

## Chapter 4 *Woolhampton 1903-2003*

*Abbot Geoffrey Scott*

### **1. Arrival at Woolhampton**

‘My dear confrère’, wrote Abbot Lawrence Larkin in his letter from Great Malvern priory to the brethren in April 1903, ‘Our old home at Douai is being broken up by the French Government, and we are to be expelled from the country...for no other reason than because we are religious men. But Almighty God...has shown His merciful Providence in a way that seems truly wonderful. No sooner is the old Douai closed than a new Douai is open and offered to us on English soil’.

St Mary’s College, Woolhampton, overlooking the Kennet Valley, in Berkshire, to which the Community and school at Douai transferred, was the direct successor of a small domestic school which the last chaplain to the Catholic family at Woolhampton manor had established in the early 1830s. In the nineteenth century, it had grown into a small boys’ boarding school, forming a three-sided quadrangle. At the northern end of this quadrangle, St. Mary’s Church, serving as the school’s chapel was the only Catholic church in the district of Newbury until the end of the nineteenth century. With the establishment of the diocese of Portsmouth in 1882, further buildings were erected, and the college became a minor seminary, sending boys to be trained as Catholic priests in the various English seminaries. By 1900, Bishop John Baptist Cahill of Portsmouth, had become anxious about the decline in student numbers and about the future viability of the Woolhampton establishment. He had visited St Edmund’s, Douai, privately in 1902, and when news came of the monks’ expulsion from France, he immediately offered the lease of St Mary’s College to St Edmund’s, Douai. This was accepted by Abbot Lawrence Larkin, and the property was eventually purchased by Douai in 1912.

For the Community, the boys, and English Catholics associated with them, the expulsion from France in 1903 revived memories of the persecution of their English Catholic forbears in the penal period, although it was ironically now Catholic France which was portrayed as the aggressor. Such were the sentiments inscribed on the illuminated address presented to the Community of some thirty monks and sixty five boys when they arrived at Charing Cross station on the evening of 18 June 1903, after their journey on the boat train. The party was welcomed by representatives of the clergy and laity and fellow Benedictines: Bishop Francis Bourne of Westminster, the Duke of Norfolk, Bishop Cuthbert Hedley OSB of Newport, Abbot Aidan Gasquet, the Abbot President, and Abbot Benedict Snow, the first student of St Mary’s College Woolhampton. Also present were members of the Douai Society. Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, on his deathbed, wrote a note of welcome in a shaky hand. Father Philip Fletcher, an Old Dowegian, who read out the address and nearly broke down, confessed at the time that the days of persecution were still possible – ‘witness Mexico’, he gloomily interjected. In the event, his feelings seemed justified, for Canon Sprankling, another Old Dowegian present, was attacked by an official of the Charing Cross Hotel, ‘who was in sympathy with the expellers’, and the authorities refused to

allow the welcome reception to take place on the platform, so it was relegated to the adjoining hotel.

The break-up of St Edmund's, Douai, marked the end of an English presence in that town which spanned three hundred and thirty five years. St Edmund's College, Douai, closed on 18 June 1903, with Brother Bernard Downen being the last to leave, and opened again, at Woolhampton, on 5 September 1903, as Douai Abbey and on 7 September, as Douai School, which was created by the merger of St Edmund's, Douai, and St Mary's College, Woolhampton. The official translation of the Community to Woolhampton was celebrated on 17 September 1903, when the bishop of Portsmouth celebrated Mass and the papal rescript of re-establishment was read out by Canon Luck. Friends rallied around the exiles from the moment they touched English soil. In July 1903, it was agreed to call the new institution 'Woolhampton Abbey', but the name was never adopted. In one sense, however, the Community felt at home in Woolhampton because of its proximity to the great Benedictine abbey of St James's in Reading, and Dr. Jamieson Hurry, the authority on Reading Abbey at the time, became an early friend of the Community, enthusiastically donating his books on the abbey to the library and contributing an article on Reading Abbey to *The Douai Magazine*. Some years later, the Community donated Benedictine habits for actors' use in the pageant of Reading Abbey in June 1920, though not all at Douai approved of the inappropriate addition of sandals and rosaries around the players' necks.

The Community had managed to bring across to England a motley collection of items: its valuable archive and collection of English Catholic portraits, most of the library, and the red-plush and silver filigree Father Christmas outfit. More surprisingly, there were also transported the cricket square roller which was still pulled by a team of junior boys on Sunday mornings until the 1970s, and the white rowing boat which had been moored along the Scarpe in Douai, and which, being too heavy to pull up Woolhampton hill, lay in dry dock at Midgham Station until auctioned in 1904. The station in Woolhampton was called Midgham to avoid confusion with Wolverhampton, but that, in turn, tended to cause more confusion, and luggage sometimes ended up in Mitcham. Also disappearing into history after 1903 were the organ pipes from the Pugin chapel at old Douai, which were never re-used, despite finding their way to Woolhampton. In other packing-cases from Douai were religious items such as the statue of the Sacred Heart, the framed Raphael engravings which had hung in the abbot's gallery at old Douai and were now hung in the school cloister at Woolhampton, and the statue of 'Notre-Dame du Sacré Coeur', which was given a prominent position in the cloister at Woolhampton, although it was ruefully noted that the custom of raising caps when passing it 'has not become general' at Woolhampton as it had been at old Douai. Addressing a monk as 'Sir' seems to have been abandoned on the transfer to Woolhampton, and was replaced by 'Father', probably thanks to the secular clergy's association with St Mary's College, Woolhampton. The use of monastic bowls instead of cups and the black and white beans used for voting at Chapters also seem to have been casualties of the move to England. Some customs did survive, at least for a while. May, Our Lady's month, for instance, continued to be observed after 1903 'in the traditional Douai manner', with a May-altar being erected in the chapel or in the Haydock Hall. This old Douai tradition lasted until May 1917. The coat-of-arms, used at old Douai, an amateur crowded composition of devices representing St Edmund and St Benedict, continued in use. It was replaced in 1929 by official arms composed by the College of Heralds with the help of Father Stephen

Marron. This grant of arms happily coincided with the beginning of the abbacy of Abbot Sylvester Mooney. In this official achievement, the three crowns of martyrdom, kingship and virginity pertaining to St Edmund, the Community and school's patron, were displayed, being adopted from the arms of the medieval abbey of Bury St Edmunds. Above, in the margin, two fleurs-de-lys, flanking an abbot's mitre, represented the priories at Paris and Douai, and the engrailed line strikingly denoted the crossing of the English Channel in 1903.

The financial security which had assured the prosperity of St. Edmund's in Douai was not found at Woolhampton. Abbot Larkin, who had hoped the brethren working away from Douai would come to its rescue, was deeply disappointed that the Douai mission fathers offered so little financial support to establish the exiles at Woolhampton. He wrote in September 1903 that there was to be no official opening at Woolhampton: 'we have neither room nor money. So we shall have instead a little glorious chaos and general upset for I don't know how long... We are stuffed like herrings in a barrel, 15 religious, 3 lay masters, 2 laybrothers, 107 boys. I don't suppose it will last but it is a splendid start'. There could be no return, despite lots of clinging nostalgia for the old days. Abbot Larkin believed Squire Granville Ward's offer in 1904 to purchase the old buildings at Douai and establish a new college there under the English bishops was quite impracticable.

## **2. Habitat**

When the Community and college arrived at Woolhampton in September 1903, they found a much smaller and humbler set of building than they had known in France. Compared to the generous proportions and ample resources of St Edmund's, Douai, the property at Woolhampton in 1903 was cramped, dingy and in disrepair. St. Mary's College consisted of a three-sided quadrangle enclosing a gravel playground, made up of the school chapel to the north, the main cloister with dormitory above to the east, onto which opened classrooms and playroom, all heated by open fireplaces, and, on the south side of the quadrangle, rose the grandest buildings, the School Tower and Haydock wing which had been built just before the monks settled at Woolhampton, and which housed the refectory, study hall, professors' studies, and the domestic staff quarters. From 1903, monks, lay masters, boys, and the monk prefects were forced to live together in cramped conditions caused by the merger of the two schools. The pressure to have a monastery building, separate from the school, led to Frederick Walters, the Southwark and Portsmouth diocesan architect who had designed the buildings of St Mary's College in the 1880s and 1890s, being commissioned to draw up plans for a grandiose monastery as early as 1904. Walters was a frequent visitor to the Community and was to retire to a cottage at Kiff Green, close to Douai. He is buried in St Peter's churchyard, Woolhampton. Because of the scale of his designs and because of the turbulence within the Community in the first decade at Woolhampton, Walters's plans never became a reality.

The loss of lucrative bursaries from the French government meant that finances were tight at Woolhampton, and Father Paul McCabe was sent to America in 1905 to appeal for funds. The Community was scattered throughout the school areas and took its recreation by walking on the road alongside the college to where it forks down to the Bath Road, although in 1904 recreation had been livened up with the introduction of card-playing and billiards. Without the junior monks, life at Woolhampton was more

sedate and superiors less anxious about running a tight ship: 'Since juniors have been confined to Malvern, the treatment of the Community has been more liberal, sensible & large-minded. Discipline is not slack, (as it well might be, considering the revolutions & turns of fortune we have experienced) but is administered in a more reasonable way, as though the Brethren were really men.'

The major point of debate in the first few years at Woolhampton related to what was termed the 'habitat' question, and this deeply divided the Community. A sizeable minority, mostly Douai missionaries in the north, preferred only a temporary residence at Woolhampton before a final establishment could be made at either at Preston Hall, near Maidstone, although Ramsgate Abbey objected to this plan for reasons of proximity, or, secondly, in Bath, at Prior Park, or, thirdly, at Moorhanger Park, Bedford, or, finally, in the north, at Holme Eden, Carlisle. It was also seriously considered that the English Benedictine novitiate house at Belmont priory, Hereford, should be handed over to St Edmund's. The issue caused suspicions to circulate within the resident Community at Woolhampton which became exasperated at the frequent absences of the abbot, who was apparently secretly exploring possible alternative homes. A major reason against settling at Woolhampton was the difficulty of securing the legal title to the property from the diocese, which did not have the freehold since this was tied up in chancery. The dispute over ownership was still a problem as late as 1911, and in that year, the Bishop of Birmingham offered Cotton College, Staffs. as yet another alternative, but the Community lacked the means to purchase it. There was also the pull of Great Malvern, where a small priory dependent on Douai, had been established in 1891. St Edmund's priory, Malvern was founded on the recommendation of the English Benedictine Congregation as a possible bolt-hole for the Community which had, like many of the religious orders in France, begun to feel some hostility from the French government. In the meantime, a house of studies had been founded at the priory for junior monks who had completed their novitiate at neighbouring Belmont. Thus, competing neck and neck with Woolhampton was Malvern, where the foundation of a new church was laid in September 1904 by Bishop Ilsley of Birmingham. In 1906, however, once the decision was made to remain at Woolhampton, Malvern's star began to wane. Its bid to become a preparatory school for Woolhampton failed, and it ended up as a 'locus penitentiae' for problematic missionaries and a retirement home for others. In 1919, the monastery was sold and its church attached as a chapel-of-ease to the parish of St Joseph, Great Malvern.

The estate at Woolhampton in 1903 comprised only seven acres in what was then a rural backwater. Through wise husbandry, this parcel had increased to one hundred and fifty acres by the end of the century, and by 2000 was to be found in a very desirable part of the country, known as 'Silicon Valley' on account of the computer industries established in the area. In 1903, the original Beenham public footpath formed the eastern boundary of the estate, running immediately behind the classrooms, and the matured oak in the present monastery garth, so cherished by Abbot Sylvester Mooney who had watched its growth over the succeeding years, was in 1903 merely part of the hedge along that path. To the north of the small group of buildings, was a kitchen garden on which was built the school refectory during the First World War. Beyond this, a rough playing field was soon laid out, on top of which the abbey church would be built in 1929. In March 1926, fifty acres were added to the estate through the purchase of Ferris's Farm. Greyfield Wood and Withy Copse, near Beenham, a property of thirty-eight acres, were purchased in 1935.

### 3. The Abbey Church

Between the arrival of the Community in Woolhampton in 1903 and until 1933, the small gothic St. Mary's Church, originally built as a parish church for the Newbury district and as a chapel for the secular college, served as the abbey church. Its abbatial status brought changes to the interior of this humble building, for in the sanctuary the monks installed choir stalls and an abbatial throne which was encircled in 1913 with scenes from the life of St Benedict by Gabriel Pippet. The church was crowded out with eight altars for the daily masses celebrated by what was now a much larger group of clergy than had been the case before 1903. St. Mary's lost its abbatial status when the abbey church of Our Lady and St. Edmund was completed in 1933, and reverted to being a school chapel. Following the decline in boarding pupils in Douai School from the 1970s, St Mary's came again into its own as the parish church of Woolhampton. There was little change in the church until after the Second Vatican Council, and it remained, for much of the century, dark, dusty, and neglected. The Community found itself hard pressed to keep its two churches running efficiently. In 1974, however, under Father Leonard Vickers, the parish priest, superfluous altars were removed from St. Mary's, a separate Blessed Sacrament chapel was designed, and the baptismal font was given more prominence at the entrance to the church. Further alterations were made to coincide with the bi-centenary of the church in 1986, when Father Gervase Holdaway was parish priest, and these culminated in the consecration of the church and blessing of the consecration crosses in 1995 by Bishop Crispian Hollis of Portsmouth.

In what were the declining years of the gothic revival in architecture, the Community had set its heart on eventually leaving little St. Mary's and raising a large abbey church of medieval proportions. This project was under discussion from at least 1907, but plans were delayed by the Great War and the subsequent disruption. There were serious plans drawn up throughout the 1920s for a new abbey church, which was to be partly financed by benefactors whose names were listed on 'St Joseph's Roll Call', a later name for the Douai Abbey Church Guild, originally founded at Stratford-upon-Avon, and which had a weekly mass for members' intentions. The return of the novitiate to Douai from Fort Augustus in 1923, which engendered a stronger desire for an enhanced conventual life, helped to deepen interest in the scheme. A building committee was convened in September 1925, and consisted of Abbots Edmund Kelly, Ambrose Bamford, and Stanislaus Taylor, together with Fathers Aloysius Bloor and Hugh Bowler. In 1926, J. Arnold Crush was selected by Abbot Edmund Kelly as the architect of the new church. He had already been given commissions by the nuns at Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester, thanks to the influence of Abbot Kelly, then Abbot President. After a period of debate as to where the new church might be located, a site at the northern end of the property became the favourite, following the purchase of a field in 1926.

Crush worked closely with Father Hugh Bowler, a budding antiquarian, regarding the site of the new church, and they both agreed to its interior being faced with Bath stone, with Berkshire knapped flint squares adorning its exterior, and he also collaborated with the artist Geoffrey Webb on the heraldry to be incorporated.. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of the arrival in Woolhampton was commemorated by the foundation stone of the Abbey Church being laid by Bishop William Cotter of Portsmouth on 18 June 1928. Arnold Crush envisaged the abbey church at Douai, the largest project he ever attempted, as a statement and witness to the continuity of monastic architecture from the Benedictine Middle Ages. By 1933, however, only a third of this over-ambitious scheme, the lady chapel and two bays, had been completed, and the truncated end was covered by a temporary wall which terminated in a lean-to. Even today, the original eastern end of Crush's church reflects an impressive purity through the subtle quality of light which it derives from its stonework and fenestration. Once the church was built, boys returning to school by train at the beginning of term, on the 'Midgham Crawler' [it was known as the 'Midgham Bullet' at the end of terms] were reassured to catch a distant view of the new church, and, using it as a bearing, the scouts no longer got lost. Inside, Father Aloysius Bloor carved in 1955 the Stations of the Cross, designed by Dame Werburg Welch, a Benedictine nun of Stanbrook Abbey, whose brother, Oliver, taught in the school, and the high altar was designed by Geoffrey Webb, along the lines prescribed by the 'liturgical movement'. Unused stones from the building-site were used to construct the present rockery to the north, and the church was screened from the road at the west by trees planted by Father Oswald Dorman and Brother Augustine Strickland. Once the church was completed, Father Philip Robinson had Harold Darke, organist of St. Michael's Church, Cornhill, London, draw up a specification for the organ which was built by Rushworth and Dreaper of Liverpool, the Great Organ being completed between 1938 and 1947 and the Choir Organ at the end of 1953, in memory of Abbot Philip Langdon, who had been English Benedictine Procurator in Rome and had provided financial assistance for it.

The abbey church satisfied the needs and aspirations of the next thirty years. It had the right dimensions to serve a resident community of forty and a school of two hundred, and sufficient space and style to allow the major liturgical ceremonies to be carried out with great dignity. But incomplete as it was, it was still tunnel-like and the high altar was a great distance from the congregation. The first major readjustment came in 1964 when, a temporary central wooden altar was introduced into the church, following the promulgation of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Like so much else in the abbey and school, this temporary arrangement threatened to become permanent because of a lack of funding to accomplish a permanent scheme. However, this remained a dream of Abbot Gregory Freeman, and in 1979 an economic and satisfactory solution was adopted, whereby a square stone altar, designed by the artist David John, was positioned at the west end of the monastic choir and alongside, a new classical Italian organ built by Tamburini, to accompany the monastic chant.

In the event, this latest design also proved temporary because by 1985, at the onset of Abbot Gregory's terminal illness, the church's temporary west wall was found to be in a dangerous condition. It reflects an extraordinary resilience and deeply founded faith that the Community made the difficult decision in 1987 to go ahead and complete the abbey church, not knowing initially where the financial help would come from and having to persevere in spite of coping with the instability and discontinuity caused by being led by three abbots in as many years. To continue with Crush's original design of a long and narrow Gothic church was unrealistic, liturgically and financially, and so in 1988 the modern design of the architect Dr Michael Blee was adopted. On 3 May 1992, the old church was vacated, an event marked by a Jericho Day Concert. The completed church was dedicated by Bishop Crispian Hollis on the Feast of St.

Benedict, transferred to 9 July, 1993, and another Jericho Day Concert, this time to commemorate the raising of the walls, on 11 July 1993, celebrated the church's completion. In 1994, the church won an award from the Royal Institute of British Architects. Today, the abbey church is acknowledged as a wonderful building, and its beauty shared by the Community which meets in it five times a day for prayer and by countless others who come to sit undisturbed in its silence or attend the performances of sacred music which take place within its walls.

#### **4. The Monastery**

It is often said that when monks come to colonise a site, they virtuously build the church first, and only later see to their accommodation. That could never have been the vision at Woolhampton, where there already was a church and some accommodation, but neither were suitable in the long term, so that in the twentieth century, development of church and monastery took place at Woolhampton *pari passu*. For over fifty years, the Community deprived itself of a recognisable monastery by using any available funds for the expansion of the school. After living for years alongside the boys, the monks moved into an accommodation block, designed by Sebastian Pugin-Powell, in May 1916. Known to many generations as the 'Ark' because of its shape and its uncanny habit of swaying in the wind like Noah's ark rocking above the flood, this ludicrously proportioned block housed the monks' cells and, on the ground floor, the calefactory or monastic common room. The Ark was built with donations from benefactors who were members of St. Joseph's Roll Call Guild, and a statue of St. Joseph is found outside its entrance. The foundation stone for the Ark was laid on 27 July 1914 by Bishop Cuthbert Hedley of Newport, a monk of Ampleforth, who spoke eloquently on the occasion: 'The Monastery of St. Edmund's has been twice laid low and devastated by Revolution. We now see it rising again, erect, growing and living. It is marvellous what has been done in the last ten years. In times to come, say in a hundred years, when we shall all have gone, it is safe to prophesy now that these ten years will be looked back to as heroic. The strong men and strenuous work of these days will be then recognised, when the Monastery has grown, its cloisters lengthened, its sanctuary broadened, and the shrubs we see about us have developed into the luxuriousness and beauty of this fertile Berkshire country'.

