was to be performed each day, noting that "voices should be clear and all effeminate levity avoided." The records make little reference as to how the Divine Office was celebrated at St.Edmund's, but the various parts of the Office would have been recited, rather than sung. St.Michael's, Belmont, near Hereford, founded in 1859 as the common novitiate for the English Benedictines was probably the only house in the Congregation to have an elaborate choral office. Here "choral office was maintained at a high level, with strict Plain Chant after the fashion of Mechlin. Each day Vespers were sung, but not Mass…" By 1873 it certainly seems that Sunday Vespers were sung in the chapel at Douai, for in his diary for Easter Sunday that year Henry Parkinson records: "the plainchant 'Regina Caeli' which had so often been murdered was sung very creditably this evening thanks to the Vesperales. Belmont's emphasis on Plainchant stemmed from the insistence of its wealthy benefactor Francis Wegg-Prosser that "no music but Plainchant must be used at Mass or Solemn services in the church." Edmund Granville Ward, the wealthy benefactor of St.Edmund's half-a-century later, had similarly strong views on church music. *The Douai Magazine* recorded that on 13th January 1894 in a speech at St.Edmund's,"Mr Ward highly recommended the singing of plainchant." He had clearly touched on a controversial issue for the writer commented that "we do not know if his audience were entirely sympathetic on this point…" In fact a columnist in *The Douai Magazine* had in a previous issue deplored the fact that a plainchant Mass had been used in the chapel on All Saints Day, 1893, remarking: "We trust that there will be no reason to tolerate it again."

A good choral tradition seems to have been steadily built up at Douai for Mass on Sundays and major feasts, especially after the opening of the Pugin chapel in 1851. The Community seems to have been blessed with talented choirmasters, such as Dom Cuthbert Murphy, under whom "church services were devotional and beautifully

carried out.” Murphy composed several Masses, Motets and Benediction services, which were all performed at Douai. The future English Benedictine President and Bishop of Port Louis, Austin O’Neil,l was another gifted Edmundian musician and choirmaster at Belmont. Under him, the choir of the college achieved “a high degree of efficiency, and he exploited his musical talent in inventing operettas for performance by the boys.” Alongside operettas and settings for poems to be performed at the Christmas festivities (in those days pupils did not go home for Christmas), O’Neill produced liturgical music, including accompaniments for the Cassinese tones, the Saturday night litany of Our Lady, and the lovely melody to the Carol, *See, Amid the Winter's Snow*, all still sung at Douai. The pages of *The Douai Magazine* make frequent reference to Masses by Haydn, Gounod and Vittoria being performed in the chapel. Whilst the zeal and performance of the choir were often commended, this did not prevent the occasional barb being expressed, such as in September 1895 when it was noted that “the Haydn Mass was delightful to hear, though some of the effects were marred by an over zeal on the part of the cantors.”

8. The College

Prior Parker had been most insistent on the necessity of the revived community having a school as an important focus for work. Although St.Edmund’s had the character of a *petit seminaire,* it never became strictly a seminary, for there were always a number of lay pupils among the seminarians. The total number of students was comparatively small, the number never rising significantly above eighty pupils, although half way through the century the number rose to 100 boys. In 1898 concern was expressed that the number was dwindling to 63, the lowest for some years. The Community annals record that there were 70 boys in the school in September 1902 at the beginning of the last academic year in France. According to Edmund Granville Ward, the small size of the school resulted “in a kind of family spirit, which anyone who knows Douai at all must see is conspicuous in the place.” The 1885 prospectus declared that “the Fathers endeavour to foster a family spirit, and discipline is maintained chiefly by kindly advice and guidance. A friendly intercourse of the Religious with the students…forms and influences the character of the boys, while it makes the College a happy home.”

Monsignor John O'Connor, who was later to receive G.K Chesterton in to the church and who was reputedly the model for the author's famous 'Father Brown' stories, remembered that during his time at old Douai "the monks were our big brothers, and we had a sort of feeling of going shares with them in everything…All children had to endure boredom but at Douai one saw the process of education intact, bringing up and bringing out." The College kept intact the old seminary tradition of the divisions of Rhetoric, Poetry and Syntax.

In the days before the common English Benedictine novitiate was established in 1859 at Belmont, junior monks in all the houses of the Congregation had to combine their own studies with the arduous task of teaching in the school. At Downside the future Bishop Bernard Ullathorne memorised the Rule of St.Benedict while washing in the morning, and read the works of the Fathers of the Church by candlelight at night. A snapshot of the situation at Douai in 1828 is provided by the following extract from a letter written by James Appleton, the future Prior:

> We are employed in the following manner…Mr Collier
> has the affairs of the house to manage and our divinity
> schools to hear and Gruarts, a French student of philosophy,
> to hear. Besides this he teaches French to an English gentleman
> in the town and perhaps several others…Father Marsh too is
> well occupied; he has to attend the churches in the town and
> at home to manage three youngsters who are just
> commencing their studies. Glassbrook has a little French man
> under him, to whom he teaches Latin and English.
> He has two others in the town to attend to. Br Bede Swale
> teaches the class that follows mine and Br Ignatius Greenough
> the one that succeeds his in order. Thus we are all labouring
> from morning until night without a moment's respite…we
> cannot expect to receive any assistance from the students we
> are bringing up, until three years have lapsed…

It was only late in the century that the number of laymasters increased.

A prospectus of the College, dated 1836 begins: "This establishment is open for the Education of Lay as well as Ecclesiastical students. To form them to a solid and enlightened piety and to give them a thorough knowledge of their Religion… while they are being initiated in to the Languages and Sciences, is the aim of the directors of St.Edmund's." The Prospectus for 1885 declares that "the object of the College is to

educate youth, principally for the priesthood…and to continue the work of the English, Irish and Scotch foundations established at Douai in the 16th and 17th centuries." It went on, "only British or English subjects are admitted." This was obviously not universally applied, for a humourist has added in the margin "and any others if money is forthcoming!"

a) The curriculum

An account is given of the course of studies in the College in 1885: "Latin, Greek, French, English, History and Geography, Mathematics, Book-keeping, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, Drilling, Penmanship, elementary and liturgical music and religious education." Elocution also features in this list, inciting our humourist to comment: "cockney accent a *sine qua non.*" Throughout the nineteenth-century St.Edmund's possessed a framework reflecting Jesuit influence. The Prior took the place of the Jesuit Rector, and under him were a number of prefects, usually a prefect of study and a prefect of discipline. These functions were normally carried out by members of the monastic community, assisted by a small number of lay masters.

