Saint Alban Roe
Intrepid Champion of the Faith

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and
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On 21st January 1642 Alban Roe, a priest and monk of the Order of Saint Benedict, was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, the penalty inflicted on those convicted of high treason. Born in Suffolk in 1583 and christened Bartholomew he had been a Protestant in childhood and in early adult life. He converted to Catholicism, was clothed as a Benedictine monk, taking the name Alban, and began his work as a priest on the English Mission during the reign of James I. He was captured and endured many years of imprisonment of varying degrees of severity. Ultimately he fell victim to the political and religious turmoil in England during the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Civil War. On the 25th October 1970 he was one of the “Forty Martyrs of England and Wales” canonised by Pope Paul VI. His remaining relics consist chiefly of blood-stained cloth.

To understand the life and death of Alban it is necessary to examine the factors which had shaped his contemporary political and religious environment. It is difficult for us living in a secular age to appreciate the importance of religious belief and practice to our ancestors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Henry VIII’s dispute and final break with Rome after 1533 left the nation as undeniably Christian but with great variations in opinion as to how to live a Christian life. To some, death was preferable to inability to practise one’s religion in a manner pleasing to God. The right path would lead to the joys of heaven, the wrong to risk eternal torment in hell. The separation, brought about in order to secure the Tudor dynasty, left large sections of the population with spiritual loyalty to the Pope. Others, also troublesome to those in authority, spurred on by the Reformation in Europe and ideas spread by the printing press, expounded extreme Protestant views which threatened the monarchy and the whole structure of government. There was little evidence of Christian charity and benevolence to those with differing opinions. The spirit of the age was one of persecution and animosity.

Although religious practice changed comparatively little during the reign of Henry VIII, the King replaced the Pope as Supreme Head of the English church. In the late 1530s, about nine hundred religious houses were dissolved in England. In the case of the Benedictines, this ended a presence of almost a thousand years. During the reigns of Henry’s three children the nature of religious observance swung widely; severe measures were taken against those who did not follow the current official line. The reign of Edward VI (1537-53) saw the introduction of increasingly Protestant practices under the guidance of Archbishop Cranmer. The seizure of Church property, begun under Henry VIII, continued. The real presence of God in the sacrament of the bread and the wine was denied and communion in both forms could be taken by the laity rather than just by the priests. After much discussion the Book of Common Prayer was produced in 1552, specifying the liturgy to be used in parish churches. Attendance or conducting a service at a place where this liturgy was not followed would lead to imprisonment.

Edward’s Catholic half-sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne after his death and set about undoing the work of Edward and Cranmer by implementing the self-conscious assertive Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation. On her accession in 1553 she issued a proclamation stating that she would not compel her subjects to follow her religion but all the religious legislation of Edward was repealed. Clerical celibacy was restored. Leading reformers such as Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer were imprisoned. In an attempt to ensure the continuation of the Catholic line, Mary married Philip of Spain in 1554. In that year the English church was returned to Roman jurisdiction and the Heresy Acts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were revived. In November 1556, sixteen Benedictine monks headed by Dr. Feckenham returned to Westminster Abbey. Their stay was short-lived.
Fearing the penalties specified by the Heresy Acts, many rich Protestants sought exile but those that remained fell victim to the so-called Marian Persecution, giving the Queen the nickname “Bloody Mary”. Bishops Latimer, Ridley and Archbishop Cranmer were burned at the stake as heretics. In all, about two hundred and eighty religious dissenters met the same fate. Mary’s failure to produce an heir led to the accession of her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth, in 1558 and then the oppressors became the oppressed.

Despite the urging of France to the contrary the Pope, Paul IV (1555–59), did not protest against Elizabeth’s claim to the throne. She lost little time in removing the country from papal control and ending Catholic religious practices. Through the Act of Supremacy in 1558, and her adoption of the title “Supreme Governor of this realm” Elizabeth substituted royal for papal authority in spiritual matters. The Act of Uniformity of the same year replaced the mass and other Roman exercises with a modified version of the Book of Common Prayer dating from the reign of Edward VI. The effect of the Act of Supremacy was that anyone who maintained papal authority would forfeit all goods and chattels in the case of the first offence. Reoffending would lead a person to face the law of Praemunire. This prohibited the assertion of any papal or foreign authority over that of the monarch, which could, after further offences, lead to charges of high treason and the banning of heirs from inheriting honours and offices. The Act of Uniformity was intended to force on the nation the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer. Any cleric who used any other form of service would lose property and be imprisoned. Those who refused to attend an Anglican service faced a fine of twelve pence on each occasion. Throughout Elizabeth’s reign the intensity of measures taken against priests and the Catholic Faithful varied according to the degree of threat which they were deemed to pose. Rumours circulated that the Pope was not entirely opposed to the Book of Common Prayer, and encouraged by this, to avoid fines, many Catholics reluctantly attended Anglican services, though often hearing mass in secret.