On the ground floor of the 'Ark' was the monastery cloister at the end of which stood the grandfather clock which Father Bede McEvoy had 'begged' from its owner whilst at St Augustine's, Great Howard Street, in Liverpool's dockland. A fire in the Ark in 1943 destroyed its ground floor, as well as some five thousand books from the monastery library. After the Ark's restoration, this ground floor calefactory became what it had been designed for, a monastic refectory, and from that date, the monks began to eat separately from the school. Shards of stained glass from Flemish and French churches, picked up from the battlefields of the First World War, were presented to the community in 1924 by a parishioner, J. Dunster, and incorporated into the east window of the refectory in 1949 to a design by Geoffrey Webb. Between 1953, the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Community at Woolhampton, and 1957 the corbels of this refectory were blazoned with the arms of the three abbeys and four medieval cathedral priories attached to the monastery: Evesham, Bury St. Edmunds and Reading abbeys, and Winchester, Ely, Gloucester and Peterborough cathedral priories.

As early as 1954, discussions about the need of a complete monastery building had begun. The decision made the following year to separate monastery and school by erecting doors at the end of the monastery cloister which ran from the Ark, suggests a heightened sense of the need for more privacy by the Community. By 1960, the Community believed the time was at last ripe to build a new monastery and complete the abbey church, and schemes for an appeal were drafted to finance a building which would house one hundred monks. This project happily coincided with the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Community's life in Paris in 1611, and came on a wave of enthusiasm which heralded the calling of the Second Vatican Council. Preparatory discussions on the planning of a new monastery began seriously in early 1961 when a series of position papers were drafted by the younger monks studying abroad. These seem to have been designed to disturb, and even terrify, a sleepy and complacent Community through exposing it to revolutionary architectural and theological concepts. The most influential paper came from Brother Swithun McLoughlin, then a student in Louvain, which was characteristically disdainful of romantic gothic revivalism, and sought to persuade conservative English Catholics to adopt contemporary architectural and liturgical trends in Europe.

The modernisers won the debate over the form which new monastery would take, and in 1961, Frederick Gibberd, a Methodist, was commissioned to design the new monastery. His design was approved in 1963, the diamond jubilee year of the Community's arrival at Woolhampton. Gibberd distanced himself from the modern model of Le Corbusier's tightly-knit Dominican French monastery of La Tourette, and instead, he designed for Douai widely-spaced buildings arranged to give freedom of movement and variety in the environment, both internal and external. As early as 1961, however, it was realised that, for financial reasons, only part of such a monastery might be built, but the reduced project was helped to realisation by a generous loan and advice from Mr James Walsh, an Old Dowegian, a major benefactor, and close friend of the Community over many decades. Gibberd was a versatile visionary, being responsible for Harlow New Town, Regents Park Mosque, a terminal at Heathrow Airport, Didcot Power Station, and the Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool. It was this last commission which brought him to the notice of the Community at Douai. Gibberd had firm views about religious architecture: 'I am bound to confess my heart always sinks at the thought of what the design for the church will be like: pubs are bad enough, but churches usually excel over them for the shallowness of their clichés'. His task was to show that a twentieth-century architectural style was as well suited to providing the environment necessary for living a life according to the Rule of St Benedict as had been the traditional medieval styles. Gibberd was a firm believer that architecture was a matter of function. He saw that the only difference between designing a tea caddy and a house was that the caddy held tea leaves and the house people. The caddy was easier to design because tea leaves had no prejudices, he said. He planned a monastic complex with the abbey church at its heart, and his brief evolved from discussions with the Community who had at first showed a singular lack of comprehension in the project. For the monks included a store for toothpaste in their brief to Gibberd, but omitted to state the number of monks who might actually live in his finished building.

Gibberd planned a simple and direct building, according to the fashions of the 1960s when Sir Basil Spence's cathedral at Coventry exerted an enduring influence. His monastery would be in sympathy with its environment, a means to an end, not an end

in itself. He did not know, he said, whether his monastery would be seen as a beautiful building, but he was determined to make use of distinguished artists to adorn it. One of these was Dame Elizabeth Frink, who designed the bronze crucifix in the abbot's chapel, Gibberd's gift to the Community. Gibberd admitted that building for the church was still the greatest form of art, for he believed the eyes were channels of the soul. At the annual dinner of the Douai Society, in July 1963, Gibberd predicted that: 'The wheel was approaching full circle. At the start, in the Middle Ages, the Church had set the visual standards in art and architecture. She had then been superseded by the Aristocracy under whom art had become a luxury product. Now, in the world of the Common Man, the Church was beginning once again to accept her responsibilities'. That sentiment was of course arguable, but Gibberd rejected the popular conception of a monastery as a kind of forbidding fortress, confining the monks to a restricted environment, withdrawn from life. He designed his monastery at Douai primarily as a home, and therefore, instead of one tightly-knit unit serving a multiple of purposes, as at La Tourette, Gibberd's Douai has widely spaced, individual buildings arranged to give freedom of movement and variety in the environment.

Each building was to have its own particular form and its scale, reflecting the importance of its function. The abbey church was the dominant symbol, and Gibberd planned a new wide nave and narthex, with a central altar and retro-choir, which was never built. Nevertheless, Michael Blee was to adopt Gibberd's general scheme when he completed the church in 1993, for both architects planned the church to sit amid lower buildings which would form a large rectangular cloister, from which the church projected, with the sanctuary as the fulcrum of the total layout. A third of Gibberd's monastery was built between 1964 and 1966. He preferred 'study-bedrooms' to the more traditional term 'cell', and located the calefactory, the recreation or 'warming room' inside the central cloister, facing the abbey church, where it has absolute privacy. The cloisters of Gibberd, connecting the various buildings together, were to be 'internal pavements', wide and totally enclosed, with a minimum of entrances from the garden, so that they formed a spacious and warm environment for perambulation, quite different in character from the open medieval cloister. The foundation stone of Gibberd's monastery was laid on 13 June 1964. The first monks moved into their new rooms in January 1967, and to beds of wooden boards covered with foam-rubber mattresses, but with the luxury of showers in some cells, which caused something of a stir in the media, always prone to stereotype the monastic life.

## **5. Ten Abbots, 1903-2003**

### **a. Abbots Laurence Larkin, Ambrose Bamford, Stanislaus Taylor, David Hurley**

The habitat question put enormous burdens on superiors and partly explains why, in the decade after 1903 there was a run of abbots, all elected in quick succession. As early as December 1903, only six months after the expulsion from Douai, the first abbot of Douai, Abbot Lawrence Larkin, elected as recently as 1900, tendered his resignation, worn out by ill-health and 'the unprecedented strain during the crisis of the last three years'. He could not be persuaded to remain, but continued to reiterate his opinion that his long period of ill-health meant he could not do justice to the office, and that 'a new start [at Woolhampton] gave a new claim in equity to a new election'. No evidence has come to light for a persistent rumour that Larkin, who had taken a doctorate of divinity in Rome, had been tainted by Modernism. The election for a

successor, which took place in February 1904, brought sixty-four of the community to Woolhampton. Many of these who were missionaries had never set eyes on the new home until this moment, and it is striking that there were as many as twelve absentees, which suggests a cleavage between resident Community and those on the mission. Larkin's successor was Abbot Ambrose Bamford, then a missionary at Frizington, Cumberland, who was favoured by the resident Community, though he only slipped into the office thanks to a bare majority. Bamford had been reluctant to accept the abbacy in the first place, knowing what overwhelming burdens would fall on him as abbot. He admitted to being capable of looking after 'the material but not the spiritual interests', he disliked Woolhampton, and, not surprisingly, he retired after only a year, 'to be left in peace in a quiet home in the north', Blyth, Northumberland, that is, where he remained for the remaining forty years of his life.

Bamford's successor, Abbot Stanislaus Taylor, was elected as third abbot in July 1905, but even this appointment was touch and go, because Taylor took months to recover from 'a painful illness', and was only blessed in January 1906 in a ceremony 'shorn of much of its grandeur' because of bad weather and Taylor's continuing poor health. He was, however, to be the first abbot to survive a full term in office. Taylor was a musician, and came to Woolhampton from the priory at Great Malvern where he had become a personal friend of the composer, Sir Edward Elgar. He was determined to settle the Community and school at Woolhampton and silence the party still demanding a move north. Of the sixty fathers attending the chapter which Taylor called to debate the 'habitat' issue, only six, one being Abbot Taylor himself, favoured remaining at Woolhampton, which the majority opposed as being a place where they would be 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined'. Comparisons were made at the Chapter with Downside and Ampleforth, whose communities had been forced back to England the previous century and had had to lead a nomadic life for years before they eventually settled, whereas Douai, according to the pro-Woolhampton lobby, had 'at once found a home'. Taylor was supported by Bishop Austin O'Neill, who had strongly held views about English Benedictine community life and had retired to Woolhampton from Mauritius. O'Neill believed the priority for Douai at Woolhampton was 'a proper monastery; old Douai and Malvern were makeshifts'. A transfer to Belmont priory, where O'Neill had once taught and which had a 'purpose-built monastery', he saw as the next best option to Woolhampton itself. Eventually, in August 1906, a year after Taylor's election as abbot, the Chapter opted to remain at Woolhampton. The successful outcome of this first great crisis after 1903 has left posterity remembering Abbot Taylor as 'the real founder of Douai at Woolhampton', and he rapidly began to sink deep roots at Woolhampton by extending the estate, and stabilising the resident Community by bringing the junior monks from Malvern in 1909.

Visible signs of this new-found stability created by Abbot Taylor, were to be found in the laying out of the grounds and the large numbers of trees planted thanks to a legacy left to Douai by Archbishop Benedict Scarisbrick, a Douai monk who had died in 1908. It was Taylor who bought Woolhampton Lodge and pieces of land in 1906 and 1907 to consolidate the estate, including the parcel of the Woolhampton manor estate across the road, which became the 'Park'. Taylor's first building went up in 1909, on land purchased from Sir William Mount of Wasing Place. The sanitary system was rickety when the Community arrived in 1903, so Taylor had it replaced by a very ecclesiastical-looking neo-gothic lavatory block designed by Sebastian Pugin-Powell. It cut across the old path to Beenham village and carried a tablet whose inscription

rejoiced that this ancient tree of a Benedictine monastery, which had been sown in Paris in 1615, and watered in Douai from 1818, had finally taken root in 1903 at Woolhampton. Pugin Powell was also responsible for a number of aborted monastery plans between 1907 and 1924. The year after the waterworks had been modernised, the accommodation block near St Mary's Church was heightened and capped with another monumental inscription, the Benedictine motto, 'In omnibus glorificetur Deus', 'That God might be glorified in all things'. Abbot Taylor used the excuse of his silver jubilee of ordination in 1912 to mark the event by panelling the sanctuary of St Mary's Church, installing an abbatial throne and commissioning Gabriel Pippet to encircle it with illuminated scenes from the life of St. Benedict. Finally, the sanctuary was enhanced by an alabaster altar and altars in the Sacred Heart and Lady Chapels to commemorate his friend and ally, Bishop Austin O'Neill [1841-1911] and his brother, Prior Oswald O'Neill, the last prior of Douai in France [1843-1910].

Having achieved a measure stability, and turned down an offer, because of Douai's straitened circumstances, to make a foundation in Australia, Abbot Taylor was succeeded in July 1913 by Abbot David Hurley, whose blessing as fourth abbot in St Mary's Church lasted from 10.45 until 13.15, surely a sign of stability achieved. Abbot Hurley returned to Douai from the missions, where he had been since 1889, and was determined to run with the baton his predecessor had handed him, providing a worthy home for a Community which had experienced so many vicissitudes during its long history. His enthusiasm for the construction of a complete range of conventual buildings was, however, to be blunted by the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War soon after he became abbot. Nevertheless, there was some progress. The foundation stone of the new monastery accommodation block, the 'Ark', was blessed by Bishop Cuthbert Hedley OSB in July 1914, who wondered at the time how monastic life had been maintained so well at Woolhampton over the past ten years, and, despite a delay because of the war, a monastic refectory, cloister, and monks' cells, together with the school refectory, were eventually completed by 1916. The boundaries and privacy of the estate were further protected by the purchase of a field on the Bucklebury road from Mr Currie of Upper Woolhampton in 1919 in order to prevent the building of twelve cottages by the Newbury Housing Committee. Abbot Hurley towards the end of his term of office returned to his principal objective, the drafting of plans for a complete monastery complex. In May 1920, the distinguished architect, Giles Gilbert Scott, had been commissioned to design a monastery and church in the neo-Byzantine manner, austere in grey brick, but because of the high cost of building materials and labour after the war, as well as Abbot Hurley's own poor health, the scheme never came to fruition.

Abbot Hurley was in office when Douai encountered the difficulties resulting from the First World War. The first sound of guns heard by the Community, at the beginning of October 1917, was caused by a heavy air-raid, and large numbers of evacuees swarmed out of London, reaching Reading and even Woolhampton. The war affected all sorts of domestic arrangements. There were, for instance, no pancakes on Shrove Tuesday 1917 on account of the high cost of eggs, one of the few occasions, apparently, when the rigours of the war had an impact on the school. Meanwhile, some of the monks endeavoured to follow Lord Devonport's Food Ration Scheme, whilst others took up 'National Service' which involved spending daily one and a half hours planting potatoes and digging up the Park. The shortage of carbide prevented the use of gas lighting, and candles were therefore distributed by the procurator, who determined

from November 1917 to install electric lighting. In March 1916 Bishop Romanus Bilsborrow, a Douai monk and Bishop of Port Louis, Mauritius, returned home for his consecration as first Archbishop of Cardiff. Since he had endured various perils and delays due to German submarines on his voyage from Mauritius, Abbot Hurley went to meet his ship and bring him to Douai where the monks and boys met him at the front door and heard His Grace give a speech of appreciation. During Abbot Hurley's term of office, the English Benedictine General Chapter met at Woolhampton in 1917, the first time the Community had hosted it since it had met at old Douai in 1846. To create a good impression on the Chapter Fathers, the abbot asked that all the Community should roll up their sleeves and tidy the garden which was much neglected because of the dearth of skilled gardeners during wartime. Abbot Hurley outlived the war, but was forced to retire on 1921, on grounds of ill-health, having completed his eight years of office. He was particularly attached to the shrine of Lourdes, and after his retirement and on his return to parochial work, he was given the courtesy title, 'Abbot of Lourdes'.

### **b. Abbot Edmund Kelly**

Abbot David Hurley was succeeded by Abbot Edmund Kelly, who had been prior at the translation to Woolhampton in 1903 and was prior for nearly twenty one consecutive years. His life covered the last prosperous generation of Douai's long exile in France and the first struggling generation in England. . In his appreciation of Abbot Kelly, Father Edmund Brietzcke noted: 'We who saw him daily realised that he was the one permanent feature in a Community which was constantly changing with monks leaving for the Mission'. On his election, he immediately appointed Father Sylvester Mooney as his prior. His inaugural speech pointed to his own immediate future and to his long-term objectives for the community: 'I am a little man. I am now standing at my full height and have no higher to go...An Abbot does not always wear his mitre, but he does always wear his cross...There are difficulties. You have witnessed one today...in so small a church...We are the beginners, the sowers, and others will reap'. Under Abbot Kelly the new novitiate building was completed in the summer of 1923 and the Douai novices returned from Fort Augustus. Brother Dunstan Cammack was the first monk to spend his novitiate at Woolhampton under Father Stephen Marron as novice master. In 1926, thirteen acres of Ferris's Farm, which lay behind the buildings, alongside the Beenham path, were bought, and this purchase allowed the monastery garden to expand and, eventually, the monastery pitches to be laid out to the north-east. By 1928, the silver jubilee of its establishment at Woolhampton, Douai had doubled the size of its buildings and expanded its estate from six to one hundred acres. With an adequate monastery now built, Abbot Kelly revived the plans for a new abbey church and the foundation-stone of this church, designed by J. Arnold Crush, was laid, on 18 June 1928, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the community's arrival at Woolhampton. Bishop Cotter of Portsmouth, together with Abbots Kelly, Taylor and Hurley laid their hands on the stone as it was lowered to its final position

Because of the late settlement in England in 1903, Douai took longer than the other monasteries to experience some of the tensions in the monastic life of the period. Downside, under a line of reforming abbots, had surrendered many of its parishes in favour of building up a large resident Community, most of whom taught in an expanding school. At Ampleforth, numbers of aspirants entering allowed the Community to maintain its parishes whilst building up its school. Belmont, which

became an independent abbey in 1925, saw itself as a paragon of monastic observance, steeped in its awareness of being the offspring of the common English Benedictine novitiate house. By the 1920s, in the dying rays of the gothic revival, there was tension at Douai between those who wanted to maintain the tradition of a small resident Community and the majority working on parishes scattered across the land, and those who felt the time had come to expand the numbers in the resident Community and develop something which looked and worked like a proper monastery.

Many of the young monks, trained in the austere regime of Belmont's neo-medieval monasticism, found the *ad hoc* life-style of Woolhampton uncomfortable and inauthentic. When in 1920 the young Bernard Ryan, who had taken to calling the Fathers 'Dom', and was even to write an article on the use of this title in 1924, put his plea for a more monastic spirit in writing, *A New Utopia – dream? or possibility?*, his superior locked away the manuscript for five years. In 1919, four novices, 'in consequence of their views of monasticism', had been refused 'perseverance' [the ceremony which takes place every three months in the novitiate, in which a novice formally asks to continue]. Abbot Hurley strove hard to pull all the factions together, reformers on one hand and old missionaries on the other, who insisted there were two Communities, those in and those out of the monastery. The fragility of the Community is clearly reflected in the defection of five Douai novices being formed at Belmont in the summer of 1920. They had been deeply affected by the reading in the refectory of Abbot Cuthbert Butler of Downside's *Benedictine Monachism*, which elevated the monastic cloistered life above missionary work as the ideal for the English Benedictine Congregation. Butler's work was severely criticised in *The Douai Magazine* reviews for its dogmatism about the Benedictine life. Butler had himself conducted the Visitation at Douai in May 1918 and had noted that many of the community desired 'some advance in liturgical observance'. Relations had become frostier between the two abbeys the following year when repeated demands by Abbot Butler for the loan from Douai of Brother Benet Weldon's 'Memorials' of English Benedictine history, written in the early eighteenth century, were turned down. For the young Edmundian novices, Belmont seemed to epitomise Butler's vision, offering a more contemplative life where they could 'enjoy a richer liturgical service, escape school work, which interfered with the due performance of the 'Opus Dei', and [where they would be] practically free from the likelihood of going on the mission'. They threatened that if Belmont would not accept them, which it did, then they would seek to join Caldey or Buckfast. Abbot Hurley was appalled by their action and highly critical of Prior Kindersley of Belmont for his silence and inaction. Douai had, nevertheless, learned its lesson, and there was much discussion about the possibility of purchasing Erdington Abbey in Birmingham from the German Beuronese Benedictines who were returning home. Erdington might have served as an alternate novitiate to Belmont and have had that monastic ambience which would appeal to young Benedictine Turks. In the end, the remaining Douai novices were removed from Belmont to Fort Augustus, a safe haven hundreds of miles away on Loch Ness, and all energy now began to be put into establishing a novitiate at Douai itself, where the young might be better formed in the spirit and traditions of the house.

### **c. Abbot Sylvester Mooney**

The novices returned to Douai under Abbot Kelly in 1923, and his plans for the abbey church were part of his determination to satisfy the demands of the up-and-coming

generation of reformers. Abbot Kelly became Abbot President of the English Benedictines in 1929, and was subsequently thrice re-elected up until the General Chapter of 1939, but in 1929 he was not re-elected as abbot of Douai and his plans for Douai fell on the shoulders of his successor, Abbot Sylvester Mooney, who enjoyed the longest reign of any prior or abbot since the restoration of the English Benedictines in the early seventeenth century. He had himself known five abbots in twenty nine years, and being prone to indecisiveness, relied heavily on Abbot Kelly's advice. Abbot Mooney's father had himself been at St Edmund's, Douai, in 1858, and the son, Ignatius Sadoc Mooney, called after the Dowegian Dominican friend of the family, Sadoc Sylvester of Trinidad, belonged to the last generation of school boys at old Douai. He had been in his final year in the college when the transfer to Woolhampton occurred. He was clothed at Belmont, studied theology at Malvern, took a degree at Oxford in mathematics and physics, and then embarked on his teaching career. He became prefect of discipline, or Second Prefect, in 1915, First Prefect in 1919, and after serving as prior from 1921, this shy and reserved man became the sixth abbot of Douai in 1929, being continually re-elected until 1969, an embodiment of the stability that the Community had long hankered after. . 'His gentle persuasive manner was characterised by a soft rubbing of the arms of a chair, and the use of such phrases such as 'Heavens alive!'[Obituary by Father Richard Jones in *The Guardian*, 8 September 1988].