St.Edmund's did try to develop its studies and structures to bring it nearer to its counterparts in England. One such innovation was the introduction of the mortar board as part of the compulsory uniform by Prefect Dom Bede Ryan in the 1890s. These were resented from the outset, although some pupils enjoyed the reaction such headgear evoked from local inhabitants. A pupil of this era recalled that on visits to the nearby towns "… the respective inhabitants did not seem anxious to deny themselves the pleasure of seeing us, if we may judge from the curiosity they showed in following us everywhere.. our 'mortar boards' no doubt were the unconscious cause of our attractiveness. But we did not care."

By the later nineteenth century the cult of Thomas Arnold, the famous Headmaster of Rugby, was in the ascendant in the English public schools, and even its continental isolation did not protect St.Edmund's from coming under its influence, as can be seen in the slightly absurd comparison made between Arnold and Prior O'Neill: "Arnold had trained only manly men, O'Neill had trained them not only to be manly men but excellent priests." Another indication of the attempt to imitate the English Public

school system can be seen in the introduction of a school parliament in the later 1880s, although this seemed to have a pedagogical rather than a legislative function. Similarly another tradition of the English public school system was introduced in 1901, when a school captain was elected, but the office soon disappeared, the officials' list being dominated by the leaders of the Sodality of Our Lady, a Jesuit society founded at Douai in 1836.

b) The religious life of the College

We can glean some insight in to the religious practice of the College from a description of life there in 1848: "High Mass was at 7.30am. Play time was followed by study time, learning by heart the Epistle and Gospel of the Sunday, and a portion of the Douai catechism. Then it was to our classrooms for instruction and examination."

The academic year at Douai began with a retreat for the boys and then was punctuated by the feasts of the liturgical year. The boys would go home only at the end of the summer term, so the major feasts of Christmas and Easter were important opportunities for recreation as well as for religious festivities.The first major feast of the Christmas term was that of the College patron, St.Edmund, King and Martyr. There was Pontifical Mass in the chapel and the boys would wish Father Prior a happy feast. On the major feasts there was a custom known as the *Gaudeamus,* the granting of special privileges to selected senior students. According to Prior O'Gorman, *gaudeamus* was " that magic word which makes every Douai student prick up his ears towards Christmas or Eastertide and awakens a pleasant reminiscence in the mind of many an old boy who enjoyed this feast in years gone by."

Old Dowegians would sentimentally recall the celebration of Christmas in the college. One noted that "beginning with Christmas Eve, its festoons, its illuminations, its chandeliers, the Midnight Mass with its long procession, the organ majestically pealing forth the 'Adeste,' the high altar in a blaze of glory, fills the mind with a transport of joy, never to be forgotten in after years."

Midnight Mass was immediately followed by Low Mass and then Christmas letters and parcels were distributed by the Prefect, before the singing of the Litany in front of the Crib. The Prior sang the Mass on Christmas morning, and then dinner would be served, including 'the traditional cork sauce.' After supper, "an entertainment, partly literary, partly musical" would be given by the senior students.The days immediately after Christmas would be devoted to a succession of plays and operas. The dramatic, literary and musical talents of both boys and monks would be exploited in the production of these.

Lent was immediately preceeded by the celebration of 'carnival.' On Shrove Tuesday 1873, Henry Parkinson recorded that the boys enjoyed "rolls, butter and chocolate for breakfast. At 7 in the evening we had the magic lantern in the theatre room."
The Holy Week ceremonies were carefully carried out in the College. Parkinson relates that on Palm Sunday 1873 "Father Prior sang Mass. No sermon. Nearly all the fellows had the large Syrian palms presented by Mr. Gray. The procession went round the garden – and just as we got into the house on returning it began to rain. The ceremony lasted 2 hours without a sermon." On Holy Thursday Parkinson gloomily recorded that "we had 'slops' or sago for dinner today – that is the fifth time to my knowledge of that preparation on Holy Thursday." On Good Friday,"Service began at 8. Fr Prior officiated. Fr. Benedict preached the passion sermon taking for his text 'daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me….' We had half an hour in study this morning during which Fr Cuthbert read us the account of the Last Supper and of the Passion from the Gospel of St.John. At 3pm the members of the Sacred Heart went to pray their devotions to the Blessed Sacrament in chapel. A number of the fellows too had gone through the Stations previously. After this we went to the Cemetery to say a De Profundis for the souls in Purgatory. "

May was observed in the College as a special month of devotion to Our Lady. During this month it was customary to take prayer intentions from a special box. In 1914, a remnant of this tradition from St.Edmund's Douai was discovered at Woolhampton in the form of "a yellowed slip of cardboard containing the request to pray for the success of the French arms in the war of 1870." June was the month when Blessed Sacrament processions took place along the streets of Douai, in which the

monks and the boys took part. One Old Dowegian remembered having "the privilege of going out in groups to join in this procession…there were lines of burning tapers held by Sisters of Charity, by schoolboys and by aged men…I can still hear the solemn chant and the braying trombones…and the tingle-tangle of the carillons, together with the deep boom of the massive bell of the parish church. I can still see the noble, devout French clergy…much devotion was poured down to the Blessed Sacrament from the opened windows of most houses, where knelt the aged grandparents and the good mothers of families…."

"Exhibition day" immediately preceded the end of the summer term at the beginning of July. The day took the form of prize giving and a concert of music. An account of Exhibition Day in 1894 recalls that "the large table in the Big Room was piled high with many beautiful illuminated volumes. When the room filled at eleven o'clock it was delightful to watch the play of emotion manifested in the countenances of those who sat watching that table…" Clearly there were often surprises when prizes were awarded. The chronicler for the 1894 exhibition rather acidly remarked that "most of us were surprised that the prize for ecclesiastical music was awarded to Albert Glaze as he has not attended the choir since Christmas." After the prize-giving the prior gave a speech, which was the vehicle for congratulating, encouraging and, on occasion, castigating the boys: "In congratulating the successful students," the prior would often caution them "against feelings of pride." There would not always be boys to scold, but the prior would warn the lazy "against idleness and listlessness – such qualities would not be suitable to the Lord's vineyard." Exhibition was immediately followed by "Going home day." An entry in Parkinson's diary for 7th July 1872 records that "After Mass, Father Prior spoke as usual about the vacation. He gave us 5 weeks and 2 days and expressly forbade any spirits to be taken from the college or to be bought on the way home."

c) Sport

A number of sports were popular at Old Douai. Association Football was introduced in the late 1880s. Before this time, football at Douai had had no set rules and unlimited numbers, but by 1890 there were "regulation posts and regulation balls and

a new uniform.” The next stage was the establishment of a league in 1892. *The Douai Magazine* of 1895 ook a nostalgic look back at the past in order to show the superiority of the present when it presented the thirty-six rules of “Ye Olde Douay rules of Footballe” which legislated for the use of hands, forbade any kicking backwards and stated “these rules can be added to with the unanimous consent of the public.” Cricket had been played in the quad at Old Douai even before football was introduced. The purchase of the country estate at Planques led to the laying out of a new cricket field, together with running track and tennis courts. In the winter, skating became a popular activity, especially in the months of January and February.