Elizabeth’s second parliament met in 1563. Ecclesiastical commissioners reported that the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity were being flouted and the result was the passing of “an Act for the assurance of the queen’s royal power.” This specified that an oath affirming the supremacy of the Queen had to be taken by all holders of significant positions and by all those who attended mass or who assisted in its celebration. Refusal to take the oath would lead to forfeiture of property and imprisonment. A repeat offence would lead to the offender being hanged, drawn and quartered as a traitor. In practice the Act was not implemented fully but it posed a powerful threat.

At a Convocation of the English Church in 1563, under the leadership of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion were accepted which set out the key features of the doctrine of the Church of England. They reflected some traditional Roman practice and avoided some of the more extreme Protestant ideas followed on the continent. The breach with Rome was made abundantly clear, The Pope was declared to have no power in England, the “Sacrifices of the Mass” were said to be fables; transubstantiation had no scriptural foundation; the Roman doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, the invocation of saints and the veneration of images and saints were described as foolish and vain inventions and “contrary to the Word of God.”

On the accession of Pope Pius V (1566 – 72) the papal attitude towards the Queen changed as it became obvious that there would be no voluntary return of England to Catholicism. The Pope made a strong
condemnation of the Book of Common Prayer and two English priests, Sanders and Harding, were empowered to give absolution to all those guilty of schism, that is promoting division within the Church. This was followed up by a papal bull authorising the absolution of those who had been guilty of heresy by conforming to the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity.

The Queen’s position was far from secure. There was a rival claimant to the throne, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, and in 1569, in her support, the Northern Rising occurred under the leadership of the Earls of Westmorland and Northumberland. This was put down with difficulty by Elizabeth’s forces. The papal response in 1570 was to issue a bull, “Regnans in Excelsis” excommunicating Elizabeth.

The Pope’s displeasure and his reaction to events in England may be seen in the following extracts from the Bull:-

“Elizabeth, the pretended queen of England…..having usurped the place of supreme head of the Church of England……has reduced this same kingdom to a miserable ruin. She has…….oppressed the followers of the Catholic faith, instituted false preachers and ministers of impiety, abolished the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, fasts, celibacy and Catholic ceremonies……She has dared to eject bishops, rectors of churches and other Catholic priests from their churches and benefices……She has forced the people to come to terms with her wicked laws, to abjure the authority and obedience of the pope of Rome. She has thrown Catholic prelates and parsons into prison where many have miserably ended their lives……Therefore we declare the aforesaid Elizabeth to be a heretic and her to have incurred the sentence of excommunication and to be cut off from the unity of the body of Christ.”

The Bull goes on to deny “the pretended queen” the right to her crown and to absolve all her peoples from any sworn oaths of fealty and obedience. Those that persisted in following her commands should also consider themselves excommunicated. To people who accepted the reality of eternal damnation this was a dreadful penalty. Politically it was practically an instruction to rebel.

Royal reaction was both predictable and necessary. Statutes were quickly passed making it high treason to affirm that the queen had no right to the crown or to declare her a heretic. Similarly it was high treason to seek to put into effect or publish any papal bull. To counter the efforts of the priests trained in Douai in trying to win back those who had agreed to attend the Anglican services, there was passed the Statute of Persuasion, (23 Eliz. C1) making it high treason for a priest to reconcile, and for a layman to be reconciled “from the religion now by the Queen’s authoritie established within her highness’s dominions to the Romish Religion.”
1585 saw the passing of the “Act against Jesuits, Seminary priests and other such like disobedient persons”. This made it high treason for any Jesuit or seminary priest to be in England and a felony for anyone to harbour or relieve them. It was under the terms of this act that most of the English martyrs were executed during and after Elizabeth’s reign, including Alban Roe.

Meanwhile the attitude of the English population towards Catholics and Catholicism was being greatly influenced by a highly significant book, “Actes and Monuments”, generally known as “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs”. The first English edition appeared in 1563, published by John Day, which ran to almost 1,800 pages. John Foxe covered the history of those who had died for their faith from the early Christian martyrs, through the medieval period, ending with graphic illustrated accounts of those who had fallen victim to Marian persecution. By 1596 it had grown in size and it had reached its fifth edition. Far from being an unbiased text, it was a work of anti-Catholic propaganda. Following a Convocation order in 1571, this tome was chained beside the Great Bible, authorised by Henry VIII, in cathedrals and many churches. Selected readings were made from the pulpit and treated almost as Scripture.

Protestant England faced its greatest challenge in the form of the Spanish Armada in 1588. In the event, the destruction of the invasion fleet boosted English national pride, strengthened Elizabeth’s support and led to Catholicism being associated with a lack of patriotism.