Abbot Sylvester became abbot when an economic recession made the future of the school and the completion of the abbey church doubtful, but he had a flair for financial management which gave him some personal satisfaction. He was forced to keep a tight rein on the abbey church's architects, fortunately rejecting, for instance, the scheme to fill the plain leaded windows with stained glass. Father Sylvester had an abiding interest in the relationship between Christianity and Socialism. His paper to a conference at Douai in 1934 on higher studies took democracy as its theme, not an especially popular theme at that time, and although neither abbot nor Benedictine Rule is mentioned, it is clear that Abbot Sylvester was describing his understanding of the abbatial office when he condemned a democratic ruler who became a tyrant, 'a drill-sergeant' who believed 'external efficiency brings internal happiness...and quick results'. For him, the greatest human achievements 'have been inspired by personal loyalty...You cannot be loyal to a system...you can only be loyal to persons'.

In 1947, Abbot Sylvester's portrait was painted by the artist, Henry Carr, and shows him at the height of his powers and prestige, magisterial but benign. In 1954, following Abbot Sylvester's silver jubilee as abbot, Cardinal Bernard Griffin put discrete pressure on Mgr. Montini, later Pope Paul VI, to recommend that the abbot be given the privilege of wearing the *cappa magna*, the long purple train accorded to prelates at pontifical functions, although black in the case of abbots. Typically, Montini was reluctant, since prelates had recently been ordered to cut the length of their *cappas*, as such pomp was out of harmony with the times. The cardinal insisted, and this unusual privilege was granted, much to Abbot Sylvester's continuing embarrassment. However, he swallowed his feelings and borrowed the abbot of Downside's winter *cappa*, which had once belonged to Bishop Wulstan Pearson of Lancaster, a Downside monk. A copy was made by a member of the Douai linen room, and this Abbot Sylvester wore for the first time on the feast of St Benedict, July 11, 1954 and continued to wear grudgingly at pontifical masses throughout his abbacy. On his retirement in 1969, he refused to take a titular abbacy, preferring instead to return to

the ranks. He died in 1988 at the extraordinary age of 103, the oldest Benedictine monk in the world. Professor Adrian Hastings, an Old Dowegian, while he was in the headlines through his exposure of Portuguese government massacres in Mozambique, worked in the Douai library in January 1974, on his most widely acclaimed book, *The History of English Christianity*. In this work, he paid tribute to Abbot Sylvester as a living witness to the rich traditions of English Catholicism: ‘Dom Sylvester Mooney represented an older tradition still. On the Berkshire Downs, at Douai, in the Abbey of St. Edmund, at the very end of our period, the summer of 1985, Dom Sylvester entered his hundredth year, wheeled into the office, the work of God, in the great monastic church he had himself built fifty years earlier, the office which he had attended dutifully for more than eighty years. No medieval monk had practised *stabilitas* better than he. He had been ordained priest for the monastery in 1911 and ruled it as abbot for forty years from 1929 to 1969. As a boy he had been in the school at Douai in France before the monastery moved back to England in 1903, ending three hundred and fifty years of the education of English Catholics in exile, in the little town where in the reign of Elizabeth I Cardinal Allen had first established a college. Of all that long line of thousands of young Englishmen who had gone to Douai for schooling and priesting Mooney was the last, a gentle, quiet man, witness to the human fruitfulness of a Benedictine pattern of life, a monastic stability which had well served the community, as it had served him personally, in the pursuit of God’, [*A History of English Christianity 1920-2000*, 661]

#### **d. Abbot Gregory Freeman**

The winds of change began to blow through the Douai Community rather later than they did through the universal church at the end of the Vatican Council in 1965. On 13 June 1964, the foundation stone of the new monastery was blessed and laid by the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Hyginus Cardinale, in the presence of some two thousand people. The guests included the mayor of Bury St. Edmunds, who brought with him stones from the old abbey from which Douai took its patron, to be incorporated into the new building. This monastery was Abbot Mooney’s swan song. It was the responsibility of Abbot Gregory Freeman, an undemonstrative Yorkshireman elected in 1969, to deal with revolutionary change in the monastic life and somehow to carry the Community forward. Abbot Gregory maintained his interest in the history and traditions of the English Benedictine Congregation, by remaining as archivist once he had become abbot and taking on the office of chairman of the English Benedictine History Commission. His character best answers perhaps that description of him as ‘a cross between a Cistercian and a Boy Scout’. He had been a somewhat reluctant housemaster in the school, where he was known as ‘Caesar’, and was appointed novice-master in 1960. He was probably the best novice master the Community had known for decades, and completed the full integration of the novitiate into the Community begun under his predecessor. Father Gregory abolished shaven heads for novices and instituted regular conferences, attaching supreme importance to *lectio divina* and the common life. A novice of his remembered that until Father Gregory became novice-master, ‘it was unheard of in those days to be able to ring up the novice-master and say “This is your favourite novice speaking;” even more unheard of for the novice-master to reply “Which one’s that?” Abbot Gregory had warmth and humanity; he was careful and concerned with individuals’ welfare, and so he tended to take his time making decisions. Abbot Gregory continued the policy of reform inaugurated by Abbot Sylvester in his last years. The Divine Office, for instance,

which had been modified and translated into the vernacular, assumed its definitive shape under him, and at the time of his death, the new Monastic Office, edited by Father Peter Bowe, was dedicated to him in 1990. He always preferred simple liturgy. 'One longs for the day', confided a long-suffering Abbot Gregory in 1978, 'when customs harden and we can get on with praying. Rubrics should be like children – seen and not heard'. In 1977, the abbey church was reordered, being provided at last with the permanent central altar, designed by David John, and the new sanctuary was the centrepiece in the brochure published by Father Leo Arkwright in 1979 to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the community's arrival at Woolhampton. Abbot Gregory was determined to protect the monastic life and the Community's prayer above all else. He laboured, therefore, to provide the means by which monks were freed to attend the office in choir, and the monastic horarium, as it stands in 2003, is largely his creation.

Abbot Gregory had to cope with serious practical issues, besides theological and liturgical change, such as decline in vocations and an ageing community. He had to face the effects of an instability partly resulting from the radical changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council which helped to encourage the first wave of departures of monks from the Community from 1975. Then, there were too many parishes for the Community to supply adequately, as well as a dearth of novices. Fewer younger monks taught in the school which was itself beginning to feel the first effects of a national decline in the popularity of boarding education. During the 1970s, with rampant inflation, fees rocketed as a result of the oil crisis. There were also demands for a broader curriculum through the introduction of drama, music and art into the timetable. This inevitably meant more expense to provide resources, and more lay staff. At the beginning of the new year, 1974, Abbot Gregory commenced a new volume of annals on an apocalyptic note: 'Economic recession, energy crisis, all suggest a tough year ahead for the whole of humanity. We, with a building programme to complete...will have our headaches also. And yet it is the Holy Year; we are called to repentance... This is the right mood at a time when the belief in the infallibility of science and the ingenuity of mankind has so potently been shaken'. In that year, the headmaster reported that the coaching of games, traditionally taken by monks, was critically undermanned and there was 'a acute lack of sufficient people even to take games', let alone matches. Perhaps rather late in the day, the words 'long-term planning' began to enter the vocabulary of those involved in the monastery and school's senior management.

Abbot Gregory was the inheritor of Douai traditions of friendship and hospitality, which had flourished alongside a large Community heavily involved in its school. It was in his abbacy that cordial relations were re-established with Douai in France. In April 1982 the mayor of Douai visited Woolhampton, talked to Abbot Sylvester Mooney about his boyhood in France, and then planted a tree. Visits of *Douaisiens* to Woolhampton have continued from that time. The Community shrank and withdrew from active work in the school during Abbot Gregory's term of office, the informalities which had grown from the bonds of hospitality in the past remained, and now seemed to threaten to invade the Community's privacy, and protests were made, particularly by younger monks who felt the Community was increasingly lacking any sense of identity. These concerns led to a decision in 1977 to protect the privacy of the monastery refectory by keeping boys at arm's length and reducing the frequency of school guests and staff in it. Abbot Gregory tried in other areas to achieve some consensus through Council meetings which dealt with much longer agenda than those

of his predecessor. He called plenary meetings of the whole Community to examine the principles of the monastic life and to draw up strategies for the future of parochial work and teaching. The result was a profusion of committees and sub-committees devoted to different aspects of the Community's life. As a result of Community meetings in 1970, the way forward was agreed through the adoption of crucial guiding principles: there should never be fewer than nineteen active priests in the abbey, that some of the parishes with three monks should be preserved together with some smaller ones close to them, that only parishes which could be reached from Douai within about three hours should be retained, and, finally, that Ditcham should be run down as a school. Of these, only the last was authorised, after a great deal of debate, by the chapter following the meeting. At the end of 1981, Abbot Gregory became ill and began lengthy periods of debilitating treatment. He heroically carried on, however, being re-elected abbot in 1985, perhaps rather unfairly by the Community which could not face the reality that he was so close to death. That release came on 23 October 1989.

#### **e. Abbots Leonard Vickers, Finbar Kealy, Geoffrey Scott**

After an abbacy lasting twenty years, Abbot Gregory was succeeded by Abbot Leonard Vickers who had acted as administrator of the English Benedictine abbey of St. Anselm, Washington D.C. in 1983 and had then become abbot there in 1987. After being in the school at Douai, he had immediately joined the Community, and had held various positions, junior master, parish priest, and assistant bursar. He had worked as 'pig brother' whilst continuing his studies, and after ordination, had become deeply involved for twenty years in the local parish, where he was loved. 'Now make sure, Leonard, the parishioners are worshipping God and not worshipping you', Abbot Gregory would warn him. His gifts were practical rather than scholarly, and he was a man of exceptional charm, which set people at their ease. Until he left for Washington, Abbot Leonard had never since his school days been absent from Douai for any length of time. As a professed monk of Douai, though superior at the time in Washington, he was eligible to be elected its abbot. Abbot Leonard was in Washington when he was elected, so an emergency trans-Atlantic phone call had to be made to enquire whether he would accept the abbacy, and the *Te Deum* was sung in his absence. Washington had matured him and had brought him to appreciate the value of an abbot delegating many of his responsibilities to the brethren and leaning on them for support. What he had tried successfully in Washington, he attempted also at Douai, to which he returned with new insights. His short abbacy saw a new impetus given to the Community's work, especially in the school, and a quickening of momentum. He planned to establish a board of advisers to help in running the school, which was beginning to enter a critical period of its history. Abbot Leonard, the hope of many at Douai, who was seen as having the ability to give a new confidence and sense of direction to the community, died tragically of sudden heart failure in early September 1990, after only ten busy months as abbot. It was some consolation to the Community that Cardinal Basil Hume, conscious of the serious losses the Community had borne in such a short time, was present at Abbot Leonard's requiem, at which Abbot Aidan O'Shea, his successor in Washington, preached. Abbot Aidan spoke about this 'exceptional man whose presence was compelling and liberating'. In Washington itself, Cardinal Hickey celebrated another requiem and preached the panegyric. Abbot Leonard was a popular figure, and one mourner reported an 'upsurge of energy' as his coffin was lowered into the grave.

The Community, reeling under the blows of three abbots' deaths in as many years, elected Father Finbar Kealy, recently appointed as novice master, as ninth abbot of Douai in 1990 only three weeks after Abbot Leonard's funeral. Abbot Finbar inherited the accumulated policies and problems of his two predecessors, there had been much left unsorted and unsolved. He therefore sought to clarify the Community's future and to maintain the momentum achieved by his predecessor. In 1991, the Community were helped in their discussions about the future by facilitators who encouraged the monks to trace 'the graced history of Douai', with its moments of light and darkness, and which, it was hoped, would provide a sense of direction. Abbot Finbar was determined to communicate with the community, resident and on the mission, so newsletters, meetings and committees were inaugurated at which future plans were drafted. The first school advisory board, lay headmaster, deputy headmaster, and lay bursar were appointed under Abbot Finbar, and his abiding monument is the Abbey Church which was largely built and then dedicated during his abbacy. Parishes continued to be relinquished, however, on account of diminishing manpower, and the reduction in numbers, especially in the resident Community, overshadowed many of the positive achievements of this time. As the number of active priests declined, parishes such as Great Malvern, Worcestershire [1991], St. Osburg's, Coventry, Cowpen, Northumberland, and Frizington, Cumbria [1992], St Gregory's, Cheltenham [1997] were all handed to their respective dioceses, and the running of the school was transferred to a separate Trust in 1997. Behind such radical changes lay a huge amount of work and unremitting effort, all of which took their toll on Abbot Finbar, whose health at times suffered. After serving his eight-year term of office, Abbot Finbar was succeeded in 1998 by Abbot Geoffrey Scott, then serving as assistant priest in the Douai parish of St Anne, Ormskirk, Lancashire. Abbot Geoffrey's links with Douai were strong. He had grown up in a Douai parish, was educated in Douai School, where he taught for many years and became headmaster between 1987 and 1993. It was he who was to see Douai enter the third millenium and achieve its centenary at Woolhampton in 2003. For his [unofficial] motto he took the phrase from the Holy Rule on the qualities of the abbot: 'Multorum Servire Moribus', 'He must serve a variety of temperaments'.

## **6. The Community 1903-2003**

On its arrival at Woolhampton, the resident Community numbered sixteen, most of whom had come as minor seminarians from the school at old Douai or as 'Benedictine students' from Douai parishes, the majority of which lay in the north of England. Father Patrick Mullarkey, clothed as a novice at Belmont for Douai in 1910, was typical. He had been sent to Douai, then at Woolhampton, in 1904 for his education by the Douai monk at Bedlington, Northumberland, who lived in a presbtery standing in 'Catholic Row', and was ordained in 1918, the first priest that Bedlington had ever produced. He then acted as Prefect [housemaster] in Douai School until 1930 and taught mathematics there before going out to the missions in the north-east where he remained until his death in 1957. After the Second World War, the school continued to be the most important source of vocations, but increasingly pupils who had not been 'Benedictine students' began to be attracted to the Community. By the 1970s, however, vocations from the school had practically dried up and no further 'Benedictine students' entered. Further diversification occurred in the years leading up

to 2003 when older men, some of whom had been married, and men from abroad sought entry into the Community.

In 1903, the Community was large, approaching one hundred, most of whom were engaged in parochial work. There were eighty two in the Community at the end of the First World War in 1918, of whom twenty four were resident at Douai. Over the following decades, there was little change, the resident Community averaging between twenty and twenty five professed monks, the novices being at Belmont and from 1920 at Fort Augustus, and the junior monks at Malvern until 1909. After the return of the novices from Fort Augustus in 1923, numbers in the resident Community began to swell to thirty or even forty. At the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, the numbers in the resident community stood at 42, but by the 1960s, the resident number of monks had dropped to about thirty. During the 1970s, it declined further and settled at a total of twenty to twenty five in the last quarter of the twentieth century. There had been large numbers of aspirants joining the Community at old Douai in the 1880s and 1890s, most of whom found their way onto the mission in the twentieth century. The bulk of these died during the 1950s and 1960s, which led to problems of shortages of monks in the parishes. This explains why from the mid-twentieth century many parishes were relinquished.

In the Community at Woolhampton, there were a number of monks who either joined or were affiliated to Douai from foreign monasteries, each bringing with them his own strengths and interests. Father Benedict Inizan, a Breton who had been born in Carmarthenshire, was affiliated to St Edmund's in 1918, when his own community of Caer Maria [Kerbeneat], having been exiled in Wales, was disbanded during the First World War. After incardination into the Douai Community, Father Benedict continued to work on Douai's parishes in the Principality until his death in 1928. Father Brendan O'Connor, professed at Fort Augustus in 1924, was an early member of the English Benedictine priory at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, U.S.A., before transferring to St Vincent's, Latrobe, which sent him to work from 1932 in the Catholic University of Beijing. On returning to England from China, he too worked on Douai parishes, notably St Gregory's, Cheltenham, from 1942. In 1946 he formally transferred his stability to Douai. Finally, there was the famous Dom Lorenzo Nardini, 'Romanus Romanorum', an Italian aristocrat who had been professed at Cesena, Italy, in 1873, then lectured in Louvain where he became friendly with Leopold III, King of the Belgians; after arrival in England where he taught theology at Belmont, he came to live at Woolhampton in 1925. He owned one of the two cars to be found at Douai during the Second World War, and was arrested and interned, but was allowed to retain his car provided he did welfare work among Italian internees.

#### **a. The Celebration of the Liturgy at Woolhampton**

The celebration of the liturgy, the Divine Office and the Mass, provided some continuity between old Douai and Woolhampton as well as lying at the heart of the Community's life. In 1903, the finest set of mass vestments belonging to the Community, the Ward Vestments, the gift of Squire Granville Ward in 1896, had been transferred to Weston, the Ward home on the Isle of Wight, to escape the liquidator's grasp. The vestments had been commissioned by Ward to commemorate the beatification of the three Benedictine abbots of Colchester, Glastonbury, and Reading, martyred during the Reformation. On the feast of St Edmund, 20 November 1903, the set was brought from Weston and used for the first time at Woolhampton. It was on this occasion that abbatial pontificalia, the pectoral cross and ring, matching the vestments, also the gift of Granville Ward, were presented to the abbey. Squire Ward, however, tended to prolong his frequent early visits to Woolhampton to such an extent that at the 1912 Visitation it was recommended that he should stay up to four days only. Monks also objected to being hauled off to his private chapel at Weston Manor on the Isle of Wight to celebrate lengthy liturgies on the major feasts at which the squire acted as master of ceremonies.

In 1903, Father Paul Rigby carried on as choirmaster, a post he had held since 1896 at old Douai, and the Mechlin plainchant in use at old Douai replaced from 1903 that of Ratisbon which had been sung in St Mary's College, Woolhampton. Old Douai melodies also survived, a number inherited from Father Cuthbert Murphy and Bishop Austin O'Neill who had been organist at Belmont Priory, Hereford. As the school remained for Easter in the years immediately after 1903, the school choir was able to sing throughout Holy Week and Easter itself, performing a blend of Gregorian Chant and 'figured music'. As late as 1947, Father Aloysius Bloor, the choirmaster, was using music composed by O'Neill in 1873 for the Lamentations of Holy Week. Between 1914 and 1916, a liturgical committee made up of monks had had a proper calendar for St Edmund's approved by the Congregation of Rites, which acted as a spur to a discussion at the Chapter of 1920 about building an abbey church as a setting for a more dignified liturgy. In 1924, the *Antiphonale Monasticum* from Solesmes, incorporating a purer and more historically accurate interpretation of plainsong, arrived, and the Community was able to sing vespers from it for the first time on the Solemnity of St Benedict, using also the hymnal of the English Benedictine Congregation supplied by Ampleforth and Fort Augustus. The Mechlin Vespers, which the new Solesmes edition replaced, did not apparently contain music for the monastic feasts. The introduction of the Solesmes method at this date allowed the pupils in the school to be given a more thorough grounding in the rules of plainsong. From Pentecost 1956, a new Solesmes *Antiphonale* was introduced and the tradition of daily sung Vespers in Gregorian chant commenced. The following year Compline began to be sung daily, and in 1958, the singing of the daily conventual mass was introduced. This looked like the final touches of the liturgical music reforms being put into place, but it was not to last long because the decrees of the Second Vatican Council were soon to reform much of Douai's liturgical observance.