d) Discipline, punishment and homesickness

Like all schools of its time, St.Edmund’s College had a strict code of discipline and punishment. In early 1849 three senior boys flouted college rules and visited a hostelry on their way home from an excursion, where they “drank more *eau de vie* than was good for empty and unaccustomed stomachs, with the manifest result of semi-intoxication.” Reprisals were swift: “The next day the three culprits were marshalled in front of the whole College and severely lectured by the Prior for their misdemeanour, which was declared to be ‘unpardonable and to be punished by immediate expulsion.’” Fines were also imposed for certain offences.In September 1851 Dom Joseph Kitchin recorded in his diary that “the boys are fined 50 francs for stealing walnuts.” In February 1900 the community annalist recorded that

> Bad weather still continues and there has been no playday for three weeks, which is a record for Douai. The boys are very indignant and make noisy protests in the way of banging their desks etc. when the bell is rung…today a small rebellion occurred among the boys. All expected play… but as it suddenly began to rain heavily it was decided that they should study. Before 8.30 they manifested their displeasure by cheering when the prefects turned them out of the playrooms and when they entered the study a continuous banging of desks began. At prayers they pitched on different notes so that the prefect had to stop them three times, after this some manifested their temper by throwing their books around… at 6pm the Subprior gave them a talking to and punished them by stating that on Sunday evening next (carnival Sunday) there would be catechism class and no opera.”

Corporal punishment had evidently been a feature of school life until 1887, when Prior Oswald O'Neill told the Fathers that "it is forbidden to beat boys without explicit permission from the superior…the permission…to use the stick when it was required…is not recalled." Furthermore, he warned the brethren to "avoid boxing the boys' ears; much damage has been caused by severe blows to the head." The Prior advocated a sense of balance to be adopted in punishing boys, avoiding the two extremes of "too much severity and silly softness on the part of Masters."

Douai may have raised 'manly men' but there are touching references throughout the nineteenth Century to homesickness. Prior Appleton kindly reassured one boy that "such a malady was the common lot of all fresh boys and that it would soon pass away and be succeeded by unspeakable happiness." The boy to whom he said this admitted that later he did not deal so kindly with a new boy who was suffering from homesickness. "I assured him," he recalled, "that he was spreading the contagion all around, that it was simply disgraceful that he should thus treat a college of world-wide celebrity- that as he did not think that we were good enough for him, we had come to the conclusion that he was not good enough for us."With that, "we threw him out and landed him into the public street, bidding him forthwith to return to England." He concluded "suddenly, oh, what change came over the sick youth! He declared from the street that he would never again give way to such unseemly grief…he became a devoted son of *Alma Mater*."

9) St. Edmund's, revolution and war

Right through the century, daily life at St.Edmund's was greatly affected by political upheaval in France, notably during the 1830 and 1848 revolutions. In June 1848 boys in the school were awakened by the noise of cannon and ammunition waggons rumbling past the college on their way to Paris. News of the shooting of the Archbishop of Paris brought fears for religious communities. The boys were warned by the Prior "not to show any sign of political bias; not to speak any word that might be misinterpreted by the excited Frenchmen." One contemporary pupil remembered: "our young brains were busy with scheming plans of escape and how we could all best find our way to Calais!" The republic that was declared that summer was not to end the tradition of English ecclesiastical students being educated at Douai, but the

eventual separation of church and state that took place in France at the end of the century and which hastened the demise of St.Edmund's, Douai, seemed already on the horizon. A contemporary pupil noted with distaste that Mass in the church of St.Pierre in the town the Sunday after the new republic was declared "was a Military Mass… anything but a devotional act of Divine Worship. The centre aisle was filled with armed soldiers. At the elevation of the Sacred Host came the loud word of command, the rattling of the muskets and the thud" of rifle butts as they struck the stone pavement. **"**

Greater danger was posed by the Franco Prussian War of 1870-1, for at this time Douai was still an important fortress town, a vital military centre with a depot of arms and ammunitions, with an up-to-date arsenal and cannon foundry and fortified walls and gates. The winter of 1870-1 was particularly severe. Hard frost for some weeks at a time held the earth in an iron grip, and the snow lay thick on the ground. Numbers at St.Edmund's dwindled as parents recalled their sons to England, but studies and recreation carried on as normal. At one point in the war the fighting came within twenty miles of Douai. A contemporary observer recalled that "Douai was a strange spectacle then. 500 guns stared through as many gaps in the ramparts, not a tree within 2 miles but stood up like a bare pole…the ditches were flooded so was the plain…"

The defeat of St. Quentin brought home to those in the college the tragedy of war, when hundreds of fugitives and soldiers sought safety within the walls of St.Edmund's. Overcrowding and disease in the town quickly ensued, and smallpox broke out in the college, where thankfully it did not prove fatal. The worst case was that of Dom Benedict Mackey, "who for some days lay between life and death." Another outbreak, of a different kind, was that of "spymania." It became a routine practice for Douai boys walking in the town "to be followed and interrogated by innocuous officials." A contemporary observer recalled that before falling ill with smallpox, "Father Benedict Mackey got arrested for a spy on a skating excursion and was taken before a village mayor, and that worthy being insolent, there arose an incredible legend that Father Benedict "put his thumb unto his nose and spread his fingers out."

At one point the military threatened to take over the College, but its inhabitants braved the austerities of the war, largely due to the calmness and tenacity of Prior Anselm O'Gorman who was praised for being "unbending and unflinching in face of danger," refusing to bow to pressure to close the house at Douai. As early as July 1870 in fact, O'Gorman had drawn up an emergency plan should the hostilites necessitate the closure of the monastery. He informed the President that in the event of this, the senior students would be sent to the monastery at Belmont, "fifteen to Downside and six to Ampleforth, and the rest would be obliged to go home for a while." However, in the event, "Prior O'Gorman's determination and courage were justified," for on 26th February an armistice was declared and life at St.Edmund's continued.

10. The English Mission

Most of the Community during the century were far away from Douai and engaged on the English mission. In the early nineteenth century the Catholic Church in England underwent a process of massive expansion. The granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 led to the building of many new churches, presbyteries and schools. The English Benedictines played a large part in this. In 1789 there were forty seven English Benedictine missions in England and Wales, by 1860 there were ninety-six, many of them in urban areas. It was in these areas that Edmundians gained a reputation for heroism.

By the 1840s Liverpool had an estimated population of 40,000 people, swelled by the many thousands of Irish who arrived in the port as a result of the Potato Famine.
In the year 1847 three members of the Douai Community died as 'martyrs of charity' in the town, riddled with typhoid as a result of massive overcrowding. Dom Francis Appleton, Douai's third Prior between 1833 and 1841 became Rector of St.Peter's, Liverpool in 1841, after resigning the priorship following an argument with the President. He made several improvements to the church and was, according to the *Liverpool Mercury* "much respected in the town as a proficient scholar and an able and eloquent advocate of civil and religious liberty." He caught the fever and went to Stanbrook Abbey in Worcestershire. Annalist Dom Athanasius Allanson recorded that

“contrary to doctor’s orders, [Appleton] injudiciously took some whisky which acted like poison on his constitution,“ and which led to his death on 26 May 1847 at the early age of forty-one. Five days later, one of Appleton’s curates, Father Austin Gilbert, died of the fever aged twenty-seven. Barely a month later, another curate, Father Vincent Dale, succumbed to the fever. The *Liverpool Mercury* grimly recorded that Dale “was one of the worst cases of the fever, his body being covered with black spots.” A contemporary monk of Downside ghoulishly related to a friend that “those who die of the fever ought to be buried in a few hours, for a rapid state of decay sets in immediately the venom lays hold of the body…one of the priests here died at six in the evening and while putting him in his coffin he burst.”

The heroism of these three monks was recognised in the erection of a church in their memory down by the docks. St.Augustine’s Church was formally opened in 1849 and became known thereafter as ‘the martyrs’ church’. It was fitting that the first two parish priests also died of the fever, (both were Edmundians), Father Francis Cook and Father Celestine Francomme. Cook was a legendary figure who had defended his people during serious food rioting in the town in 1855. A contemporary account records that at Cook’s request, “the mayor and corporation granted large supplies of bread to the people of the area…and the good Father dispersed from his own scanty means a substantial sum of money.” These ‘martyrs of charity’ were revered at old Douai. At the head of the staircase leading to the chapel was a framed copy of the ‘silhouette’ depicting the thirteen priests who had fallen victim to typhoid fever, and including the three monks of St.Edmund’s who had died in the 1847 epidemic. “Such example made the name of Douai,” declared Prior O’Gorman when he spoke to the boys at the Exhibition of 1894, “and when called upon to make the sacrifice, you are to do in like manner.”

Monks of St.Edmund’s were also involved in the mission abroad. Dom Ambrose Cotham accompanied Dom Bede Polding to Australia in 1835, where he laboured for nine years in Van Diemen’s Land. The diary he kept during this period records the rough life there, for he worked single-handed among the convicts and built churches and schools, until he returned to England in 1851 where he spent the next quarter-of-a century devoting himself to the building and adornment of a beautiful Gothic church in Cheltenham. Later Dom Edmund Caldwell accompanied Polding to Australia and

subsequently worked there until the convict settlement was discontinued in 1854. Bishop Wilson of Hobarton recalled that Caldwell's "prudence and gentle manners gained him the esteem of all classes of the community." Dom Francis Barry had come to Douai from Australia where he had emigrated with his parents as a boy. Barry later went back to Australia where he became Rector of St. John's College in the University of Sydney. By the time of his death in 1896 he was the last English Benedictine working in Australia.

The island of Mauritius unexpectedly became a focus for Douai missionary activity in the mid-nineteenth Century. When the Holy See was faced with difficulties in the church in Mauritius in 1840, it was considered impolitic due to tensions between the English and the French to send an English or French priest to resolve the issue. A good compromise choice was settled upon Dom Bernard Collier, former Prior of Douai: Collier was working in Rome at the time as Procurator in curia. It proved an excellent compromise to send to Mauritius an English priest who had worked in France and who was therefore sensitive to both English and French aspirations. Collier became the first of a line of Douai monks to be bishops in Mauritius when he was consecrated Bishop of Port Louis in 1847. He was succeeded by another prior of Douai, Adrian Hankinson, who was bishop from 1864 until1869.

Père Adrien, as he was known, was a master of the French language and was reckoned to pass easily for a French ecclesiastic. A delightful story relates that once "on a journey, dressed after the manner of priests in France, two English ladies chanced to occupy seats in the same carriage as he…Feeling quite sure their fellow traveller was a French priest who certainly would not understand English, they indulged in uncomplimentary remarks about him. Père Adrien said nothing; but on his arrival at Douai , as he was about to close the carriage door, he politely lifted his hat and said: 'Ladies! I have the honour to wish you good day!'" Hankinson died in Mauritius but three years later his remains were returned to Douai where they were solemnly interred on 20th November, the feast of St.Edmund.

Hankinson was succeeded as bishop by Dom Benedict Scarisbrick, who retired from Mauritius in 1887. His successor was a French priest, but in 1896 the link with Douai was restored with the appointment as Bishop of Port Louis of Dom Austin O'Neill,

who at that time was President of the English Benedictines. Mauritius was to have a Douai monk as its bishop until 1916, when the last Edmundian, Dom Romanus Bilsborrow, returned to England to become the first Archbishop of Cardiff.

11. Studies, scholarship and literary work

Throughout the early nineteenth century all the English Benedictine houses experienced difficulties in providing adequate philosophical and theological studies for their monks. There was a problem with resources, both human and material. Following the devastation inflicted by the French Revolution, there was no longer access to good libraries or continental universities, and there was a dearth of good professors to teach the junior monks in house. Furthermore, pressure from the schools attached to the monasteries meant that the studies of the monks in training often had to take second place to the work of teaching. Despite these problems, it is striking how successfully the Congregation as a whole managed to provide monastic studies for its members.

Some of these problems are evident in correspondence dating from the early days of St.Edmund's, Douai, which had at its disposal fewer human resources than Downside or Ampleforth. A letter of 1828 from the future prior, Francis Appleton, gives a flavour of the in-house studies being pursued:

> we three that were last professed ... began our course of theology on the 17 th November (1827.) After we had finished the prolegomena we began the treatise De Deo. Bailly is the author we study.The plan which Mr Collier has adopted in teaching us is to make us learn the author by heart and afterward to fix our lessons with our seniors by making an analysis of them ... As for my private studies I am obliged to lay all these aside. There are many things I should like to apply to but time will not permit. However, to perfect myself in English I generally continue to write a short sermon every month and if 1 have any time remaining I employ it either in reading ecclesiastical history or in learning by heart a portion of the old Scripture.

For a time in this early period, the monks of St.Edmund's had to attend the local seminary at Cambrai to continue their theological studies. Interestingly, St.Edmund's

after 1818 did not take advantage of its continental location to continue the earlier tradition of its monks attending the French universities. The only degrees gained by its monks for most of the nineteenth century were those honorary doctorates conferred by the President of the English Benedictines, notably the doctorate conferred on Prior Francis Appleton in February 1841.