Inevitably, the building of the abbey church in the 1930s acted as a spur to liturgical developments. Music in the church was the responsibility of Father Aloysius Bloor, the choirmaster of both monastery and school, and an accomplished musician. He was firmly convinced that Douai was the successor of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds and recommended the adoption of the thirteenth-century Mass of St. Edmund [Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 109] and the twelfth-century Office of St Edmund [New

York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Holford MS], which, he argued, were sung by the monks of Bury St Edmunds. In 1949 it was agreed, at his prompting, to ask permission from the Congregation of Rites to have the proper mass of St Edmund for use at Douai. He had also lighter musical tastes. In 1935, he had set to music the Hymn to St. Benedict composed by William Titterton, a close friend of Chesterton and father of two boys in the school, which was full of distributist nuances ['Rich man's son or poor man's, Equal work together, Work with prayer and spade']. Its rousing chorus, 'Ye that follow Benedict' was bellowed out by the whole school, alternating with the boys' choir, for decades ahead.

At the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the times of the Divine Office remained similar to those in the other English Benedictine monasteries: 5.00 Rise, 5.20, Matins and Lauds, 7.20, conventual Mass which slowly attracted more concelebrants, 12.35, the 'Little Hours' of Terce, Sext and None, run together, 18.30, Vespers, and 20.45, Compline. From that time, however, there was to be many revisions of the entire Office and much varying of times. Many devotions began to fade away, Stations of the Cross had gone by 1970, Rogation processions even earlier, and Corpus Christi processions disappeared. These had been splendid events, with carpets of coloured sawdust at Cold Ash convent, and girls strewing petals around the open-air swimming pool at Denford Park, Hungerford, the preparatory school of New Hall, the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre's senior school. From 1969, midweek Benediction, and the Litany of Our Lady sung on Saturday evenings after Compline, for the conversion of England, a tradition maintained in all the old English Catholic continental colleges, no longer had the school in attendance. The beginning of a parting of the ways between Community and school is reflected in the liturgical arrangements dating from 1972 when, for the first time, the school was allowed its own mass, early on Sunday morning, and the high mass was attended only by the Community and the local parish. But pride in the Community's past was still present, when in 1970 Prior Matthew Hulley and Father Leonard Vickers attended the Canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, one of them being Saint Alban Roe, a founder member of the Community, who had enjoyed a game of cards in prison before being hanged drawn and quartered in 1642. From 1970, the feast of St. Alban Roe entered the Community's liturgical calendar.

The flurry of liturgical activity experienced by the Community in the 1960s was partly due to the coincidental return of juniors who had studied at Louvain, and Father Gervase Holdaway organised a series of pastoral liturgy conferences during this decade to acquaint English Catholics with continental thought and practice. In parallel with all this liturgical innovation, a liturgical commission was established in 1969 by Abbot Gregory Freeman to help the Community adjust to new forms of the monastic Divine Office, which had been abbreviated in 1967. Prior Matthew Hulley's spoken English grace at meals succeeded the ancient sung Latin grace in 1969 and has survived the test of time. Into English too in 1964 was translated the Latin necrology of the dead of the English Benedictine Congregation which was read out daily. In December 1980, the Community began singing some of the psalms at morning office, hitherto recited monotone, and from December 1984, the psalms and canticles at midday office were sung, and from 1985, the entire office, with Latin Vespers chanted in plainsong. Some monks, however, hung onto the old ways, notably Father Robert Biddulph, who had transferred to Douai from St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate. He gathered a band of disciples around him who favoured the Tridentine Rite and who condemned the

‘woeful laxity of liturgy’ at Douai. His wish that the old Latin rite be celebrated at his funeral in 1995 was honoured. In 1984, the diarist noted: ‘We have all kinds of participation in the Conventual Mass by the priests - concelebrants acting as deacons, but not concelebrating, Fr. Sylvester in his chair unvested except for stole, one present but not communicating [says his own Mass] – and now a new variety: Fr Robert Biddulph now receives Communion but the Host in the mouth, as he doesn’t approve of Communion in the hand [he says his own private Mass]. Your diarist approves of the unity in diversity’.

## **b. The Daily Life of the Community at Woolhampton**

The timetable [‘horarium’] governing the monastic day at Woolhampton was as close as possible to that followed at old Douai, given the early difficulties with accommodation. Its main lines were laid down by the Constitutions of the English Benedictine Congregation and many of the details in the timetable were adopted, not surprisingly, from the regime that all the monks had known as novices at Belmont. Thus the manual of House Rules, or Customary, used at Woolhampton was an amalgamation of regulations from old Douai and from the common novitiate at Belmont. In 1941 this Customary was revised and remained in use until 1964 when Abbot Sylvester Mooney supervised another revision. The general horarium scarcely changed, however, with rise at 5.00 and ‘summum silentium’ at 21.30 or 22.00. The differences between the 1941 and 1964 sets of regulations reflect the evolution of the Community in changing times, and generally they show a reduction in petty rules. Thus, smoking, which had been allowed daily after dinner in 1903, and after supper in the ‘smoking room’ and in a monk’s cell since 1910, had become more acceptable by 1964, when the exact rations of tobacco were stipulated. But fashions changed as health-risks grew and in December 1988, the diarist noted that for the first time no smoking was observed at the meeting of the Abbot’s Council, even during the coffee break, and he commented ‘Anti-smoking is now rampant, except amongst many of our boys’. By the House Rules of 1964, permission was no longer required for giving and accepting of photographs nor was permission needed by that date to have a haircut whenever the barber was in the house. Older fashioned courtesies had also disappeared by 1964, such as saluting passing superiors by the uncovering of one’s head or bowing, nor was it now deemed necessary to kneel and kiss the abbot’s hand whenever he returned from a week’s absence. All of these had been the norm in 1903. The injunction to avoid crossing the legs ‘at all times’ was removed in the 1964 Customary, although the ban on ‘unseemly behaviour, immoderate laughter and forms of rowdiness’ remained in force.

Until the new monastic refectory was in use following the 1943 fire, the Community took its meals in the school refectory, but earlier than the boys, though breakfast was in common and talking allowed. Silent meals became the norm for the monks after 1943, and for talking meals in the holidays, the monks would transfer to the school refectory so as to preserve the silence in their own refectory. The celebration of Carnival, on the two days before Ash Wednesday, was continued from old Douai ‘an inheritance from our continental exile’, according to the annalist. The reduction and streamlining of the

Divine Office from the late 1960s brought changes in the timetable, which also became more flexible. This liturgical change impacted, directly or indirectly, on a number of other related institutions. Thus, for instance, the complicated rules, dating from Belmont days, governing 'begging pardon' for being late in church or refectory were simplified or abolished, rising in the morning and bed-time became later, and the ancient tradition of a novice or junior 'knocking-up' each monk in the morning with the words 'Benedicamus Domino', to the often weary reply, 'Deo Gratias' was dispensed with in 1974 when an electric bell, part of a system designed by Father Wilfrid Sollom and boys in the school, was substituted. A hand-bell had originally summoned the brethren to church and meals, being replaced by a wooden rattle during the Triduum, when bells were not allowed. Holiday times were also streamlined. The office of 'semi-abbot', the lowest solemnly professed monk who asked the abbot for extensions of recreation time, which was adopted by the English Benedictines from the Spanish Benedictines in the seventeenth century, was abolished in 1969. The four-week holiday at Christmas, from Christmas Eve until 12 January, the feast of St. Benet Biscop, the patron of the English Benedictines, a luxury provided by the Constitutions, was pared down in the 1990s, and half-choirs, another ancient tradition, disappeared in May 1974, and the new 'sleepless mode' became the norm. Until the arrival of radio and television, the Community, and indeed the school, which had few holidays initially, provided its own entertainment, especially at Christmas. By the 1990s, Christmas drama, pantomimes, concerts, and tournaments had all gone. Only the Community whist drive survived, though no longer providing cigarettes as prizes, and the exiguous whist drive itself disappeared into history in 1999 when the last *Magister Ludorum*, Father Boniface Moran, passed to the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon. The Month Day, the first Wednesday of each month, provided initially in all the English Benedictine monasteries as a restorative following medicinal bleeding of each monk the previous day, still survives as a holiday, but the monks have now dispensed with the leeches.

### **c. Scholarship**

Until Brother Dunstan Cammack was clothed at Douai in 1923, novices had been formed at Belmont Priory until 1920, and then at Fort Augustus between 1921 and 1922, under Father Bernard Buggins as novice master. Belmont was strict and severe on the surface, but its austerity was tempered by a run of wise priors. At Douai, the austerity of the Belmont novitiate continued, with novices living and recreating separately from the rest of the Community. They sat at a separate table in the refectory, kept their heads shaven, and had their mail, in-coming and out-going, read by the novice master. All these restrictions began to disappear by the late 1960s. The same loosening occurred in the juniorate regime at much the same time, but there was always an exaggerated fear of junior monks becoming involved in the school, largely because so many had been pupils there, and ex-pupils, it was feared, might enter the monastery merely to become 'seventh-formers'. A great deal of the junior monks' recreation time seems to have been spent playing rugby, at least until the 1960s, when declining numbers prevented teams being organised. After solemn profession, a junior monk was allowed to work in the school and many began at that point to take games. There was always a tension present between a monk's, and especially a junior monk's, responsibilities in the monastery and in the school, and in 1958, in a discussion about changes of housemasters and the need for an additional house, the abbot expressed his

concern about the frequent absence from conventual duties and studies of junior monks in charge of games.

Douai monks were among the first to attend the international Benedictine college at Sant' Anselmo, on the Aventine Hill, in Rome, and the first abbots at Woolhampton continued to support sending their junior monks to Rome, following their novitiate at Belmont, for the licentiate in theology. Father Philip Langdon completed his doctorate in theology at Sant' Anselmo in the summer of 1904, the first English monk to do so. The return of the junior monks from Malvern in 1909 prompted the Community to establish its own philosophy and theology faculties, although it was not always easy to find sufficient academically equipped professors to man the various faculties. Abbot Larkin in particular was ahead of his time in his thinking regarding higher studies, for as early as October 1903, he was looking forward to the closure of Malvern as a juniors' house of studies and its replacement with a house at Oxford which would provide university education. Douai seems also to have been the first English Benedictine house, and the one which developed the longest tradition, of sending monk students to the Ampleforth private hall of St Benet at Oxford, which provided the means to achieve Oxford secular degrees for teaching in the monastic schools. Brother David Connolly, who was awarded his degree in 1904 was the first of many Douai monks at Oxford. Theological studies at Oxford, often in the studium at Blackfriars and therefore not within the university, only became popular in the 1980s. Until Oxford became the popular choice for theology, Paris in the 1920s, Salzburg and Rome in the 1950s and Louvain in the 1950s, then in the forefront of the theological revival, were frequented by Douai monks. Most junior monks studied philosophy and theology in-house, until it became impossible to provide professors of sufficient number and calibre by the mid-1970s. Only from the 1980s, because of the dearth of staff, were juniors sent away for their ordination studies. Until this happened, it was common for juniors from other monasteries to join the theology faculty at Douai, especially from the 1960s. In 1961, Brothers Vincent Cooper of Ealing Abbey, Cornelius Doherty of Glenstal, David Rochon of Valyermo began to study at Douai; they were followed in the 1970s by juniors from Prinknash, Ramsgate, Downside and Maredsous in Belgium.

Higher studies and research in the last days at old Douai had been encouraged at Belmont, where a number of the younger monks had been noteworthy for specialist work. These included Father Benedict Mackey, whose definitive text of the works of St. Francis de Sales had been published before his death in Rome in 1906. Mackey had preached the farewell sermon at old Douai in June 1903, and visited Woolhampton in 1905. After him, there seems to have been little work of serious scholarship until the 1950s. However, Father Stephen Marron, although he published little, was an avid collector of Benedictine and local archival material, and responsible for some important articles on the early history of the Community which were published in *The Douai Magazine* during the 1920s and 1930s. He was a robust defender of the accuracy of his eighteenth-century forbear, the Paris monk, Brother Benet Weldon, whose 'Memorials' formed the core of the monastery archive at Woolhampton. Weldon had been attacked by Mr. Edmund Bishop of Downside. Father Stephen collaborated in his research with Abbot Justin McCann of Ampleforth and Dom Hugh Connolly of Downside, and with these two ranks as one of the triumvirate of unofficial English Benedictine annalists of the twentieth century. Another incipient scholar was Father Ignatius Rice, who wrote fluently and was a member of the Meynell-Chesterton literary circle. He published various articles, but no book. Some believed he lacked the discipline to concentrate on producing a major work and, in any case, as headmaster, he had not the time to do so.

Not surprisingly in a Community which was heavily committed to the parochial ministry, published work of the brethren was often devotional and catechetical, and written for a popular audience. Father Gregory Green's *The Devout Mass Server* [1931] and his *Eucharistic Hours* [1928] saw many editions, and Father Michael Young's *Revealed Religion* [1949] was designed as an expansion of the catechism for secondary schools. The 1960s and 1970s were important for the publication of popular catechetical aids in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, and the series entitled 'Pastoral Publications', was taken over at first from St. Edmund's College, Ware, by Douai in 1964 and then added to until 1971. Douai published under its own name from 1965, 'Community Leaflets', 'present-day theology in simple language', which were designed by Brother Cornelius Doherty, a monk of Glenstal then studying at Douai. More elevated, at least in its title, was the enthusiastic Father John Murty's *The High History of Saint Benedict and his monks. Collated by a Monk of Douai Abbey*, 1946, a free translation of St Gregory's Dialogues. In a more scholarly vein, Father Hugh Bowler was drawn as a young priest to the study of English recusancy on which he worked for lengthy periods from 1952 in the Public Record Office. These efforts bore fruit in his edition of three volumes on extracts from the Recusancy Rolls, 1581-1596, published by The Catholic Record Society, 1965, 1970, and 1986. The last volume, following Father Hugh's death in 1978, was prepared by the West Sussex archivist and Old Dowegian, Timothy J. McCann. In these volumes, Father Hugh contributed a definitive introduction to the workings of the Exchequer Departments and paid special attention to Berkshire recusants. He became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1960, and a member of the Council of the Catholic Record Society. Historical study, a typically Benedictine interest, continued to be the predominant research interest at Douai, and Father Geoffrey Scott took on the mantle of Father Hugh in the last decades of the century by publishing volumes on the eighteenth-century English Benedictines and on English Catholic bibliography.

Benedictine scholarship demands access to a rich library, and Belmont had enjoyed such a resource to be tapped by its young scholars. At old Douai, primary sources and essential reference works were available, but much had to be left behind and was disposed of in public auctions soon after the monks' departure in 1903. Most of the manuscripts and rare books were, however, carried to Woolhampton, as well as the unique collection of English Catholic seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portraits. Everything was rapidly set in order by the first librarian in the new home. As soon as Father Philip Langdon became librarian in 1904, he solicited large and important collections of books and periodicals from the missionaries, and later, Father Stephen Marron enlarged the library even further by receiving a number of old Catholic libraries, including the libraries of the Catholic missions of Scarisbrick [1919] and Netherton, the Berkshire missions of Woolhampton and Ufton, and in 1919, the large library from St Edmund's priory, Malvern. Father Stephen Marron sent recusant books and portraits in 1929 from the collection at Douai to the Catholic Exhibition in Liverpool. The library itself was reorganised in late 1937. In February 1950, Dr David Rogers began to research the rare book collection at Douai as part of his, and Mr Anthony Allison's massive project of cataloguing English Catholic books published between 1559 and 1640. Father Stephen Downey succeeded Father Gregory Freeman as librarian on the latter's election as abbot in 1969, and was responsible in 1976 for absorbing into the collection the library of the Benedictine nuns of Haslemere, founded in Brussels in 1599. The community was fortunate in having as a neighbour in the 1930s, the golden age of the private hand-press, the artist and book-illustrator, Thomas Derrick, whose sons were educated at Douai, and who was responsible for cutting the fine library bookplates, for painting some of the portraits of abbots and headmasters, and contributing pen-and-ink sketches to *The Douai Magazine* of the 1930s. His influence explains the prevalence of Eric Gill's lettering in the Blessed Sacrament chapel of the abbey church and on a number of tombstones in St. Mary's graveyard. Besides the book and portrait collection, the coin collection, which had been begun at old Douai, was catalogued in 1926 by Father Hugh Bowler and soon received gifts, notably from Cowpen Hall, Northumberland, and from the architect, Frederick Walters. From the 1970s, Father Leo Arkwright drew up exhaustive inventories of the pictures, metalwork, furniture and coins preserved at Woolhampton up to that date.

#### **d. Activities and Interests of the Community at Woolhampton**

Throughout the century, as the Community settled into their new home, its members developed a range of interests. Although the monks had enjoyed the country estate at Planques, near old Douai, Woolhampton provided them with a home in a pleasant rural setting on a plateau above the Kennet valley overlooking the Hampshire downs. Livestock was kept at various times, and in the second half of the century, novices sent out to cultivate the 'pig-field' transformed it into a vegetable garden after the disappearance of the livestock. Nearby, vines were planted by Brothers Dermot Tredget and Francis Hughes in 1986, but never produced grapes of any quality. After the Second World War, Father Oswald Dorman, who had a pipe constantly in his mouth, 'and who, it is well known, will smoke anything', grew tobacco near the white cottages to supplement his meagre ration, though 'Dorman twist' was found to have the properties of a mild laxative. The abbot's council in July 1946, after the end of the war, had agreed that all tobacco should be provided at the monastery's expense to spare the smokers sampling this home-grown weed. Bee-keeping, which was introduced by Father Anthony Baron in 1933, underwent a revolution when Father

Robert Biddulph transferred to Douai from St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, in 1950. A member of the Magic Circle, accomplished ballroom dancer, and devotee of the Tridentine Latin Rite, Father Robert was skilled in woodwork and kept his bees in constant agitation by his experiments in the apiary. Fathers Anthony and Robert, and later Fathers Wilfrid Sollom and Nicholas Broadbridge taught woodwork in the school, and after the closure of the school, Father Nicholas began making prayer stools, completing his 100<sup>th</sup> in December 1980, and then moving onto his own patented plaques and crucifixes. Father Sebastian Simpson and Brother Mark Ackers began the making of vestments in 1937, but the craft had a short life at Douai.

Printing and book-binding lasted longer. The community had its own printery since the 1934, and this was largely the brainchild of Father Robert Richardson, who was succeeded by Father Leo Arkwright who, with Father Stanislas Camp, had commenced his training in late 1948. The print room was moved to the end of the 'new' science block at the end of 1949. The press published in-house items such as the school manual of prayers, the Stations of the Cross, and the grace books, the first edition being printed in 1935, which were for the compulsory use of novices until the late 1960s. A pocket prayer book was printed by Father Robert for American servicemen who spearheaded the allied invasion of north Africa in 1942. By the end of 1993, the printery, especially the hand press, had been overtaken by technology. Book-binding commenced at the end of 1945, inspired by a new interest in the monastery library after the disastrous 1943 fire. The craft was encouraged by Prior Sebastian Simpson, and tuition was given by Peter McLeish who had been trained in the Cobden-Saunders tradition. Father Stephen Downey, the abbey's librarian in 1943, was to be the most accomplished binder who emerged from this bindery, and his tools were again used in the 1970s and 1980s when Tobie Roper-Power, a parishioner, taught the craft to the junior monks. After his departure, book-binding was revived by Father Bernard Swinhoe. The enthusiasms of younger members of the Community sometimes led them further afield than Douai itself. There was, for instance, the involvement of the younger monks in the archaeological dig at the Iron Age fort along the ridge at Ramsbury Corner in the summer of 1949, which was organised by the Newbury Field Club and Neville Hadcock, who lived on Bucklebury Common and who was a specialist in medieval monasticism. In this year also, Father Aloysius Bloor carved a new figure of Bacchus in limewood to hang outside the old Angel Inn, Woolhampton. The Community was blessed in the second half of the century by the outstanding scientific gifts possessed by Father Wilfrid Sollom, an Old Dowegian. As a junior in the late 1950s, he had built the first telephone exchange at Douai and set up his amateur radio transmitter, which led to a flourishing Radio Society in the school. Later, he joined the team which helped design the new monastery, leaving an important photographic and film archive of its building. For the school, he developed a weather satellite tracking system and was at the cutting-edge of computer software technology by the early 1980s. He put this to practical use by patenting a rotary eye-brow switch in 1989 which allowed a severely disabled man to communicate and improve the quality of his life.