The foundation of a common novitiate and house of studies for the English Benedictines at Belmont, near Hereford, in 1859 marked a significant change in the approach not only to studies, but in the character of English Benedictine monasticism. Belmont seemed to enshrine two ideals: on the one hand a centralised religious congregation of a Counter Reformation type, and, on the other, a style of monastic observance that was free from the distractions of external apostolic work.
It quickly established a distinctive monastic culture that was new to the English Congregation: habits and cowls were worn, the diet was frugal, there was manual labour and virtual enclosure, and the studies included classes on the history of monasticism.

Such a culture was certainly alien to St.Edmund's, Douai, but a shift in external customs was detectable, as in the issuing of an order in the early 1860s to the effect that "henceforth priests were to be addressed as Father and the other religious as Brother, " a change that one contemporary observer believed came as a direct result of the new monastic customs and new monastic vocabulary being introduced at Belmont. From this time novices were encouraged to speak of 'cloisters' rather than 'corridors,' and the house was called a 'monastery' rather than a 'college.' It is notable however, that the printed letterhead for St.Edmund's throughout the century remained 'St.Edmund's College' rather than 'St.Edmund's Priory'. At Belmont "young monks used to look with amazement on the attire of aged Capitular or Mission Fathers, who would appear with a scapular thrown over their ordinary clothes and wearing a top hat."

Belmont was not liked by some of those who belonged to an earlier tradition. Dom Basil Whelan notes "it was argued that Belmont fostered unrest and disharmony inside the other monasteries by breaking the old traditions, and leading the young monks trained at Belmont to criticise their seniors." The annalist and historian, Dom

Athanasius Allanson, made no attempt to disguise his disapproval of some of Belmont's monastic austerity: "Manual labour will not improve our young men," he contended, "nor will it prepare them for the Mission…we want more: we want able and learned ecclesiastics."

St.Edmund's both contributed to, and received much, from Belmont. The future bishop, Austin O'Neill, was sent there at an early age to employ his skills as an organist. Nearly twenty years later he returned there as an equally gifted and successful Professor of Philosophy for nine years before being elected President of the Congregation. Dom Cuthbert Doyle, another Edmundian, was Novice Master at Belmont from 1873-88, where he trained almost a whole generation of English Benedictines. His long tenure of this office, together with his many writings on the priesthood and the monastic life, earned him the appellation of "doyen of the English Benedictine Congregation." At Belmont, Doyle was a member of the Chapter of the Newport diocese and he continued to be known to many people as 'Canon Doyle' long after he had relinquished that office. Doyle was fond of relating the story of a certain Mother Superior who, whilst browsing in a station bookshop, noticed a volume whose author she took to be Canon Doyle. She purchased the book and on her return to her convent gave instructions for it to be read in the refectory. The story is taken up by Doyle's obituarist: "The reading caused amazement followed by consternation as the story unfolded itself, until at length one of the sisters, examining the title page carefully, discovered that the author was not, *Canon* Doyle but *Conan* Doyle."

Belmont not only furnished its monks with a thorough philosophical, theological and religious training, but succeeded in inspiring an interest in scholarship as a long-term occupation. As well as nurturing the scholarly talents of better-known names such as the future Abbot Cuthbert Butler of Downside, Belmont also imbued Dom Benedict Mackey of St.Edmund's with the love of learning and laid important foundations for his future research. One of Belmont's professors, Dom, later Bishop, Cuthbert Hedley was responsible for encouraging Mackey to embark upon a project that became his life work, namely the task of editing the works of St. Francis de Sales. When the first volume of Mackey's renowned 'library' of the saint's works appeared in 1884, the title page proclaimed that it had been edited "under the direction of Bishop Hedley."

Mackey soon became the recognised authority on de Sales and lived for a time in Annecy, home of the saint, where the nuns of the Visitation soon declared that Mackey “knew more about their saint than they did.”

Mackey was probably the most able scholar the Community produced in the nineteenth century, but there were others, such as Dom Edmund Roche, who assisted Dom Laurence Shepherd in ministering to the Benedictine nuns, founded at Cambrai, who in 1838 settled at Stanbrook Hall in Worcestershire. Dame Benedict Anstey’s Life of the Rev.Dom James Laurence Shepherd notes that Roche “was a wonderfully clever man, specially in languages.” Dom Laurence Shepherd encouraged him to translate the German Abbot Wolter’s work, *Psalliter Sapienter*, which was published by Stanbrook Abbey Press in 1885. Roche also employed his linguistic skills in teaching Greek and Hebrew to two of the nuns, again at the suggestion of Dom Laurence. Dame Benedict relates that at the initial suggestion, Roche “recoiled on the plea of incapacity and when that was dismissed as futile, on the plea of having no books.” However, the necessary books were obtained and “the very sight of these cheered the little Professor, for the grammars were the very same edition he had learned and taught from at Douai.”

In the 1880s Dom Boniface Mackinlay began his research on the patron saint of the Douai Community, St.Edmund, King and Martyr, which culminated in the publication of his book on the subject in 1893. Mackinlay is notable for being “one of the first of the modern monks of St.Edmund’s to show any decided leaning towards research” in to the history of the Community, thereby “opening out for future historians many curious by-paths” and starting “questions which it would be of great interest to solve.” However, the accuracy of Mackinlay’s scholarship subsquently came to be questioned. His obituarist remarks that”in his early days Father Boniface was at times none too careful about exact references to the sources of his information.” In the first of a series of articles in *The Tablet* in July 1901, Mackinlay enthusiastically claimed that relics brought to England that month from their shrine at Toulouse, were the remains of the body of St.Edmund. However, a storm of controversy erupted in the press some days later when experts declared that though the bones which had been brought from Toulouse were undoubtedly those of someone who had been venerated as a saint, it was practically certain that they were not those of the Saxon King.

The fruits of Mackinlay's research were published in *The Douai Magazine*, which first appeared in 1894 under the editorship of Dom Bede Ryan. It was the successor of an earlier magazine, *The Edmundian*, which ran from 1832 until 1839. It had been planned to use the same name again in 1894, but by this time St.Edmund's College, Ware, was using it for the name of its in-house journal and the rather less imaginative title of *The Douai Magazine* was adopted instead. In his editorial for the first edition Dom Bede stated that the new publication had amongst its aims not only "to do ourselves some good thereby (by promoting)…our own advancement in the science of literature," but also "to record the history, past and present of our *Alma Mater*."

Belmont was not just responsible for encouraging the scholarship of Mackey, Doyle, Mackinlay and others; it also had a profound influence on their outlook on English Benedictinism at a time when a spirit of reform pervaded the Congregation, an important issue to be examined later. Given that Belmont was the common novitiate for the Congregation after 1859, it is surprising to learn from the council book of St.Edmund's that between 1876 and 1879 a group of postulants destined for the new monastery of Fort Augustus in Scotland were sent to Douai, rather than Belmont, for their novitiate. This was unusual, but the break from custom may be explained by the presence of bad feeling between the Prior of Belmont and the Prior of Fort Augustus. This episode is of interest, for the records show that among these postulants destined for the Fort was one Hugh Larkin, who as Dom Lawrence Larkin subsequently chose to be clothed as a monk of St.Edmund's, and who twenty two years later became its first Abbot.

Towards the end of the century, Belmont's fortunes waned as a house of studies, and the English Benedictine General Chapter, as early as 1883 favoured the establishment of a house of studies in Rome. A Douai monk, Dom Joseph McConnell, was one of three monks chosen to begin this venture. The three were "soon recalled to England as failures," but the initiative was ultimately recognised as leading to the eventual establishment a decade later of the International Benedictine College of Sant'Anselmo, where numbers of Edmundians were to receive their theological education, following in the footsteps of Dom Laurence Larkin who was sent to Rome in 1885 and was subsequently awarded a doctorate in Theology *summa cum laude.*

The lifting of the ban, in 1895, on Catholics attending the ancient Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, led to the foundation in 1896 by Downside of Benet House in Cambridge, and in 1897, of the house that later became known as St.Benet's Hall by Ampleforth in Oxford. These establishments enabled monks to read for degrees in these Universities. The Douai council book records that in September 1898 'intelligent monks' were to be sent to the new house in Oxford. Dom David Connolly was the first member of the Community to study there.

12. Relations with England and France

In view of its continental isolation, the monastery at Douai maintained remarkably strong links with the Church in England through its students and the many bishops and secular clergy who came to visit, often on the way to, or the way back from Rome. The Visitors' Books contain some notable names, including Cardinal Wiseman and the future Cardinal, John Henry Newman. There were also a number of prominent lay visitors. Henry Parkinson's diary records an amusing account of the one of them in May 1873, an English Earl, who

> drove up to the hall doors in a carriage and pair.
> The fellows were playing at the time, but when the carriage
> drew up all ceased and a number, and the religious, stole up
> quickly to get a view of his Lordship. He was accompanied
> by his valet who almost immediately got the nick-name of Buttons.
> One of the first things we heard of the Earl was after supper.
> He was reported to have enquired of his valet 'is the luggage <u>heore</u>?"
> "Yes my Lord" was the prompt reply. "Then I'll ch<u>ea</u>nge my boots!"
> His Lordship says the rosary every day and not having said them
> previously he begged to be excused at some period of the evening
> and returned to the chapel to 'say his beads.' They entertained him
> with a splendid dinner or supper and he expressed great astonishment
> at so excellent a reception & said he had no idea we could do things
> in this fashion over here…

The next day, the diary continues, "we dined with his Lordship at 1. We had mutton, veal and ham. And pudding. We drank his Lordship's health and sang 'ad multos annos' for him." The Earl then rose and

> said he was exceedingly gratified at the profuse hospitality
> which he had experienced and that it gave him great pleasure to

> see so 'flourishing an institution of English origin in a foreign land.' He remarked that he did not know which to think the most of – the harmonious manner with which his health had been drunk (laughter) or the great hospitality which had been shown him. …His Lordship said of the Benediction service of yesterday that it was the most devotional at which he had ever assisted.

Throughout the century the monks seem to have enjoyed cordial relations with the local French community. Indeed, the re-establishment of "the foreign school" in the town was eagerly awaited, as early as 1802, for somewhat selfish reasons. General Estourmel is on record as having written to the Mayor of Douai on this subject, pointing out that "when established, it will bring in every year the *English guineas.*"

Pupils educated at Douai subsequently recorded their memories of various local characters with whom they came into contact, such as the local Shoemaker "called Bootz," and the tailor, "a veteran of Waterloo called Côte. He was lame having being wounded at Waterloo." The wound had apparently been inflicted in a particularly uncomfortable part of the anatomy, "leading the boys to unkindly suggest that he must have been hit whilst running away." Schoolboy folklore also featured a 'domestique' by the name of Henri, who "did not believe in soap and water. His face was like that of an indiarubber doll which can be contorted into an infinitude of grotesque expressions. He was bulbous in build and spoke fearful *patois.*"Cordial relationships also appear to have been formed with local clergy and prominent officials in the town, many of whom remained in contact with members of the Community long after the expulsion from France in 1903.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that relations between the monks and the local authorities were not always harmonious, especially during the tense months leading up to the expulsion. The community annals record that on 7 April 1903 Dom Francis O'Shaughnessy was arrested at Planques, for failing to answer a summons following an incident where he had shot a poacher on the estate "who was after watercress." O'Shaughnessy was released on bail at 5pm the following day. The Community annalist wryly observed that " it is probably the first time since the Revolution that an English Benedictine has spent 24 hours in a French prison." In May 1903, just a month before the Community left France, O'Shaughnessy was put on trial where he

was given the option of a six month prison sentence or a fine of £20. The Community annals record that Edmund Granville Ward came to the monks' rescue and paid the fine "and all expenses."

13. St.Edmund's and the English Benedictine Congregation

In the second half of the nineteenth century a dispute arose in the English Benedictine Congregation concerning its true nature. One party favoured reform by abandoning the provincial system (where the Benedictine missions were governed by two Provincials) and attaching the parishes to the monasteries; the other wanted to preserve the *status quo* with the parishes remaining independent of the monasteries. The crux of the issue was whether the English Benedictine Congregation was a missionary body in which the monasteries acted as seminaries for the missions, or a monastic congregation of autonomous reformed monastic houses. As we have already seen, the establishment of Belmont as the common novitiate had already brought about a change of 'tone' in the Congregation, by greater emphasis on conventual life.

Another catalyst for change came from the monastic reform taking place on the continent, encouraged by Prosper Guéranger at Solesmes and the Wolter brothers at Beuron in Germany. Given its continental location, St.Edmund's might have been expected to have been influenced, more so than the monasteries based in England, by these continental reforming ideals. The reality was quite the reverse, explained perhaps by the presence in the Community of two of their number, Prior Anselm O'Gorman and Dom Benedict Sander, who had transferred their stability to Douai from the Italian Benedictine Congregation of the Strict Observance.

More significant pressure was brought to bear upon the English Congregation from powerful forces in the English Catholic church. Criticism of the Benedictine missions came from bishops and secular clergy, who resented in their dioceses these missions which were outside their control. Bishop Brown of Newport and Menevia as a monk and former superior of the Downside community knew too much about the weaknesses of the missions and their missioners, and from 1850 continually encouraged the Congregation to reform itself. Monsignor Francis Weld, who had been a pupil at Downside, wrote a pamphlet in 1882 which expressed some of these

criticisms. “You have sixty-two missions,” he declared.” and most of these are single missions! Jesus Christ called them to be monks; they joined your Order to be monks and to avoid being secular priests, and you have made them secular priests without even giving them the education for it.” He described the houses in which the missioners lived as “the private residences of gentlemen of fortune,” where “ladies are not merely admitted to an outer room…they go upstairs, downstairs, anywhere.” Weld was scandalised to hear of “a distinguished prelate” who was vesting in the sacristy of one of the English Benedictine missions. “Extending his hands to receive the cincture, a soft velvety hand touched his…one of the good lady-attendants in the Priory was helping to vest him!”