The effects of the Second World War on Douai are better documented than those of the First World War. By June 1939, a wireless was introduced for the first time into the calefactory in order to hear news bulletins. Following a course in late 1937 on Air Raid and Gas Precautions and First Aid in Mr Blyth Currie's Russian Hut, four of the monks were enrolled in the Red Cross to serve as instructors for the rest of the abbey and school. During the war, buckets of sand and water and stirrup-pumps were placed at

every corner as protection against incendiary bombs and part of the grounds turned into a potato field. As a result of the Military Service Act and Air Raid precautions, it was decided to go ahead and cover the windows, and much of the Community's Office was recited in the school chapel for the duration of the war. At the beginning of hostilities, Brother Hildebrand Sweeney, a novice, left the Community to join the army, and novices became fewer and fewer as the war went on. There was a serious gap between 1943 and 1945, when only four novices were clothed. The Benedictine Community of St Augustine's, Ramsgate, together with the two senior forms of its prep school, came to Douai for eight months in 1940 before they moved on to Huntingdon. During 1940, Abbot Edmund Kelly and Abbot David Hurley died within a few months of each other, adding to burdens already being carried. The Community, however, did not lose its sense of humour at this critical time. In February 1941, the Abbot President, Sigebert Trafford of Downside conducted the quadriennial Visitation, and noted in his report: 'Some said there was too much talking in the Refectory... When the Abbot was away, the Prior [Father Michael Young] made use of air-raid warnings as an excuse for extra talking. Fr. Prior said that this had not occurred often and that the Community was at one time in such a state of nerves that he thought talking would be a relief to them'. It was thanks to this Visitation that a newly appointed cook was removed, having been found using the boys' rations of food to feed the hungry Community. Christmas wartime fare was meagre. On one Christmas dinner, the Community was served shepherd's pie and rice pudding, thanks to the bursar obeying the abbot's instruction not to serve anything special, a far cry from the Christmas dinner of 1918 at the end of the First World War, when the Community had consumed a huge turkey reared by Father Joseph Bond.

During 1943, three of the Community supplied as chaplains in the various neighbouring camps for American soldiers, one being at Greenham Common. This brought about friendly contacts between the American soldiers and the school, fixtures were arranged and American films provided. Douai, thanks to these American friends, was one of the first English audiences to be shown, in 1945, 'The Bells of St. Mary's'. Meanwhile the school, led principally by the Air Training Corps, had begun to assemble 'airframes', including that of a Hawker Demon. With all labour sources already tapped for war production, abbot, Community, boys and staff, had undertaken, with Father Anthony Baron's encouragement, the dismantling for salvage of crashed or elderly aircraft. By the end of the war, weekly up to five aircraft were being dismantled, and the task inspired many boys to build their own model aeroplanes and gliders. Victory in Europe was celebrated with a bonfire made up of the remnants of aeroplanes dismantled. One enduring effect of the war years was the interest in agriculture and animal husbandry in the school and among novices in the Community. There were apple trees planted in the orchard below the abbey church, more potatoes grown, and chickens kept in a new henhouse in the 'South of France', that is, north of the Abbey Church. Pigs were also a feature of the landscape by 1950, having been introduced on a government scheme during the War. The following year, the Young Farmers' Club was established in the school, and in 1953 developed its allotment in the wood beyond the Cemetery Pitch, thus providing occasions for good-humoured jesting for decades to come .

St. Benedict tells us that guests are never lacking in a monastery, and from 1903, despite the early cramped conditions, Woolhampton maintained the reputation for hospitality which the Community had enjoyed at old Douai. Only the English

Benedictine Congregation has continued the medieval tradition of affiliating confraters to its monasteries, who, in return for their major contribution to the Community and its work, share in the Community's prayer, and are entitled to wear the Benedictine scapular. Confraters have continued to be enrolled at Woolhampton in the Book of Confraternity, and include among their number Derek Worlock, Bishop of Portsmouth and Archbishop of Liverpool. In 1976, a group of 'lay associates' of Douai was established, and this evolved into oblates, since, in 1992, the Community decided to welcome oblates, and under Father Gervase Holdaway, the oblate director, their numbers have expanded rapidly. From 1979 until 1982, a lay community took over the old agricultural labourers' cottages of the 1840s which had been renovated by Father Finbar Kealy. The guest apostolate developed in many directions. From work with guests, there developed a Douai presence at the pop festivals of the 1970s. Four of the Community sat around a fire in Desolation Row on the Isle of White in August 1970, chatting to 'hippies' and later others joined the Reading pop festival, where monks were part of a 'Christian Tent', though none was brave enough to model himself on an Anglican member of the team who set out each morning with bucket and brush to wash the feet of the hippies.

From 1966 until 1978, the Community was blessed with a considerable body of junior monks who, when they returned from university during the summer, organised for the rest of the decade the annual 'Boys' Camp', when, led mostly by Father Godric Timney and helped by boys from the school, they provided a camping holiday in the park for boys in need. The Camp's models were a St. Vincent de Paul Boys' Holiday Camp and a retreat at Ampleforth for Borstal boys, which had been joined by Douai monks, and, of course, the inherited traditions of the Douai Scout camps proved useful. There were inspections and wide games, billycans and Tilley lamps. The Boys' Camp had a more radical side reflected in anti-smoking and anti-Vietnam War songs sung by mere eleven-year olds around the evening camp-fires. In a similar radical vein, was the involvement of members of the Community in Greenham Common airbase protests. During the 1970s, they had provided chaplains to the Asian Catholic Ugandan refugees, expelled by General Amin, who were temporarily accommodated at Greenham. By 1983, the anti-nuclear weapon campaign had strengthened and Douai being on the ridge opposite Greenham Common, where the cruise missiles were based, found itself involved in masses, vigils, and prayers at the women's camp and giving hospitality to Pax Christi demonstrators. Since monks were often also celebrating Sunday mass for the Catholics in the American base in these years, there was some confusion as to where the Community's true loyalties lay.

By the 1990s, there were major developments in the guest department, following Abbot Finbar Kealy's decision to create accommodation separate from the monastery and a suite of conference rooms linked to a new main entrance for visitors. From this came the development of a pastoral programme and a bookshop in one of the lobes of the abbey church. In July 1992, a meeting of the abbot and Old Dowegian businessmen on the subject of developing an apostolate to businessmen later bore fruit in Father Dermot Tredget's popular courses in the late 1990s based on Spirituality in the Workplace. In November 1993, the journalist Melvyn Bragg stayed as a guest and described his experiences. He was struck by the regimented graves of the monastery cemetery, 'soldiers of Christ' lined up, by Vespers 'sung in luxuriant Latin', by 'enjoyable Boy Scout food, hunks of bread, beans, chips, fish fingers...all washed

down with tepid tea'. He was surprised how ordinary the monks looked, 'no uniform look...neither Dairylea sanctity, Friar Tuck mischief, nor gaunt asceticism'.

#### **e. The Missionary Work of the Community**

When the Community settled at Woolhampton in 1903, the majority of the monks were spread throughout England, serving parishes attached to the monastery. The great carve-up of the English Benedictine missions in 1890 had left Douai with most of its parishes in the north west, the north east, south Wales, and the west Midlands. Douai also continued to provide monks as bishops of Port Louis, Mauritius, which it had done since 1847. Bishop Austin O'Neill was Bishop of Port Louis in 1903, and was fortunate enough to spend some time at Woolhampton before his return to Mauritius, where he died in 1913. He had taken as his secretary another Douai monk, Father Romanus Bilsborrow, who succeeded him as Bishop of Port Louis, and who was consecrated at Woolhampton 24 February 1911. In February 1916, Romanus Bilsborrow became the first Archbishop of Cardiff and Metropolitan of Wales. Unfortunately, ill-health forced him to retire in 1920, and he returned to Douai where he lived in Douai Lodge, before returning to Mauritius in 1925, dying there in June 1931. Mauritius was the nearest the twentieth-century Community came to an Edmundian presence abroad. Its work in Australia had belonged to the previous century, and when a Mr Donovan offered in 1912 to help Douai found a monastery and college in Australia, the chapter withheld its consent, since it was already stretched by its parish work in England.

Most of the great Benedictine churches served by Douai monks had been built and their congregations established by the time of the Community's repatriation in 1903, but there were a number of churches erected after this time, many of them daughters of older missions. In November 1904, for instance, churches at Cowpen, Northumberland, and Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire, were opened. Although the community was still numerous at the outbreak of war in 1914, its resources had begun to be stretched by its large parochial apostolate. The first step in rationalisation was that missions with two monks were sometimes reduced to one monk, as at Blyth, Northumberland, in this case to allow the other to serve as a military chaplain in the First World War. Twelve of the Community served as chaplains abroad in that war, and chaplaincies at the army camp at Clayesmore, and Belgian camps at Mortimer and Basildon were served from Douai. The Clayesmore chaplaincy was to develop into the mass centre at Pangbourne. To the missions, called 'parishes' after 1917, traditionally belonging to the Community in England and Wales, were added a number of parishes run by Douai on behalf of the dioceses. These included the Mumbles, near Swansea, where a temporary church was established in 1906 in a building formerly a cinema and variety hall, and at Knowle, in Bristol, where a new mission was established by Father Benedict Horrigan in 1908. Father Placid O'Hear who died in 1918 was a typical Douai missionary, working away from the monastery in the early years after 1903. He was the first priest to be resident in Ashington, a pit village in Northumberland, where the Catholic mission was originally served from nearby Morpeth. At first, Father Placid celebrated mass in Ashington's Co-operative Hall until the new church of St. Aidan was blessed by Abbot Stanislaus Taylor in September 1905, during the mass Bishop Austin O'Neill preached the sermon. Father Placid filled his new church with items of religious art from workshops in Munich and Bruges, which the Community would have known when it was in old Douai. A few days after Ashington's church was

blessed, the priory of St. Edmund at Great Malvern, was opened, which made a contemporary chronicler boast that the Douai Community 'seems to have received new life since its expulsion from Douai, judging from the churches built and opened by its Fathers'.

The signing of the armistice after the end of the First World War was marked with a sung *Te Deum* at Douai. In the years following, the abbot was invited to many of the parishes to unveil war memorials, the most important of which was to be the abbey church itself. Of the memorials erected in the parishes, a large number were carved in stone by the sculptors, A. B. Wall & Co., of Cheltenham, whose work also filled the Douai church of St. Gregory in that town. In St David's, Swansea, a window and tablet were blessed by Abbot David Hurley to the memory of Father Basil Gwydir, a naval chaplain who in August 1916 had gone down in the hospital ship, the *Rohilla*, off Whitby, when the ship struck rocks and broke in two while he was attending an injured man. Father Basil was the first British chaplain to lose his life on service in the war. St Cuthbert's, Cowpen, Northumberland, erected a Lourdes grotto in 1918 behind the Lady Altar in memory of the fallen, and at Cleator, Cumberland, in 1918 and 1919 Abbot David Hurley, to honour local soldiers, unveiled a statue of St Joseph, dedicated magnificent altar rails and led an impressive procession around the town. Up the hill, at St Joseph's, Frizington, the congregation built a calvary as its war memorial, whilst at Dan-y-Graig, South Wales, a statue of the Sacred Heart was blessed as a war memorial. Father, later Abbot, David Hurley had built a new aisle at St Joseph's, Birtley, Co. Durham, in 1910 to cope with an expanding congregation, and in this aisle his successor, Father Oswald Hall, in 1919 unveiled a pieta by Wall & Co. which listed the parish's war dead. In 1920, a large crucifix was blessed in the churchyard of Walton-le-Dale, Preston, as another war memorial, and St Augustine's, Liverpool, was redecorated and a window installed as a war memorial soon after the armistice by Father Bede McEvoy. The 1920s saw the Great Depression, and for Douai perhaps the most enduring monument of that harsh time was the calvary and copy of the grotto at Lourdes built in 1927 by unemployed men, inspired by Father Cuthbert Clayton who was at Cleator, Cumberland from 1904 until his death in April 1956. Annual pilgrimages to the Cleator grotto began from this time and many Douai missionaries lie buried at its foot. Even by 1936, unemployment in Cleator was still running at 95% of the population, and this prompted 'Dean' Clayton, as he was respectfully known by this date, to establish a Men's Handicraft Industry which trained men for jobs, and a Boys' Club to keep youth off the streets.

By 1929, Douai monks served thirty-four parishes, in loose groupings situated in the north east, the north west, the Midlands, South Wales, and around Woolhampton itself. Parish priests at this time made great efforts to develop Catholic schools in their parishes. Some parishes were, however, soon relinquished after 1903, like Chipping Sodbury, which was given to the diocese in 1926, but these were replaced by others, such as St. Osburg's, Coventry, which Downside transferred to Douai in 1926. New churches continued to be built during the 1920s, Dan-y-Graig being opened, for instance, in 1927 by Abbot Kelly, and in Northumberland, Mass was celebrated for the first time at Newbiggin, near Ashington, in 1927, in the Women's Institute. Around Douai itself, the parish at Woolhampton already consisted in a number of mass centres in 1903, and these expanded during the following decades. There were also chaplaincies attached to Woolhampton. From 1903, for instance, monks celebrated mass at Inglewood, then the seat of the Walmesley family, which had transported its

chapel, stone by stone, from Westwood House, Wigan. Between 1928 and 1930, Colonel Walmesley donated the bulk of the family's rare recusant books to Douai, partly in memory of Bishop Charles Walmesley, a member of the family and a monk of St Edmund's, Paris, in the eighteenth century.

During the Second World War, a number of the monks left their work in parishes to become military chaplains, and members of the Community acted as chaplains to American Forces stationed nearby at Greenham Common. Father Adrian Coughlin received the Medal of Freedom from the United States Government in 1947 for services tendered between 1942 and 1944 to American soldiers in Cheltenham. After the War, however, the declining numbers in the Community and the large number of parishes staffed by Douai monks led to discussions about the possibility of reducing parish commitments. It was agreed, as a first step, that the parishes to which Douai had not a 'canonical title', i.e. those which belonged to the diocese but were staffed by monks, such as Aberkenfig, Dan-y-Graig, and Mumbles in South Wales, Ashington, New Hartley and Wrekenton in the north east, should be relinquished first. In the 1950s, Walton-le-Dale, Lancashire, Wootton Wawen, Warkwickshire, Maesteg, South Wales, Netherton, Lancashire, and St Augustine's, Liverpool, all incorporated parishes, were handed over to the dioceses in which they lay. Such losses were partly compensated by the establishment of chapels-of-ease at Cambois, Northumberland, 1954, served from Morpeth, Prestbury in Cheltenham in 1963, and later, Tiddington and Shottery in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1967 and 1972. Monks from other English monasteries were occasionally recruited to fill any gaps in Douai's parochial work and in 1955, it had been proposed that Father James Donovan be sent to Ireland as the abbot's representative to obtain Irish priests to serve on Douai parishes, but none came. Arguments about a decline in vocations and the Community's inability to cover all its parochial commitments continued to be made throughout the 1960s, and were now coupled to a new issue, the realisation that many of the traditional missions had rapidly expanding Catholic populations. This period, 1950-1965 was a golden age of English Catholicism, at least in terms of statistics. Until the 1960s, there was steady expansion in the Woolhampton parish, where churches and chapels were built in Tadley [1959], Pangbourne [1958], Theale [1969], Burghfield [1976] and Bradfield [1975]. Tadley's mass centre had been founded during the Second World War for Irish workers building the aerodrome that preceded the Atomic Research Establishment at Aldermaston, and Father Michael Young was supply priest at Tadley, and later at Kingsclere, its chapel-of-ease, until his death in 1977. The patron saints of the new churches at Burghfield and Tadley were chosen to commemorate the parochial labours of Fathers Oswald Dorman, parish priest of Woolhampton 1954-70 and Michael Young.

In 1969, just before Abbot Gregory's election, the Chapter resolved to investigate the question of a radical reorganisation of the parishes in relation to the manpower available, and Father Gregory Freeman, along with Fathers Ambrose Crowley and Wilfrid Sollom were appointed members of a sub-committee. Abbot Gregory Freeman has been judged as more of a supporter of the monastery than the missions, although he always spoke of looking forward to spending his retirement on a Douai parish. He tended to think that Douai had too many parishes for the size of the Community, and as numbers did indeed decline, there was a great contraction in the numbers of incorporated parishes administered during his abbacy, beginning in 1969 with the relinquishing of Morpeth, Northumberland. In 1987, just before his death, Abbot Gregory had attempted to revitalise the Douai parochial ministry by founding a small

community at St Osburg's, Coventry, which would recite the Office together, live the common life, and develop diversified works in the inner city, besides that of parochial ministry. It was a brave, but as it turned out, short-lived initiative, and Abbot Finbar Kealy was forced throughout the 1990s to continue the retrenchment. In 1992, many parish fathers resisted any attempt to plan for the future in regard to parish commitments and declining in numbers in the Community. They argued in favour of 'crisis management' as a policy more in tune with the call of the Spirit and the needs of human psychology. Yet despite this, in the next decade Cowpen, Northumberland, Frizington, Cumbria, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, and Cheltenham were handed over to their respective dioceses. In 2003, with a century at Woolhampton behind it, the Community looks after the seven incorporated parishes of Alcester, Kemerton, Ormskirk, Scarisbrick, Stratford-upon-Avon, Studley and Woolhampton, while caring for Broadway, Worcestershire, on behalf of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

## **7. Douai School, 1903-2003**

### **a. Prosperity and Decline**

'There is nothing more complete, more complicated, or more absorbed in its own affairs than such a School as ours...It is a little world seemingly entirely independent, and, even for one belonging to it, most absorbingly interesting. It has its moods...and there are general tempers in our community at times which would seem very strange to an outsider', said a sixth former in 1928.

In the months following September 1903, there was some friction among boys who tried to preserve the separate traditions of the new school's forbears, St Edmund's College, Douai, and St. Mary's College, Woolhampton, a 'double harness', as it was called. It was the senior boys of both schools who found it the most difficult to adjust. The grandiose schemes of a small minority in 1903 to develop quickly another great Catholic public school at Woolhampton were frankly unrealistic; buildings were inadequate, academic standards, in terms of a classical education, lowish, the Community was small, young and untrained, and there was little money. The bursaries from the French government on which the vast majority of pupils at old Douai had been educated disappeared in 1903 and the school at Woolhampton very early on began its evolution into becoming largely a lay school. Another influential factor on the school's development from 1903 was the strong missionary spirit among the Douai Community which insisted that the work on the parishes took priority over education, and therefore the school should remain small or even disappear altogether. Thus the school for its first half century at Woolhampton remained rather static, even though the Community in the monastery alongside the school was undergoing a quiet renaissance in this period. At Woolhampton, the division into Abbey *and* School took long to crystallise, Community and boys shared the same accommodation, and for many years the school was looked upon as an appendage to the monastery. It was listed, for instance, under the abbot's name in various official publications. By the 1930s, the first major steps were made towards separation, for once the abbey church was built, the monks moved to the new church and the boys retained their own chapel. The division was enhanced by the creation of separate monastic and school refectories after 1944, and in 1956 the glass doors were erected to separate the monks' from the boys'

cloister. The new monastery, built between 1964 and 1966, created a further degree of geographical distance between the Community and the school.

The merger of the two schools in 1903 produced a Douai School of one hundred and nine boy boarders, which rose to one hundred and twelve in 1904 following the collapse of Prior Park school in Bath, though there was soon some anxiety, for in 1905 numbers stood at a hundred, and began to drop in succeeding years until 1911 when there were only sixty three in the school. The numbers in the next decade, however, settled at around a hundred and began to rise towards the end of the First World War. In 1919 it was reported that the school, with one hundred and thirty five pupils, was full, and this explains the accommodation problems which Abbot David Hurley was forced to address in his building schemes. Of these one hundred and thirty five, twenty six were Benedictine students and fifteen 'bishops' boys', categories which would gradually disappear over the years as the school transformed itself into a 'lay school'. There had always been a hope, expressed as early as 1903, that 'bishops' boys' would be phased out and that Douai would thus be independent of bishops and less of an 'ecclesiastical college'. In 1920, the numbers in the school passed one hundred and fifty for the first time, and after the Second World War, the school reached one hundred and sixty.

Until the foundation of Ditcham Park in 1947, boys came to Douai at the age of ten and left at eighteen years, though it wasn't unknown for the occasional slower boy to stay on until he was twenty. In September 1959, numbers in the school stood at a record two hundred and twenty one. By the early 1960s, the numbers in the school had risen to two hundred and thirty, aged 14 to 18 years, and at Ditcham, there were ninety boys between the ages of 9 and 13 years. When the monks vacated the 'Ark', the old monastery in 1967, the Sixth Form moved from the White Dormitory cubicles into rooms in the 'Ark', and the numbers in the senior school increased to two hundred and sixty by 1970. Statistics and recruitment began to change rapidly during the 1970s. As early as 1960s, it was agreed to accept a limited number of day pupils into the school, but day pupils did not come in any appreciable numbers until the 1970s. In September 1984, numbers in the school reached a further record of three hundred and thirty three pupils, an increase largely due to the expansion of Ditcham, by that time transferred to Woolhampton. Throughout the 1990s, there was a flurry of activity to keep the numbers up and thus assure its future: more day boys were admitted, a quota of non-Catholics allowed entry, and then, girls were welcomed. Co-education came after a long tradition of informal contacts, and sometimes covert consorting, with girls' schools. From the late 1950s, for instance, school dances for the sixth form, with local Catholic independent girls' schools had become a regular annual feature. They had developed from tennis matches with girls' school arranged by Father Paulinus Cunningham.

Abbot Gregory looked into the future in 1986, and although beginning to suffer from the illness which would kill him in 1989, could see that a massive drop in the school population was likely to occur in the early 1990s. Plans were therefore laid to cope with its effects and to explore the means of maintaining economic numbers in the school. Space and planning committees were established, reports and audits were compiled. The traditional sources of new pupils during the second half of the twentieth century, the handful of Catholic boarding preparatory schools, had already begun by the 1970s to close or diversify to survive. As abbot in 1990, Abbot Finbar Kealy

brought into reality his predecessor, Abbot Leonard Vickers's, plans for an advisory body to help in running the school. This was a highly competent body which set down its vision of the future in the document, 'The Logic for Douai School', and from this group of advisers sprang a network of subcommittees, enthusiastic to see the school survive and succeed. The decline in numbers seen by Abbot Gregory was even steeper in the 1990s than he had predicted because of a series of accidents such as the economic recession of 1992 and the massive reduction at the same time in forces' personnel, an important constituency for providing Douai School with boarding pupils. Nevertheless, during the last decade of the school's life, radical changes were made to ensure its survival.

Father Edmund Power succeeded Father Geoffrey Scott [1987-93] as headmaster in 1993, and following his appointment in 1997 as prior of the international Benedictine college of Sant' Anselmo, Rome, it was decided to appoint a lay headmaster. Dr Peter McLaughlin, then deputy head at St. George's College, Weybridge, thus became the first lay head in September 1997. Dr. McLaughlin quickly set out his objectives, believing such a school, in a beautiful location and with such a long tradition behind it, could survive contemporary perils. In financial terms, however, its future became rapidly more uncertain, and finally, in 1998, the Community had no alternative but to announce its closure. A brave attempt was made by a group of parents and friends who set up a separate trust in order to keep it in being, but the difficulties proved insurmountable, and it finally closed at the end of the summer term in 1999, inevitably leaving many feeling bereft and grieving at the sudden ending of an institution which had such a distinctive history and character. On 29 June 1999, the final school mass was celebrated and on 2 July, the last day of term and the last day of the school's, there was a moving end-of-term service, conducted by the school chaplain, Father Godric Timney, at which the Community sang the 'Salve Regina', and the two sixth formers who would have become the new head boy and head girl [the school's first] were introduced. At the conclusion of the service, the headmaster handed back to the abbot, amidst the tears of pupils and staff, for safe-keeping the school's standard. Within twenty four hours, the notices at Midgham Station, 'Alight here for Douai School' had been removed, scratched paintwork on the posts suggesting this was the work, not of surprisingly efficient British Rail employees, but of Old Dowegian souvenir hunters. After 181 years of its life, first as St. Edmund's College, Douai, and St. Mary's, Woolhampton, and later, as Douai School, 1903-1999, the school had passed into history, so close to achieving its century at Woolhampton.

## **b. The School Buildings**

In the first decade of the school at Woolhampton, a little boy, or 'new bug', leaving home for the first time, would have found the school 'enormous, rambling, and quite unplanned...Its imposing front door never used by the boys'. As motor traffic increased, the location of the school photograph was transferred from outside the school tower, and the triangle of lawn beyond the tower was gradually eroded by car wheels until it disappeared completely. Monastery and school shared the same buildings from 1903 until the First World War. By 1916, the headmaster had moved out of his gallery at the northern end of the original building, which was then turned into bath cubicles, and established himself in that suite of rooms which adjoined the school tower and looked out across the Kennet valley towards the Hampshire downs. Headmasters from Father Ignatius Rice until Father Geoffrey Scott would reside there

until 1992. After the construction of the school refectory [at Douai, the accent was always put on the first syllable] and the Brown Dormitory above it in 1916, little more was added to the school until 1934, when, due to increasing numbers, J. D. Kendall designed the senior wing, senior common room and the Bede Library, and the Ward Library, which had been founded in the last decades at old Douai, was relegated to become the library for the junior boys. The Ward Library, called after Granville Ward at old Douai in recognition of his generosity, had been continued at Woolhampton, where a brass tablet was displayed from 1904 acknowledging his many benefactions. The school library suffered less than the monastic library at the confiscation, and its collection of books was added in 1903 to those from St Mary's College, Woolhampton.

Attached to the new senior wing, but built separately from it because of the obstruction of the Beenham Path, was the music, theatre, and swimming-pool block. The new wing was completed in 1937 and attached to the rest of the original school by the new 'Court of Arches' at the north end of the school cloister, whilst the Beenham path, which has been continually shifted eastwards since the Community arrived in 1903, was yet again re-aligned to run around the swimming pool. To commemorate the opening of the Bede Library in 1937, Thomas Derrick designed a book-plate for the new library, similar in style to that which he designed for the monastery library. This oak-panelled library was named after Father Bede Ryan who had founded *The Douai Magazine*, the 'Parliament', and Ward Library at old Douai. His portrait, also by Thomas Derrick, was hung in the new Bede Library, and the arms of the patrons of the later school houses, Abbot Samson, Abbot Hugh Faringdon, Bishop Charles Walmesley, Archbishop William Gifford, together with those of Bishop John Virtue of Portsmouth and Douai Abbey were painted onto the corbels by Graham Coles in 1992. The theatre block and swimming pool was opened on Whitsunday, 1936, when a display was given by J. Brisco Ray, Old Dowegian and British Empire Springboard Champion. The new pool replaced the two bathing places on the Kennet at Aldermaston and Woolhampton which had been used every summer since 1904. The new gym allowed classes in physical exercise each morning and the introduction of fencing in 1937. The new theatre was used for the first time for speech day in July 1936, when Abbot Mooney spoke of a true Benedictine education being summed up in two words, character and culture. The first of many Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, was performed on stage and produced by Father Aloysius Bloor in December 1936. In October of the same year, Father Dunstan Cammack provided the première of the talkies with *I Was a Spy*, though since the theatre also served as a gym, there were problems from the start with the quality of sound. The new senior wing prompted the publication of the first photographic guide to Douai Abbey in 1936, of which the text was written by Father Stephen Marron. At the same time as the senior wing was being built, Archbishop David Mathew told the headmaster, Father Ignatius Rice, that the school was the chief benefit conferred on England by the expulsion of the teaching orders from France. 'Douai', he went on, 'showed the simplicity and virility of the new Catholic core....I also think that no Catholic school has been so free from the influence of Arnold of Rugby as Douai has been'.

During the Second World War, life carried on despite the black-outs and austere conditions, and the Haydock Hall or Study Hall became a dormitory in order that all the dormitories were grouped in the safest part of the buildings. It did not again revert to dormitory use until for a moment in July 1990, the Haydock Hall was transformed

into a Hollywood dormitory for the girls' school which featured in the film 'Three Men and a Little Lady' starring Tom Selleck and Fiona Shaw. After the cessation of war hostilities, the school began to plan for the future. In 1946, the school chapel was improved by the installation of pews from Lord Petre's chapel at Thorndon Hall. Numbers began to grow, and it was decided in 1947, perhaps rather late in the day, to establish a boys' boarding preparatory school at Ditcham Park, an extensive estate of three hundred acres on the South Downs overlooking the Solent. It had belonged to the Cave family and had a chapel once served by the Benedictines. Reasons for a separate junior school included the pressure of numbers at Douai, the increasing demand for the admission of young boys, the expansion of the Catholic population, and 'even the flight from the State Schools'. In the Community's perception, it was the right time to found such an establishment, since the senior school had grown in public respect, though some warned that it was short-sighted to be founding a new school when the size of the Community had begun to shrink. Four monks were sent in 1948 to begin an idyllic *Country Life* existence at 'Douai Junior School', where the early days seemed to revolve around the first headmaster, Father Alphonsus Tierney's, passion for ponies. The ponies were apparently useful for making the boys keep their backs straight. 'One week-end, the prefects paid a visit to Ditcham, and they returned telling wonderful tales of venison, horses, decanters, and matrons in evening-dress'.

From the start, Ditcham boys were narrowly trained in the classics and core subjects, and went on to win scholarships to the senior school year after year. In 1956, a gym and dormitory block were built at Ditcham. The staff appointed to teach at Ditcham remained there for most of the school's life, and there was always slight unease at Douai itself that the Ditcham Fathers were in danger of turning into country gentry. This probably lay behind the complaint at the 1957 Douai Visitation about 'the deportment of two of the Ditcham Fathers', and the aim expressed at Douai in 1961 that Ditcham should become more of 'a Monastic House'. In 1967, Father Hilary Palmer succeeded Father Edward Fairhead as headmaster of Ditcham, and began immediately to modernise the establishment by reforming the curriculum and engaging further staff to prepare the way for an official inspection. This was carried out successfully in 1968, and when another spasm of debates on declining manpower began at Douai in 1969 after the election of the new abbot, the Ditcham monks argued 'in favour of its continuance as a school and centre for monastic activity'. Father Hilary argued strongly for the retention of four suitably qualified monks at Ditcham, but others believed the solution lay in the appointment of more lay teachers since there were already limited numbers of monks available. The Chapter recognised that Ditcham, as it stood in the 1970s, had become a drain on the Community's manpower, and a decision was taken to close the school in 1975. In that year, the pupils transferred to Douai, taking with them the name 'Douai Junior School', and initially lived within a new block which was later transformed into science laboratories when a new Ditcham House was completed in 1980.

At Douai itself, there was an urgent need for efficient science laboratories after the Second World War and to replace the original science laboratory located high up in the attics. A large army hut was re-erected and came into use in 1950. Called 'temporary' at the time, this building continued to be used for chemistry and physics until 1976, and then became the art department until the closure of the school in 1999. It was Father Paulinus Cunningham who was primarily responsible for equipping the physics laboratory, in which he installed equipment begged, by the application of his charm

and persuasion, from the nearby Aldermaston Atomic Energy Authority. Father Paulinus himself many held key positions at Douai; he was choir master in the monastery, and senior science master and games master in the school, and his sudden death, aged only forty four, characteristically on the royal tennis court at Hampton Court, on the last day of term in 1965, left a yawning gap.

Opposite the science laboratories, new changing rooms were built in 1956 adjacent to the swimming pool. In 1982, the old bathroom cubicles were demolished and Godric, the legendary rat which lived there, had to find another home. In 1985, the squash court complex was built, the sports' department hoping that this was the first stage in a development which might lead to a well-equipped sports centre. In 1992, with the decline in boarders, the old White Dormitory, stretching above the length of the school cloister, with its cubicles and *art-nouveau* leaded-glass door panels, was replaced by more classrooms and a new computer room, the Court of Arches was refitted, and the school administration transferred from its eyrie in the school tower. The new classroom wing was dedicated in 1992 by Abbot Finbar Kealy as the Faringdon Wing, since it absorbed the old housemaster's room of Faringdon House. The next of the large old cubicled dormitories, the Brown Dormitory, was suitably converted into rooms for girls in 1995 and opened as the Tierney Wing by the Duchess of Norfolk. Dr Peter McLaughlin, the last headmaster, was able in 1998, a year before the school closed, to put into effect his master-plan of transferring all teaching to Ditcham House and bringing all the boarders together in the original school building.

### **c. The Headmasters**

For nearly a century, Douai School was held together by the hard work and generosity of its staff. Until the late creation of school houses in the 1950s, the school adopted the modified Jesuit line system which had been used at old Douai. Directly under the abbot were appointed a number of monk Prefects, the chief being the Prefect of Studies and Prefect of Discipline. During the first few years after 1903, there seems to have been frequent changes of Prefect, but the two most influential Prefects who bridged Douai and Woolhampton were Father Lawrence Powell, Prefect of Studies, 1901-05, who remodelled the curriculum and introduced the School Certificate examinations, and Father Bede McEvoy, Prefect of Discipline, 1902-03, who had the unenviable task of welding the two schools together. Father Adrian Coughlin was specifically appointed headmaster, rather than Prefect, in 1909, and remained in the post until succeeded by Father Laurence Powell, once Prefect of Studies, in 1911. Father Laurence was succeeded briefly by Father Anthony Richardson. Father Anthony, born in the Douai parish of Cleator, Cumberland, had been the last monk solemnly professed at old Douai in 1902, and was the second sent to study for an Oxford degree, in mathematics, at Ampleforth's private hall, then presided over by Abbot Oswald Hunter-Blair, and later to become St Benet's Hall. Despite Father Adrian Coughlin's earlier appointment as head, it is Father Anthony who is recognised as the school's first head master, although after only a brief tenure he was succeeded by Father Ignatius Rice in 1915, who continued the tradition of having three monks as prefects under him. This run of short-lived headmasters, along with brief abbacies during the same period, undoubtedly influenced the prevailing instability of the early years at Woolhampton.

Father Ignatius Rice, who read Greats at Oxford and studied theology in Rome, was headmaster from 1915 until 1952, taking on the office at the age of thirty two. After a

line of abbots and headmasters following on from each other in rapid succession, Father Ignatius began at Woolhampton the tradition of long-lived officials, which persisted for much of the twentieth century. He was determined to preserve the familiarity that had existed between the monks and boys at old Douai, at the cost of lessening the impact a larger school might have made on the national and Catholic educational scene. The school was still only one hundred and fifty pupils on his retirement in 1952, an extraordinary feat at a time when all schools were being forced to raise their numbers. Though the school buildings trebled in size during his headmastership and the school had become well-known, there remained in it, thanks to Father Ignatius, 'a certain spirit, a character and outlook of life, that is difficult to define yet very definite, and a valuable contribution to the education of this country'. Every Sunday evening after prayers, Father Ignatius addressed the entire school in the Haydock Hall with a 'Jazz', and then entertained the sixth form to a 'Smoke' in his study, at which cigarettes were handed around. The next morning, those whose work was poor were beaten. Traces of this discipline lingered on into the 1970s in the 'fortnightly marks' periods'.

Known to generations of boys as 'Piggy', Father Ignatius Rice always referred to himself as 'W. I. R'. He was tall, with a commanding presence, although inclined by nature to be indolent. He earned respect in the school as someone who had played cricket for Warwickshire and had all the qualities of a good sportsman. He spoke meticulously with a beautiful resonant voice, wrote fluently, and inspired many boys with a deep love of the ancient classics. Father Ignatius Rice was a fine teacher, and his pupil, the later journalist, Paul Jennings wrote after his death: 'There was a quality in him born from the inevitable conflict between his massive, unchanging, real values, his concept of civilisation, his marriage of the Classical and the Christian virtues – between these and the impermanence of school life, the constant coming and going of still unformed and immature minds; to say nothing of the collapse of Europe and the confusion of the world with which he knew those minds would have to cope all too soon...[the] impression that everything he said to you was unique and special, made you feel you were *knowing* him. You went into his room, with its brown linoleum and its wood fire that never worked and only accentuated the coolness. He would excuse himself as he finished one of his endless letters, coughing over his cigarette [I am sure he tried hard with a pipe, but he was a cigarette man really], and then he would swing round and give you his whole mind, his whole courtesy'. Father Ignatius was a close friend of the Catholic literary circle of the late 1920s and 1930s, which included Alice and Wilfrid Meynell and Hilaire Belloc. He had himself been present at the reception of G. K. Chesterton into the Catholic Church in 1922, and Father John O'Connor, who had been educated at old Douai and officiated at that reception, became the original character behind Chesterton's 'Father Brown'.

In 1920, the headmaster became a member of the Headmasters' Conference, despite the small size of the school. At the time, this was interpreted as a triumph of the headmaster's authority over that of the bursar, since there had been, up to this point, a running battle between these two officials as to who had ultimate authority in financial policies. Father Ignatius, as a stronger character than the bursar, also had firm views on education, preferring a broad education with the classics as its core, and giving a high profile to debating skills, which is presumably why the debating society occupied for decades such a predominant place within *The Douai Magazine*. He was interested in education but was not an educationalist, he would say. As late as 1937, Father Ignatius

was still emphasising that he had ‘no ambition nor intention to build up an enormous school which might become, like so many others, a big business concern’. He was fortunate in implementing his policies to have a close friend at the time in Abbot Sylvester Mooney, two years younger, and the two together were to steer the fortunes of monastery and school for nearly fifty years. Nevertheless, criticisms of Father Ignatius were beginning to surface by the early 1940s, when his grip began to slacken to the extent that it became common for teachers not to know which classes they were to take until the very first day of term. When the annalist noted that Father Ignatius was in the USA in October 1949, lecturing on English poets, he went on to note: ‘The term in the school has started with a radical and all-embracing tightening up of discipline’. In early June, 1950, Father Ignatius returned to a tumultuous welcome from the school, after his long convalescence in the United States but he remained tired and there continued to be some loosening of his grip in terms of discipline and studies. In hindsight, it would perhaps have been sensible at this point to have handed over the office of headmaster to Father Peter Lye who had deputised for Father Ignatius in his absence, but Father Ignatius was determined to carry on. Nevertheless, Father Peter’s reforming influence can be discerned in the establishment of the House system in 1951. In 1952, with his health visibly failing, Father Ignatius finally resigned, and the following year, Coronation Year, the old boys commissioned a portrait of him by Henry Carr to commemorate his retirement and to catch something of his *gravitas*. He died in April 1955.

The headmastership of Father Alphonsus Tierney began in September 1952 and ended in 1973. It was a period of transition between the autocratic patriarchy of Father Ignatius Rice and the government by cabinet which crept in under later headmasters. Father Alphonsus’s pastoral availability was legendary and contrasted with the last years of his predecessor, for he ran an open house, providing a relaxed atmosphere in which staff could feel at ease and boys comfortable. ‘Alfie’ was a gifted raconteur who habitually accosted people with the introductory remark: ‘Have you heard the one about...’, and continually adopted new interests. In his latter years, he made bread, although his ‘monastic bread’ was best avoided; he manufactured sweets, although they tended to contain more snuff than chocolate; he ventured into abstract paintings which resembled X-rays of human interior anatomy, jewellery, never worn, and, for the local parish, cheerful stained glass fascias. Father Alphonsus had had years of headmasterly experience at Ditcham, where he began with thirty six boys in September 1948 as its first superior and headmaster. During his years as headmaster at Douai from 1952, it is difficult not to see a more conscious public school spirit where the House system, a bigger school and more lay staff, and a determined effort to improve the academic status through public competitive examinations would seem to have been contributory factors. He remained an enthusiastic teacher of English and Religious Instruction, and in his classes on the Seven Capital Sins, ‘which have exceedingly desirable ends so that in his desire for them, a man goes on to the commission of many sins...’, he would explain, under pride, avarice and gluttony, how to manage a free meal at an expensive London restaurant. He was a benign father-figure, but for many boys during the second half of his term of office, Father Hilary Palmer, his deputy headmaster, aloof, highly-strung, and gifted, seemed to be the power behind the throne. Whilst headmaster, Father Alphonsus took over as editor of *The Douai Magazine* when Father Gregory Freeman became abbot in 1969, and as a sideline, he continued to collect further examples of variations of ‘Douai’ on letter envelopes. He listed sixty five, ranging for ‘Pornia School’ to ‘Messrs. Doggi Abbey’, proving, as the late Lord

Harvington, an Old Dowegian, always insisted, that ‘retaining in England a French name of four vowels [in fact, ‘Douai’ is Flemish, *ed.*] was only asking for trouble’.