Whilst the majority of the Downside monks were in favour of attaching the missions to the monasteries, those at Douai and Ampleforth were not. Dom Cuthbert Butler, the future Abbot of Downside, wrote to Prior Edmund Ford, the leading advocate at Downside of monastic reform, to tell him he had heard first-hand “of the strong ultra-missionary spirit that prevails among the younger generation of Douai.” It would be misleading to suggest that only the younger generation held this view. The more senior Fathers were shocked at the proposals to upset the *status quo* and were confused by the ‘pamphlet war’ that was being waged between the different parties. Dom Aloysius Wilkinson, the veteran Rector of Cheltenham wrote to Prior O’Neill in 1890 complaining about new “host of rules and new regulations concerning poverty” issued to missioners following the previous General Chapter, and hoping that “subjects on the mission may know what they are expected to do and that the door may be left open for objections.” Wilkinson noted that a body of the missioners were meeting to discuss their concerns about the proposed changes, “calling itself the Pope’s faithful opposition.”

Missioners objected to the proposed changes on the grounds that that they “break the traditions and historical continuity of 250 years” and they gloomily forecast “a disintegration and weakening of Benedictine influence…As one body with one aim, one interest, and helping each other we have a chance of doing some good,” but “under the proposed changes the common novitiate will disappear, the President General becomes an ornament, and when too late it will be found that our venerable Congregation has crumbled away.” In Douai’s case it was objected that being “in a

foreign country, the Prelate (i.e the prior, who by the changes would become responsible for the parishes) would not be in residence in England: how could he exercise supervision? Would the bishops deal with him in another land? Could the missions canonically be attached to the monastery?" Above all there were doubts that " the missions would be monastically governed in the sense implied."

The problem of Douai's isolation had begun to be addressed by 1890, when Prior O'Neill urged the Community to find a base for itself in England. The purchase of Moseley College in Birmingham was suggested, but strong objections were made about the proposed cost. In 1891 Connellan College in Malvern, "a large stone- built mansion standing in its own grounds of 2.5 acres "was purchased, and in August of that year Dom Cuthbert Doyle, the former Novice Master at Belmont, was sent as superior of the new house, which was designated as a Priory.

The foundation of the house at Malvern was not universally popular among the Fathers, who feared such a foundation might lead to the fragmentation of the Community. Others were opposed to it on principle. To this latter view Bishop Austin O'Neill retorted that if his fellow Edmundians " would take a larger view of their interests, they would ask themselves whether it is not time to make sentiment give way to logic, and to let Douai be the annex and Malvern, the house in England, their centre." Much of the opposition came from those who according to Bishop O'Neill didn't "want a monastery in any shape or form."

Not all took this view. In a letter to Bishop O'Neill in 1897, Dom Benedict Mackey declared:

> we shall never be able to keep much monastic spirit or
> do true monastic work as long as we keep the missionary system,
> yet at present our missionary side is perhaps our best side…
> some day however the Church will permit Benedictines to
> withdraw from missionary life as system and …we shall then
> be able to have real quiet and seclusion for a considerable number
> and our true and Benedictine life and influence will begin.

A more moderate approach was taken by another Douai scholar, Dom Cuthbert Doyle. In 1887 in his commentary on the Holy Rule Doyle gave a more mainstream English Benedictine interpretation of St.Benedict's injunction that monks should

prefer nothing to the *opus Dei* : “An ‘opus Dei,’” he contended, “namely the care of souls, which according to the theologians is even more the ‘work of God’ than psalmody, has been entrusted to our Congregation by the Holy See,” and went on to insist that obedience to this work was in no way incompatible with St.Benedict’s teaching. For Doyle, apostolic work was the norm. In another work he wrote: “In the English Benedictine Congregation every member either is sent, or may be sent, to work upon the mission. Like a soldier, he both goes forth and returns at the word of a command…”

At the centre of the dispute in the last quarter of the century were two successive Presidents of the Congregation who happened to be Douai monks. Dom Anselm O’Gorman and Dom Austin O’Neill each had different views of the question, O’Gorman was outspoken in his opposition to the necessity of reform, and O’Neill was initially more conciliatory and open-minded. Yet even O’Neill’s patience was sorely tried by the dispute, and he came to take a more dogmatic viewpoint on the crisis. A decade after becoming Bishop in Mauritius, he wrote in a letter to his brother, Prior Oswald O’Neill : “If the Congregation’s ancient supremacy on English soil is threatened by the invasion of changes better equipped from a monastic point of view, the EBC should do what any sensible body of men would do and move with the times.”

An alternative proposal was that two new monasteries be founded for the Congregation to which the missions could be attached, for it was argued that “the more Houses we have to receive novices, the more novices we shall get.” The proponents of this idea believed St.Edmund’s illustrated this most convincingly: “Some sixty years ago,” contended one vociferous opponent of the proposal to place the missions directly under the jurisdiction of the monasteries,

> solid reasons were advanced against the re-establishment in a foreign land not yet recovered from revolution, of a community which had had no corporate existence for over thirty years. Yet providentially a few bold spirits carried out the work; but had timid counsels prevailed and St.Edmund’s been abandoned…one of the three doors of the Congregation would have been shut and of all 110 members which Douai had professed since then, very few would have entered the Order.

In the event, the Fathers could debate and argue all they liked, but eventually in 1890 Rome, through the bull *Religiosus Ordo,* ordered the abolition of the Provincial system and the division of the missions among the three monasteries of Downside, Ampleforth and Douai. As was afterwards observed: "*Religiosus Ordo* revealed to those who had eyes to see it that the 'old' Congregation was dead and that the 'reformers' had won."

Within a decade the reformers had clinched their victory, for in 1899 the bull *Diu Quidem* transformed the priories of Downside, Ampleforth and Douai into abbeys and within a year these houses elected their first abbots. At the abbatial election held at Douai in October 1900 Dom Lawrence Larkin became Douai's first abbot.

14. St.Edmund's first abbot

On 4th November, Larkin received the abbatial blessing from Archbishop Scarisbrick, himself a Douai monk. The community annalist recorded the benefits of having the rite performed by a Benedictine bishop: "the impressive way in which Archbishop Scarisbrick performed the ceremony stuck all and Father President especially spoke very highly of the way things were carried out." He concluded: "If we can judge from Father President's words we surpassed both Downside and Ampleforth where the bishops did not seem to know much about the ceremony…" Larkin subsequently went to Rome for the first Congress of Abbots, where he had a personal audience with the Pope, who "remembered passing through Douai and spoke of its college for the conversion of England." Larkin must have been brought down to earth with a bump when he returned to Douai, for a month later, on Christmas Day 1900 the annalist recorded that "Father Abbot sang his first pontifical mass, but it could not be counted a great success from a rubrician's point of view; it was as Father Abbot told us, 'une grande messe."