Father Wilfrid Sollom became head in 1975, following the brief headmastership of Father Brian Murphy. From the outset, Father Wilfrid was known as someone who, presented with a job, got on and did it. He was perceived as rigorous in matters of discipline, but someone who had a deep compassion for anyone in distress. As was said of him: ‘He knew what he was doing and where he was going and he gave to everyone in the school the inestimable gift of knowing exactly where they stood and what was expected of them.’ Father Wilfrid’s personality and scientific outlook encouraged a centralising of authority on the head and a practical rationalisation of all areas of school life, but even he had to bow to forms of delegation in a world where education had become much too complex for headmasters alone. From 1973, the headmaster, therefore, had begun to meet formally each week with the housemasters to discuss forthcoming events, curricular development, and discipline. As this cabinet usually met on Monday mornings, some time was inevitably spent on dealing with infractions of school rules over the previous weekend. Under Father Wilfrid, parents were provided with frequent newsletters, and in the last days of corporal punishment, this discipline, once administered by the headmaster, monk prefects and later the housemasters, was now administered solely by the headmaster, before its final abolition. It was replaced by more bureaucratic curbs, a range of detentions, punishment books, task forces, and headmaster’s ‘parades’. Father Wilfrid prefaced his discipline book with Edmund Burke’s caution: ‘Beware, lest by hating vices too much, we come to love men too little’. Father Wilfrid’s headmastership lasted twelve years, from 1975 until 1987. He was succeeded in 1987 by Father Geoffrey Scott, the Director of Studies, who remained in office until 1993, when he was succeeded by Father Edmund Power, who had been a housemaster before joining the staff of Sant’ Anselmo in Rome. He, in turn, was succeeded by Dr Peter McLaughlin, the school’s first lay head, in 1997, and, because of the closure of the school in 1999, the school’s last head.

#### **d. The School Staff**

In many respects, the staff of the school, working below each of the headmasters, had a decisive effect on its development, and Douai School was blest with some highly talented teachers throughout its century at Woolhampton. From 1903, there were very few lay teachers employed, and these only to fill gaps where there were no monk teachers available. Among the first generation of lay staff, who are scarcely mentioned in any records, was Mr. Frank Dereham, ‘Ham’, an irascible and sarcastic dipsomaniac, according to the boys, who was believed to prefer Newbury Races to classroom teaching. In the same generation, and more likeable, was Dr Pat Lyons, ‘Dard’, who lived in the attic, near the first science laboratory, and attempted to teach simple science to the early generations after 1903, although his first love was the London theatre. He was a friend of George Bernard Shaw, and at Douai became the first president of the Engineering Club in 1921. The most distinguished of this early generation of pedagogues, however, was Mr Theodore Beasley, known as ‘Beaver’ on account of his thick beard, and who strongly resembled King George V or the last of the Romanovs. ‘Beaver’ always wore a five-buttoned suit, and drainpipe trousers at

half-mast over his boots. He was associated with Douai for nearly twenty four years, from 1916 until 1940. 'His method of teaching was somewhat Socratic. He would feign utter ignorance and then guide to the solution of problems by provocative comment and criticism'. His gold-rimmed spectacles were used as mirrors when he wrote on the blackboard, to detect miscreants behind his back, and these were chastised by strokes from a leather trace from a horse's harness onto which was carved the words 'Auxilium Christianorum'. This instrument of torture reputedly bore the marks of a penknife of one rebel who had tried to disarm it. 'Beaver' was recognised to be a kind man, nevertheless, who looked after many a homesick ten-year old. Half of his study was used as a workshop to teach the boys woodwork and metalwork. He was primarily, however, an inspiring language teacher with a fascination for Persian and Arabic, and his method was to introduce his pupils to the shorter fables of La Fontaine, learnt by heart, and only then to move on to grammar. In 1917, the Community agreed to him becoming a postulant and gave permission for him to wear the habit and attend choir office provided it did not interfere with his school duties, though his monastic vocation never seems to have matured. Beasley went on to concentrate on gathering together the records of old boys of the school, and was at one time editor of *The Douai Magazine* in which he signed his articles 'Castor' [Latin for 'beaver'].

During the Second World War came the most distinguished of the school's lay staff. Mr. Oliver J. G. Welch, known even to himself as 'O.J.G.', brother of Dame Werburg Welch of Stanbrook Abbey, was probably the most influential teacher in the school throughout the century. On his retirement, thirty-three years after first arriving at Woolhampton in 1943, he recorded that he found Douai 'the warmest and most welcoming of places. For me it was so the moment I joined the staff'. Oliver had a hint of Benjamin Disraeli and Salvador Dali about him, and he himself would have approved of both of these characters: 'With his goatee beard and curling locks giving him the look of a gallant Cavalier, he is well remembered as a beacon of fashion: a wearer of pepper-and-salt sports jackets, mustard waistcoats, cavalry twill trousers and suede boots much admired and imitated by young men awakening to the sartorial facts of life'. On coming to Douai, he was immediately invited by the junior monks to speak to their newly formed discussion group. In the school, he founded, with the help of P. J. Kavanagh, The Art Society, and in 1951, the year he became librarian of the Bede Library, he was given the task of cataloguing the Turner Collection, the extensive collection of French Revolutionary pamphlets compiled by the Paris monk, Dom John Turner, which he continued to catalogue after his retirement in 1968. His specialist history lectures on the French Revolution enthralled generations of sixth-formers, and provided the basis for his most important book, *Mirabeau*, published in 1950. Oliver carefully cultivated intellectual talent among the boys by means of The Thirteen, an elite academy of thirteen apostles, which met from the autumn of 1954 until 1995 to discuss intellectual questions. Henry Mayr-Harting, who had helped to bring The Thirteen into existence, brought its first year to a climax with his paper on 'Persecution'. In 1997, Henry Mayr-Harting was to become the first lay, and first Catholic, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford and the first Catholic canon of Oxford Cathedral. Another member of The Thirteen, Professor Adrian Hastings, published just before his death an appreciation of 'Oliver' in *The Downside Review*, depicting him as an unusually liberal English Catholic of the pre-Vatican II period, with 'a predilection for [tracing in his historical studies] the interaction of personality and public history'. But Oliver had a lighter side. In 1959, for instance, he acted as Master of Ceremonies at a tea dance for Douai boys and Mayfield girls, in which he was 'a big hit with the girls'.

Below the staff at Woolhampton were the senior boys who helped in the general running of the school. In 1903, according to inherited Douai tradition, the principal officers among the boys were initially members of the Sodality of Our Lady, which had been founded at old Douai in 1836 and which survived at Woolhampton until 1925. A Captain of the School, as well as a Head Boy of the school, separate from the Sodality, had emerged by 1923, and the Sodality was itself replaced in 1925 by an embryonic group of prefects, called 'The Committee', who had become straightforward 'prefects' by 1936. In the early days, school officials were listed as comprising the President and Vice-President of the Sodality, Lecturers, Antiphoners, Public Men, Shop Men, and Librarians of the Ward and Junior libraries. In 1951, the school was internally divided into three houses, each under a monk housemaster. These houses were not separate entities but allowed boys to identify with a smaller grouping socially: Samson House, named after Abbot Samson of medieval Bury St Edmunds, Faringdon House, named after the martyred last abbot of Reading Abbey, Walmesley House, after Bishop Charles Walmesley, the eighteenth-century member of the Community who had been a mathematician and astronomer, and in 1970, a fourth house appeared, later [1980] called Gifford House, to commemorate Archbishop Gabriel Gifford, the seventeenth-century English Benedictine who was Archbishop of Rheims and a principal founder of St Edmund's priory in Paris. The establishment of these new internal groupings followed the first official school inspection in 1951, but the buildings did not lend themselves to such a division, and the school houses throughout their existence had a degree of artificiality about them.

#### **e. The School Curriculum**

At Woolhampton, the school gradually moved away from being a minor seminary as it had been in France towards becoming an independent boarding school. An important early change was the successful recognition of the school as a secondary school by the Board of Education in 1904: 'because of our settlement in England, we have been obliged to abandon our glorious isolation and independence regarding educational matters in which we revelled in Douai'. At the first public exams sat in England, in July 1904, the school's performance was highly satisfactory, with Ignatius Mooney obtaining First Class Honours and Distinctions in Latin, and *The Tablet* noted, 'It is of special interest to note the vigour with which Old Douai challenges attention in its new home'. In 1990, the Oxford English Dictionary editors enquired whether 'Poetry' was still a class name at Douai as it had been in 1903, but the traditional English Catholic nomenclature of 'Rhetoric', 'Poetry', 'Syntax' and 'Grammar', used in old Douai and brought to Woolhampton, had disappeared by 1921, presumably with the adoption of external certificate exams. Some old Douai traditions went almost immediately; published class lists, for instance, replaced the old Douai custom of the Prior presiding over the reports of the pupils at the beginning of each term and announcing the composition of each form. Greek, however, never taught at old Douai was added to the timetable on the school's arrival at Woolhampton. The Higher Certificate Examination was attempted for the first time in the summer of 1905, which allowed more Douai boys to enter the English universities. In 1919, Louis Wharton of Oriel became the first Douai 'blue' at Oxford, and from the early 1930s. Oxford and Cambridge letters were published in *The Douai Magazine*. Even by the late 1920s, classes remained small, between fifteen and twenty pupils with a spread of ability, only six to ten boys studying in the Sixth Form for the Higher Certificate.

The standard timetable of the late 1920s contained English, Mathematics, Latin, French, and General Science. Boys from abroad found English measurements an unnecessary trial. 'For years a typical problem was that of a merchant of Newcastle who purchased a given number of tons, hundredweights, stones, pounds and ounces of coal at a stated number of pounds, shilling and pence per hundredweight. Calculate how much he paid'. Rising took place in the early days at 6.30, when the school was summoned by a rattle, mass was attended daily and studies began before breakfast. The old boarding-school timetable operated. Classes were held from 9.00 until 19.00, as well as on Saturday mornings, singing practice was held on Wednesday evenings, and a letter-writing prep on Sunday mornings, which was brought to a close with the bell of St Peter's parish church across the Park sounding 'Go To Hell' at 10.55. Games and matches filled all weekday afternoons and the scout troop met on Friday afternoons.

Partly due to increasing numbers of day pupils, the day was foreshortened from the 1980s, and voluntary 'extra-curricular activities' were introduced at the end of the school day. Pastorally, there were further developments at this time. Overworked monastic housemasters were provided with lay assistant housemasters, and then pastoral provision and intellectual support became the responsibility of tutors, that is, members of staff attached to the school houses. At much the same time, dyslexia was discovered and a range of special needs looked after by experienced staff. The number of lay staff working in the school rapidly increased during the 1970s, as the number of monks declined and the curriculum expanded. In 1974, Roger Aylward replaced Sergeant Robert Hartigan as the first full-time Physical Education teacher, and Phil Smith became the first layman to coach First XV rugby. The 1970s saw boarding schools across the land going through an *aggiornamento* like the Church itself ten years earlier. Trips became more frequent, charitable and social work in the locality proliferated, pupils accompanied the sick to Lourdes annually, twinning arrangements were established with the German schools at St. Blasien and later with the Benedictine school at Meschede, and with the Institute Saint-Jean in Douai town.

## **f. The Religious Life of the School**

In a school attached throughout its life to a Benedictine monastery, it is not surprising that, in common with many English Catholic schools, the practice of religious faith at Douai was intensive and taken for granted. In 1905, sixth and seventh classes of the lower, or 'preparatory' school, established the Guild of St Aloysius, the Jesuit saint and patron of youth, which furthered 'mutual improvement and advancement' and whose aim was 'to foster in the lower classes of the school *spiritualism*'. The great English Jesuit, Father Martindale, following a letter from the pope to 'All Young Men', spoke on St Aloysius Gonzaga in June 1926, throwing 'new light...on this patron of youth, and we shall no longer be inclined to regard this great saint as 'soft', but rather as a model of manly virtues'. The school then sent a letter to the pope, acknowledging the pupils' interest in St Aloysius. Besides the round of formal liturgical practice, apologetics were taken seriously. Father Michael Young published his book *Revealed Religion* in 1949. It was designed to teach 'apologetics' in secondary schools, and coincided with a surge of interest in Catholic Action among the boys at Douai where a branch of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul had been established in 1946. In the closed world of this typical

English Catholic boarding school, Retreats were an important event in the school year, and there were some early forms of charitable appeals. By 1926, for instance, there was a box next to the tuck shop collecting alms for the St. Francis Leper Guild.

The school had its own *Manual of Prayers*, first published in the 1920s, which until the late 1960s was always carried in the pocket and used daily for morning and night prayers, serving at mass, and the visit to the Blessed Sacrament before lunch. From 1903 until 1958, the whole school attended daily morning mass which was celebrated on the high altar of St Mary's Church, then the school chapel. Although this was the principal school mass, others were being celebrated around the chapel simultaneously but *sotto voce*, by various priests and were served by boys on a rota. Once early morning mass for the school had become voluntary in the Christmas term 1958, morning prayers took place in the study hall, instead of the school chapel, before breakfast. From this time too, but only for a brief period, night prayers remained compulsory for the junior boys, while the seniors were allowed to say their night prayers in private. As the sixth-form chronicler commented: 'These two experiments...seem to have succeeded in their aim of making religion more personal and less of a grind'. Another easing of regular practice was the dropping in 1969 of compulsory Benediction on Thursdays and the singing of the Litany of Our Lady for the conversion of England to Catholicism on Saturday nights, although the boys continued for some years thereafter to attend Benediction on Sundays.

Like so many English Catholic establishments, the Community and school, even in France, tended to maintain a self-contained, rather introverted life. The early years at Woolhampton were no different, and an element of local animosity merely heightened the sense of difference. In 1903, there were some local inhabitants suspicious of St. Mary's College becoming a monastery, and a screen of trees was erected by neighbours to shield themselves from 'French and foreign Papist monks'. The hoisting of the Irish republican tricolor which had succeeded 'the time-honoured custom' at old Douai of hoisting the 'Green flag' was discouraged in the 1920s because of fear it might offend the susceptibilities of neighbours. These were, however, exceptional examples of awkwardness and Douai gradually became accepted in the local area, employing many local people and offering its facilities for outside use. In 1957, land behind the cricket pavilion was offered to provide an extension to the village primary school. By the 1970s, the school began to look more outside itself. Pupils engaged in a variety of social and educational work in the vicinity of the school, and became attached to various international relief agencies. Slowly, from the 1960s, the proud separateness of English Catholicism was eroded. In August 1932, the boys had assembled on the platform at Midgham station to salute the papal legate and to receive his blessing as he sped by on his train journey to Buckfast for the consecration of the abbey church. One cannot imagine a similar event happening in 1970. As the school opened up to a wider national scene in the 1970s, it tended to become more mainstream-establishment. English Catholics, for instance, had traditionally honoured the war dead by a requiem mass on Remembrance Sunday, and had eschewed wreath-layings and Protestant memorial services. From 1979, however, on Remembrance Sunday, the school listened to the Roll Call of old pupils who had fallen in the battles of the two great wars and stood to attention as the Last Post and Reveille were sounded before the minute's silence.

#### **g. The Douai Magazine**

*The Douai Magazine*, which had been published for the first time on the eve of the departure from old Douai, was continued at Woolhampton, though there was to be an unfortunate gap between 1907 and 1920, when no volumes were published, the result apparently of a failure to find an editor and collect overdue subscriptions. Father Cuthbert Doyle, once a highly respected novice master at Belmont [1873-88] was editor in the transitional years 1900 to 1907. In the two years up to 1907, the *Magazine*, had already begun to falter, but had managed to continue the quality of its production and its contents and to balance Community items with school news. The thirteen-year gap which followed meant that a critical period, covering the further consolidation of the Community at Woolhampton and the effect of the First World War, was not charted. Nevertheless, an important *Festschrift*, published in 1917, helped to fill the gap, *Tercentenary of St. Edmund's Monastery. Paris, 1615. Douai, 1818. Woolhampton, 1903*, was edited by Father Cuthbert Doyle and celebrated the anniversaries of St Edmund's priory in Paris [1615] and Douai, France [1818]. *The Douai Magazine*, New Series. Vol. I, No. 1, appeared in January 1920, bearing for the first time its own motto, *Quidquid agunt homines Duacenses* ['The doings of Douai men'] and replacing the Douai motto, *Dominus mihi adjutor* ['The Lord is my helper'], which had headed previous magazines. The new editor was Father Stephen Marron who commented in his first editorial, 'The vagaries of school magazines are an imitation of nature'. This was a précis of the words of encouragement the editor had received on the republication of the magazine from the poet William Canton, an Old Dowegian. Father Stephen was hugely helped behind the scenes by Father Bernard Ryan, his assistant.

Under Father Stephen, *The Douai Magazines* of the 1920s saw the first pen-and-ink drawings of the buildings at Douai executed by two resident artists: Father Aloysius's Bloor, who had been taught by a Mr McIntosh, a painter of Berkshire landscapes, and the Old Dowegian, George Pitot [1915-18], who was also responsible for the illuminated Roll of Honour listing the dead of the First World War. Father Aloysius' final drawing for the magazine, a pen-and-ink sketch of Ditcham Park, was finished in 1949. *The Douai Magazine* reached its peak in terms of quality and items of interest under the editorship of Father Edmund Power, who succeeded Father Alphonsus Tierney [editor 1968-84] in 1984. Father Edmund assembled an editorial team, and provided a breadth of articles which gave details of the many flourishing activities in the school. These were accompanied by some superb photographs of David Hatfull, a member of staff who became Amateur Photographer of the Year in 1986, one of his winning shots being a third-former blowing bubble-gum during prep in the Study Hall. Old Douai had seen a flourishing tradition of underground and alternative manuscript school magazines, and this tradition was continued at Woolhampton, where unofficial magazines, often satirical and produced by pupils themselves, were printed from the 1920s, and were followed latterly by alternative school prospectuses. More respectable magazines attached to academic departments, such as *Quaver*, published by the musicians, and *Clio*, published by the historians, had a fitful existence from the 1970s.

With neither radio nor television in the early years, debating was a popular pastime in the school, and a record of three termly speeches allowed any orator to join the party on the Thames for Pangbourne Day. The Douai Debating Society had succeeded in 1903 the 'Parliament' of old Douai, and provided debates and papers in alternate weeks. Within a year it had become The Douai Literary and Debating Society, and the Society allowed the school to exchange views and information about the larger world. The debates of the 1930s, for instance, centred on the emergence of fascism. In 1920, the

Society had transferred its literary aspect to the newly established 'Social Study Club', which, in accord with the Catholicism of the time and the distributist principles of its founder, Father Ignatius Rice, attached itself to the Catholic Social Guild.

Fathers Ignatius, Sylvester Mooney, Stephen Marron and Edmund Brietzcke had already founded a small society in October 1914 to study social questions. A walk across Bucklebury Common provided a sanguine reflection in *The Douai Magazine* of 1921 on the evils of the enclosure system which brought about the end of the 'yeoman class' and was opposed to 'the Catholic solution of small holdings in the hands of private owners'. Distributism, according to one fifth former in 1937, was best defined as 'Catholic Communism'. Cardinal Aidan Gasquet presented an annual prize from 1920 for 'Social Study', and a number of members of the Douai Social Study Club went on to become leading members of the Distributist League and disciples of G. K. Chesterton. In 1925, there were three Old Dowegians contributing to *G. K.'s Weekly*, and the first volume, published in 1934, included poetry on *Woolhampton* and *Bucklebury Common* by Old Dowegians. In 1931 and 1932, the summer conference of the Distributist League was held at Douai, with its president, G. K. Chesterton, giving the opening address in 1932. In 1936, Father Gregory Buisseret [in the school 1901-03] ] was invited to write in *The Douai Magazine* about 'The Catholic Land Association' and his experimental Back-to-the-Land farm at Parbold in Lancashire. Later, in February 1948, Reginald Jebb spoke to the senior school on the ideals of Hilaire Belloc, the founder of the distributist movement, to whom he was related by marriage.

Distributism reflected a more radical side of a school which was generally content to bask in an unreflective political conservatism as it felt itself more at home within the public school fraternity, and this is reflected in the pages of the *Magazine*. In 1937, Robert Grant Ferris, an Old Dowegian, entered the Commons as the Conservative member for North St. Pancras, which set him on the ladder to becoming Deputy Speaker, and the same year, Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, chose the Old Dowegian C. T. Pertwee as Union candidate for West Swansea. The presence of 'Apologetics' in the school timetable encouraged the formation of groups of crusaders who issued reports in the *Magazine*. The Douai branch of the Catholic Evidence Guild was addressed in 1921 by the national president, Frank Sheed, on the urgency of its mission: 'There were forty millions to convert [in 1921] in the British Isles and at the present rate of conversions [about 10,000 a year] the work would take 4,000 years. With faith and energy the work might be accomplished in forty years'. By 1950, *The Douai Magazine* reported that a lay Catholic branch of the League of Christ the King had been established, perhaps the nearest thing in those days to a Jesuit schoolboy sodality and part of a much wider movement called Catholic Action. L.O.C.K. was designed to train its members to meet the religious and social problems of everyday living, and in the school it was an instrument of change, having succeeded within three years in having night prayers returned from the Study Hall to the School Chapel and in having a new Manual of Prayers printed. The League soon moved on from establishing a branch of the Catholic Truth Society in the school to weekly gospel discussion groups, which generally rounded off their meetings with a debate on a topical issue. 'Should nuns change their habits?' was a typical question for discussion in the immediate post-Vatican II years.

## **h. The Arts**

Musically, the school hung onto traditions inherited from old Douai, and for the first two decades continued to be heavily influenced by the tastes and preferences of the monastery. Bishop Austin O'Neill's 'Douai Carol' was sung at Christmas throughout the century at Woolhampton. By 1927, the orchestra had come into its own, a consort of eighteen, conducted by Mr J. Fry and enhanced by six members of the community who included Fathers Aloysius Bloor and Francis Bennett, accomplished violinists, and Brother Kevin McCann who was well-matched with the double base. From 1903, Bishop O'Neill's operettas, composed at old Douai, had an annual airing, performed at first in the Haydock Hall with makeshift curtains from the dormitory. They were replaced by Christmas plays performed by the boys. In the years after 1903, the Christmas term ended within days of the feast itself, and, as at Douai, a number of boys stayed on in school throughout the Christmas and Easter holidays where they entertained themselves and the Prefects to 'song, dance, mime and minstrelsy'. In 1908, the boys went home for the first time for Easter, 'a new and permanent departure'.

After the opening of the new theatre in 1937, Father Dunstan Cammack's annual dramatic productions and Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were performed in a cycle from the early 1940s. Father Dunstan's production of the farce 'Tons of Money', was performed for the first time in 1942, and so oft afterward that it was renamed 'Tons of Dunny'. Even the boy-reviewers of 'Charley's Aunt', another Dunstan favourite, produced for the first time in 1945, complained that 'too many passages' caused 'an uncomfortable feeling of embarrassment, and there are romantic touches which are beyond realistic interpretation by boys'. For more sophisticated tastes, the choral tradition of Father Aloysius Bloor, inherited from old Douai, was continued and expanded by Fathers Luke Major and Philip Robinson during the 1950s. This was a prelude to the performance of major concerts in the abbey church from the 1970s, conducted by Mr Leonard Smith, in which The Douai Choral Society joined with the local convent schools in Reading and Maidenhead. Such performances by the school continued, but in 1991, there were a series of concerts to raise money for the extension to the abbey church, and once the latter was completed in 1993, such musical events, organised by Father Oliver Holt, began to take place regularly in the church. From the early 1960s, various monks retained supervision over the liturgical music sung in the school, while the responsibility for the encouragement of music generally was handed over to lay staff. The music societies of the 1960s and 1970s were presided over by Mr and Mrs Leonard Smith, who had married while they were both music teachers at Ditcham Park. In 1982, the decision was taken to employ Mr Jan Zuchowski, the school's first full-time musical director. The first pop music group appeared at the end of 1967, called 'Hell's Teeth', after an oft-used expletive of Father Wulstan Livesey, chemistry master and First XV coach. The curse was adopted as the name of the group after Father Wulstan was reputed to have uttered it on hearing the noise made by the pop group.

In the first summer at Woolhampton in 1904, Douai boys attended the famous Greek play at nearby Bradfield College, and later generations were to follow this tradition. A major break with the monopoly which Father Dunstan held over Douai drama for thirty years, was the striking performance of T. S. Eliot's, 'Murder in the Cathedral', produced to coincide with the laying of the foundation stone of the new monastery in 1964 by Nicholas Gregson, the son of the actor, John Gregson, and then a pupil in the school. The four knights acted as car-park attendants before mounting the stage. Thirty years later, the same play was to be performed in the recently completed abbey church, under

the direction of Father Oliver Holt, who made maximum use of the building's dramatic possibilities. After Father Dunstan's death in January 1972, Douai drama had become more serious and more innovative under the direction of Father Oliver. His production of 'A Man Born to be King' in Lent, 1978, was the first serious dramatic production since 1971. By this time, the curriculum had begun to expand, introducing into the timetable subjects which had hitherto been extra-curricular. Music and Art thus gained a place in the timetable and forsook the attics where they had been practised by small groups of enthusiasts since the early years at Woolhampton. The first 'Drawing Class and Art Club' had been founded by Brother Gerard Spencer in the autumn of 1925, and Father Aloysius Bloor had shared his artistic talents with the boys at the same time. During the 1960s, Father Hilary Palmer had established an art club in the attic of the headmaster's wing and proved an inspiring teacher to his small group of his disciples. He was succeeded in the same attic by Father Bernard Swinhoe who enthused the boys with his multi-faceted approach to art, and drew photography into the art club. From the foundations laid by both these monks, Marion Hill and David Hatfull led the art and photographic departments in the 1980s towards becoming the most popular and successful departments in the school.

### **i. Food and Clothing**

No survey of a century of the school's life would be complete without some details of the food, always a preoccupation with students. In the years after 1903, besides breakfast and lunch, tea, bread and butter were dispensed daily at 5.30pm. To fill the long gap overnight before breakfast was eaten at 8am, there was 'Pieces', that is, a tray of bread and jam left in the refectory to be consumed after prep at 7.30pm. By the 1920s, some of the regular dishes had warranted nicknames: shepherd's pie was known vulgarly as 'jakes pie', and boiled cod, served in a large dish, became 'Midgham whale'. There seems to have been frequent visiting of public houses in the afternoons by some of the older boys in the first couple of decades at Woolhampton, a practice apparently allowed by school rules. The White Bell, now gone, seems to have been an especially popular pub. Another frequent haunt was Warner's, the school bakers, at the bottom of Woolhampton Hill. Inevitably, the quality of the food served to the school was sometimes criticised, and during wartime, its quality suffered. By 1942, there was, for instance, an acute shortage of staff at Douai and in the surrounding area. The monks helped to bring in the harvest on neighbouring farms and the boys were forced for the first time to make their own beds and lay and clear the tables in the refectory. The sharing of the refectory by monks and boys until the great fire of 1943 led to all sorts of invidious comparisons. A complaint against the shared refectory was brought up at the Community's Visitation in 1941 since it was the source of some friction between headmaster [Father Ignatius Rice] and bursar [Father Leonard Wynne, bursar from 1919 until 1949]. The headmaster said that the boys' bacon went to the monks who got better food than the boys etc. etc. In a rather tortured piece of advice to try and keep the peace, the Visitor, Abbot Sigebert Trafford of Downside, stressed that a school's reputation fell or sank by the manner in which food was served: 'In the outside world the reputation of the School in this matter [of food] was not good. Good food, as in the case of Downside and Ampleforth, was a prime method of enhancing the reputation of a School'.

'Hog', a name for a first-class feast day, was an appellation which endured throughout the century, and for the first few years of 'hogs' at Woolhampton, the old Douai custom of a senior boy reading poetry at dinner was continued. This custom slowly disappeared

and was replaced by the captain of the school, later the headboy, on behalf of the school, wishing the abbot and Community a happy feast day. The school and staff assembled in the Haydock Hall, the headboy's speech, spiced with humour, recorded the exploits of the term. The abbot replied, encouraging the boys in their efforts, rather inaudibly in Abbot Sylvester Mooney's case, and then blessed the assembly. The ceremony concluded with the school singing the toast, 'Ad Multos Annos', which Douai held in common with the other English Catholic establishments once exiled in Europe, and which the new school song of 1913, 'There's a word [i.e. Douai] to send a heart thrill and to set our pulses beating', never succeeded in replacing. *Ad Multos Annos* had been sung poignantly by the Community and school at the last dinner taken at old Douai, 17 June 1903. The toast on Hogs ended with three cheers, the Community and school then lunched together, the grace originally being sung in Latin.

Over the century at Woolhampton, the school uniform changed considerably. The mortar boards which had been latterly introduced at old Douai in an attempt to heighten the college's academic pretensions had always been universally disliked, and were only worn by the junior forms who did not find it easy to protest. This headgear within a year of settling at Woolhampton had been replaced by a blue cap surmounted by the old arms of St Edmund's or a bowler hat or derby, which by the late 1920s was only worn on the journey and to and from school at the beginning and end of term, and stored in the linen room for the rest of the time. Eton collars, also adopted at old Douai, however, lingered on until the 1920s. For daily use, boys were provided with a 'morning suit', that is, a short black jacket and striped trousers, with first formers wearing Eton suits on Sundays, known as 'bum freezers'. In summer, an Oxford grey suit and a boater were the regular uniform. Uniform became looser and more casual, though, strangely, some traditions endured, such as the ban on junior boys putting their hands in their pockets. After 1945, a variety of grey suits was recognised uniform, with blazers worn in the summer. By the 1970s, there was almost no recognisable uniform except the school or house tie, and following complaints about scruffiness, the blazer was re-introduced. Once girls had entered the school in its last few years, further additions were made to the range of uniform dress.

## **j. Sports and Scouts**

Sport was always an important part of the curriculum at Woolhampton, where Father Andrew Curran was the first master in charge of games and athletics. Football League, played at old Douai, continued to be played from 1903 on a neighbouring field, near Cherry Orchard Cottage, Upper Woolhampton. This large field allowed four or five games to be played simultaneously, and resulted in 'a higher standard all round, and exercise and enjoyment for the many instead of for the few. Inclination to rough play, fostered perhaps by the narrow limits of the old Douai 'Bounds' has at last died a natural death', though in the early days, the playing of games was haphazard, for in 1905 we hear that there was much absenteeism, and play was halted at one point by complaints that players were encroaching onto a nearby public right of way. One of the best games of the 1905 season was 'Benedictines v. Seculars', won by the former. Shouting from the side was 'the only blot on a season [of 1905] which gave new life to the game'. Hockey, replacing the popular hockey on ice in winter at old Douai, and cricket, were played from 1905 in the Easter and summer terms respectively. By 1907, the official

football strip for the two school sides competing was a red and a green sash. In 1905 a horse was at last procured to mow and row the cricket field, replacing an afternoon's hard work for ten stalwart youths. In 1907, the Park, across the road from the school, was acquired from Woolhampton manor, thus increasing the area set aside for games, and soon, the Park had the 'black walk' established along its eastern edge, terminating in 'Mac's shed', whose name commemorated an early groundsman.

At old Douai, boys had never known any outside games' fixtures, and for the first few years at Woolhampton, matches were organised only *en famille*. In September 1918, rugby replaced association football as the principal sport in the school, the most important reason for the change being that rugby allowed for the possibility of outside fixtures, since of local schools, only Beaumont College and Leighton Park played soccer. Rugby fixtures thus increased to twelve by 1920. From 1921, Eton College appeared on the fixture, along with many others which remained familiar names until the last decade of the school's life. The first lessons in the new game of rugby were given by Mr. Keeton the head of Reading School and an old International. Rugby's hold on Douai sport was established principally by Father Columba Merrick, games-master in 1919. This adoption of rugby, together with the establishment of the Old Dowegians' Rugby Football Club in 1927, prompted the publication of *The Douai Rugger Record, 1918-29*, edited by Father Hugh Bowler, with a preface by Father Sylvester Mooney: 'When one realised that one could handle the oval-shaped ball and at the same time lustily grab one's opponent, it all seemed like a great emancipation'. After that time, rugby's fortunes fluctuated, for the fixture list contained many schools larger and stronger than Douai, but the sport reached its pinnacle of success in the late 1950s which saw some excellent First XV's, whose ability was ultimately recognised in the team, captained by M. J. Horgan, which won the Public Schools' Seven-aside Tournament in 1959. Cricket was firmly established by the end of the first decade at Woolhampton, with thirteen matches being played in 1919, and the game was soon to have its own memorial, the crenellated cricket pavilion in the Park, built in 1922 to honour the fifty three old boys killed in the First World War. Hockey was replaced in 1962 with soccer. Since there was no swimming pool until 1937, from 1903 the school swam in two bathing places on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The first was used from 1903 until 1929 and was located near Aldermaston Mill, and the second, from 1929 until 1936, was close to a bridge crossing the Kennet, near to those ponds in the vicinity of Aldermaston Station on which the school skated in winter.

Besides the various sports, the other main outside organised recreational pursuit in Douai School was the cadet corps which was later transformed into the boy scout troop. The Douai School Cadet Corps had been founded in 1915 in a wave of patriotism during the First World War. In November 1916, the Corps took part in a sham fight on Bucklebury Common, being on the side of Marlborough and Wellington Colleges against Eton and Bradfield Colleges. After 1918, the Corps continued drills and promoted rifle-shooting competitions for which latter a challenge cup was offered by Colonel Charles Walmesley in 1921. It was disbanded in 1922 and the officers resigning their commissions in July 1922 were the Captain, Father Leonard Wynne, the Lieutenant, Father Sylvester Mooney, and the Second Lieutenant, Father Clement Sherlock. The cadets helped to ensure the introduction of physical instruction and boxing into the school's curriculum, and the Duke of York's Camp at New Romney, which Douai boys attended for the first time in 1927, was the earliest camping experience members of the school had before the advent of the scouts. The Duke of

York's camp brought together boys from the public schools and industries 'to mix...and understand each other's ideas', and help to solve 'the problem of the relationship of employer and employee'. In the summer of 1929, the Scout Troop of Douai School was founded, largely on the initiative of Father Oswald Dorman, its pioneers 'not a little proud of the honour of being members of a fellowship that stands for all that is worthy and generous in human affairs'. The Douai scout troop was the inspiration of F. F. Corballis, the Chief Scout's Commissioner, who encouraged its establishment by holding a meeting with forty boys in the cricket pavilion. Father Oswald Dorman was then appointed scoutmaster, and the scout troop was run by a long line of monks over the ensuing years. The scouts took the school colours as their own and held an annual camp in Scotland or Europe. From the scouts derived, firstly, the small-bore rifle association which had its own shooting range in the wood at the end of the park, opened in February 1935 by Abbot Mooney who took the first shot, and, secondly, the sailing club, encouraged in particular by Father Leonard Vickers, which had its dinghies parked at Burghfield Sailing Club, and, finally, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. All three continued to flourish until the closure of the school in 1999, although the scouts had themselves disappeared without a whimper by 1982.

## **8. The Douai Society**

Over the century, the Douai Society, the old boys' association, which had been founded at old Douai in 1868 became less clerical and more lay, a trend highlighted in the organisation of the first ball, followed by 'the cabaret' which took place at the Piccadilly Hotel, London. The dance was missed by the abbot and bursar, both unused to the Douai Society running such events, and who had both conveniently come down with 'flu. Members of the Douai Society continued to be honoured guests at major events celebrated at Woolhampton throughout the century. The golden jubilee of the establishment at Woolhampton, which took place in coronation year, 1953, was celebrated jointly by the Community and members of the Society, who in 1954 presented Abbot Sylvester Mooney with a pectoral cross to commemorate his abbatial silver jubilee [1929-1954]. In 1968, the Douai Society celebrated its own centenary and Bishop Gerard Tickle was elected President for the year. At the centenary dinner, Judge Danny Brabin, in toasting the abbey and school, reminded the audience that the future looked problematical: there were 'strange psychiatric experiments' taking place in a Mexican monastery, and he recommended that lay-masters be given more responsibilities in running the school which, he felt, faced a far from settled future. It is doubtful whether the audience was aware of current psychoanalytical experiments being conducted by the Benedictines in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and even if the audience was, the Old Dowegians present could hardly imagine such therapies being conducted at dear old Douai. But he was right, even at this early date, to alert the Douai Society to the school's uncertain future. In reply, Abbot Sylvester Mooney reminded the assembly that 1968 was the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the refounding of the school at Douai in 1818.

The Douai Society, having given generously to the appeal for the new monastery in the 1960s, was to mark the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Benedict's birth in 1980 by commissioning the artist, David John, to carve a panel depicting the saint, which now adorns the entrance to the guesthouse. In the appeal to complete the abbey church which followed soon afterwards, the members of the Douai Society were again to be found among the principal benefactors. Allying itself with many of the objectives of the Douai

Society was a sister association known as ‘The Parents and Friends of Douai School’ [PAFODS] established in 1986, following discussions between staff and parents about a new school prospectus. In its brief life, PAFODS was able to organise a number of successful social events within the school and to provide funding for many useful items required by the school.

## **9. A Century at Woolhampton**

The celebrations in June 1953 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Douai in Woolhampton began with Parents’ Day for the school; three days later there followed a dinner hosted by the Douai Society, and over the following two days, the community re-elected Abbot Sylvester Mooney as abbot. No one seemed to remember that in 1978 there should have been a seventy-fifth anniversary, although it was commemorated in the publication of a guide book the following year, edited by Father Leo Arkwright. However, two years later, in 1980, Benedictines throughout the world celebrated the fifteenth centenary of the birth of St Benedict [480], and on 11 July, thirty four of the community attended the mass celebrated by Cardinal Basil Hume in Westminster Cathedral, at which Father Romuald Simpson organised the music, which included pieces by two Old Dowegians, Anthony Milner and Martin Hall, and which was followed by Latin Vespers in Westminster Abbey. Later that year, nearly five hundred parishioners from Douai parishes celebrated the centenary with Mass in the recently renovated abbey church.

Whilst the Community looks forward to celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of its foundation in Paris [1615] in 2015, and the bi-centenary of its translation to Douai [1818] in 2018, it looks back over the past century at Woolhampton in gratitude to all those who have supported it, and in remembrance of all those who have, in turn, been helped by the monks in the course of the past hundred years. It is striking that the Community, in its long history, has approached the turn of each century facing critical questions. In 1700, it had to cope with the aftermath of the 1688 Revolution which prevented a peaceful repatriation of the monks in England. In 1800, it was still feeling the effects of the French Revolution, when the monastery in Paris became a prison, and the Community was reduced to a handful of monks. In 1900, the storm clouds were gathering which would force the Community from its home in Douai to Woolhampton, and in 2000, with the closure of the school to which the monastery had been intimately linked for so long, the Community began the new millennium, looking to the future in the hope that, with God’s blessing, it would be allowed to continue its Benedictine life and its mission.