15. Expulsion

The first warning of the threat to the future of St.Edmund's at Douai came in November 1889, when the Council book records that letters had been received from

the French government concerning the status of religious living in France, and that the Community would take legal advice. The purchase of the property of Malvern in 1891 was swiftly followed by shocking news that the Community did not own the property at Douai. The recently established *Bureau des Fondations Britanniques* declared that the monks were only occupiers, and presented them with two alternatives: they either became salaried members of the Bureau, in which case the Bureau would take all the profits and would appoint the superiors and professors, which was unthinkable, or they must become tenants paying rent. The Community would have to sell the additions the monks had made to the buildings but would have perpetual possession of these. They could obtain a lease of £32 per year which would be returned to them in the form of burses. They would receive £1728 in eighteen yearly instalments in return for their ownership of the property and for the improvements which they had made in it. This was the solution settled upon, but a decade later a new crisis emerged.

The expulsion of the Community from Douai in 1903 must be seen against a larger canvas, namely the movement in France in the last decade of the nineteenth century to curb the Church's power and to separate Church and State. The government, under Emile Combes introduced radical programmes to bring this about, which included a campaign against Catholic private schools. A contemporary commentator shrewdly highlighted the weak position of the religious who ran these schools, for "in everything that concerns France, the Vatican's guiding principle is this: every possible sacrifice is to be made rather than lose official diplomatic contact…" Religious in France were mere pawns in this matter, for "if one has to sacrifice monks, nuns… colleges…Rome will heave heavy sighs but will not make it a matter for breaking off diplomatic relations, because none of these victims are essential to the hierarchy."

Thus when the Law of Associations was passed in 1901, the Community at Douai found itself in a very vulnerable position, for the terms of the law required that religious congregations in France should ask for authorisation from the government to exist. For a time there was hope of a reprieve, and a document giving full details of the Community's position as British subjects resident in France was drawn up and gained the full support of the Archbishop of Cambrai and the Mayor and Town Councillors of Douai, who asked that the authorisation be granted.

The Community annals record that a long debate was held by the Community in October 1901 concerning its future. Dom Ambrose Bamford, who was to become Douai's second Abbot spoke strongly in favour of moving to England "at the first available opportunity." Despite this, the majority of the Fathers favoured staying. However, in March 1903 the request for authorisation was refused, and in April 1903 a local balliff was appointed administrator, sequestrator and liquidator of the Community's assets and the Community were given three months in which to close the college, then numbering 70 boys and 26 monks.

Within hours of the bailiff serving notice that he would soon be drawing up an inventory of the contents of the College, the Community annalist recorded that six monks "each disguised in long cloak and hats of various patterns and wearing beneath as many vestments as possible made their way to Mr. Blunden's house where they safely deposited them." The piano and harmonium soon followed, together with several hundred books and portraits. Bishop Cuthbert Hedley took the pontificalia and account books. Edmund Granville Ward, the Community's generous benefactor arrived, and "half frantic with excitement" took the vestments he had donated to the Community, and the best chalices to his manor at Weston on the Isle of Wight. Local Douai clergy quickly came to give their condolences.

Abbot Larkin went to England, to Liverpool where he became ill, burdened by the weight of responsibility on his shoulders. It was left to the Prior, Dom Edmund Kelly, to deal with the crisis at Douai single-handed. By the 20th April the abbot had gone to Malvern, where, it was rumoured, he was in negotiation with the Birmingham diocesan authorities over the possible purchase of Cotton College in Staffordshire as the new home for the Community. The annals record that at this stage "even those in Community who were most opposed to leaving Douai are now eager to get out of this country where nothing is safe from socialism or atheism." Whilst all this was going on, the boys were ignorant of the situation, but were "full of queries and enquiries." On 16th May they were told of the imminent closure of the college, and at the same time the news that the abbot had accepted the generous offer of the Bishop of Portsmouth of St. Mary's College, Woolhampton, as their new home. At the bottom of the boys' Prize list published that term was written "Laus Deo Semper. Studies recommence at Woolhampton on Tuesday 8th September."

On 18th June 1903, monks and boys gathered in the chapel for the last time. The scene described there is a touching one: "each boy knelt, wrapt in prayer, with clasped hands and tear-stained face, and not a sound broke the stillness except the sobs which grief forced from many breasts." Later that morning the train bearing students and their professors steamed out of Douai station for the last time. The annalist records that "the liquidator interfered to prevent an influx of townspeople on the platform. When the train arrived at Charing Cross Station it was met by a large delegation of bishops and laypeople. Five monks remained in the College until 5th July, continually harrassed by the liquidator "who was a thorn in their side."

16) Conclusion

Given its inauspicious beginning, the period spent by the monks of St.Edmund's in France was a remarkably successful one. The Community had almost died out by the end of the French Revolution, but as the 1885 College Prospectus noted, of the 200 priests educated at Douai "3 bishops, 19 canons, 3 domestic prelates of the Holy Father, several superiors of religious houses are numbered amongst its sons…"
It proudly concluded that "there is not a diocese of England or Scotland without its Douai priests and hardly a mission that does not owe something to their labours."

Paradoxically, the very continental isolation of St.Edmund's, Douai, that had been hailed as such an advantage to its growth and development, proved in time to be its fundamental weakness. Four years before the dramatic events of 1903, Bishop O'Neill gloomily prophesied impending doom when he observed that "Douai has suffered, and will continue to suffer something from too much isolation."

On 19th June 1903 the *Daily Telegraph* proclaimed in its leader that "the Benedictine College at Douai has been closed. We have no doubt that it will be opened again. The pitchfork seems as effectual a weapon against monkish societies as against Nature." The paper deplored the political machinations of Emile Combes and other members of the French government, whose desire for a separation of Church and State had sealed the fate of the Douai Community. Asked for his comments on the matter, Abbot Larkin gave a quintessentially English reply, conveying his belief that these French

political machinations were "just not cricket." He declared: "We have had a long innings of over 300 years, and we would not be out now if Combes were not an underhand bowler." In the last sermon preached in the College chapel at Douai in June 1903 Dom Benedict Mackey looked forward to the "toleration, liberty and new home" that awaited his Community on the other side of the Channel. In time the expulsion of St.Edmund's from France would be seen as a *felix culpa,* the opportunity for new and rich growth its native homeland, a country which had realised after 400 years the uselessness of a "pitchfork as a weapon against 'monkish societies.'"