The strength of Catholicism varied considerably in different parts of the country. Excellent material on Catholicism in Alban’s home region of East Anglia is to be found in lectures given by Dr. Francis Young in March 2014. These are entitled “Surviving the Reformation. East Anglia’s Catholic Families.” He points out that the area had a long history of religious radicalism predating Henry VIII. The existence of the names of several Essex and Suffolk towns in Puritan New England shows the lasting effect of the East Anglian Puritan settlers from “The Pilgrim Fathers” onwards. The Catholics in East Anglia probably formed less than five percent of the total population and were not numerous enough to be troublesome. However, they did include locally influential members of the gentry. Many had rallied to the support of Princess Mary in her ride from Kenninghall to Framlington where she gathered the support needed to allow her to assume the throne after the death of Edward VI. The Catholic population clung to their Faith during the early years of Elizabeth. Their spiritual needs were partially met by the priests surviving from Mary’s reign. Some Catholics did not attend Anglican services, as required by law. In the year following the passing of the Act of Uniformity, 116 citizens of Suffolk were indicted as recusants. Between 1592 and 1610 the total was 899. Most Catholics would attend the parish church under protest, perhaps playing cards during the sermon. Records refer to shelters being constructed against the walls of parish churches in which Catholics would sit and therefore attend church without taking part in or hearing the service. The wealthy had other options; Sir Thomas Kyston the Younger of Hengrave Hall claimed to attend services in the approved form in his private chapel. Ironically some of the stone taken to build this Elizabethan hall came from Ixworth Priory, dissolved in 1536.

On the other hand Lancashire was a stronghold of the Old Faith. In 1574 the Lords of the Council wrote to stir up the Earl of Derby, who, as Lord-Lieutenant of Lancashire, was the principal lay Commissioner :- "Lancashire is the very sink of popery, where more unlawful acts have been committed and more unlawful persons holden secret masses than in any other part of the realm."

The challenge to royal power and the established religious order did not just come from the Lancashire Catholics. Manchester and Bolton were hotbeds of Puritanism. The textile trade brought the Puritans of these towns in touch with the London Puritans. By 1590, most of the clergy in these towns did not wear surplices and their congregations were encouraged to take the whole of Sunday as a day of rest. During Elizabeth’s reign they formed a radical group within the Anglican Church, producing religious pamphlets to spread their views. After the accession of James I (1603-1625), they tended to break away into non-conformist groups of the Presbyterian persuasion. “The Book of Sports”, formally called “The Declaration of
Sports”, was an order issued by King James I for use in Lancashire to resolve a conflict on the subject of Sunday recreations. This had arisen between the Puritans and the gentry, many of whom were Roman Catholics. Permission was given for dancing, archery, leaping and vaulting, and for “having of May games, Whitsun ales and morris dances, and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used, so as the same may be had in due and convenient time without impediment or neglect of divine service, and that women shall have leave to carry rushes to church for the decorating of it.” On the other hand, “bear and bull-baiting, interludes and bowling” were not to be permitted on Sunday.

In 1618 the King had ordered this Declaration to be read by all clergy from the pulpit but the opposition from amongst the Puritans was so great that the command was withdrawn.

During the reign of James I (1603-1625) religious divisions became even more pronounced. Extreme Protestants sought religious freedom abroad, as in the case of the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, and the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 showed the continued threat of assassination and Catholic rebellion. All Elizabeth’s measures were confirmed and a new Oath of Allegiance was given to all persons over the age of eighteen. Recusants, those refusing to attend services in the parish church, faced heavy fines and were prohibited from civil and military employment.

The “Declaration of Sports” was reissued by Charles I on 18th October 1633, as “The King's Majesty's declaration to his subjects concerning lawful sports to be used”. This declaration has the same main text as the 1617 and 1618 declarations of King James, with the primary differences an additional introduction and conclusion adding wakes and ales (countryside festivals) to the list of sanctioned recreations. Charles ordered that any minister who refused to read it would be deprived of his position. As the Puritans gained power in Parliament in the lead-up to the English Civil War, hostility to the Book of Sports grew. Attempts to enforce the declaration came to an end with the fall of Archbishop Laud in 1640, and Parliament ordered the book publicly burned in 1643, two years before Laud was executed. By this time, however, Alban Roe had been tried, found guilty of treason and executed.
The information which survives on the life of Alban is scanty in comparison to that available on his two Benedictine brothers, Ambrose Barlow and John Roberts, canonised with him in 1970. The earliest biography is provided by Bishop Richard Challoner in his major work of 1741 “Memoirs of Missionary Priests and other Catholics that have suffered death in England on Religious Accounts”. This tome was a Catholic response to the highly influential Protestant publication, “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs”. Richard Challoner was at the English College at Douai between 1705 and 1730, ultimately attaining the position of Vice President. He explains that his summary of the saint’s life is “from a manuscript relation, kept by the English Benedictines at Douay, and other memoirs in my hands.”

Challoner’s account opens as follows:-

“Bartholomew Roe, who was in religion called father Alban, was born in Suffolk, of a gentleman’s family, and was from his infancy brought up in the protestant religion. After having gone through his grammar school in his own country, he was sent to the university of Cambridge, and there for some time applied himself with good success to higher learning; till going to visit some friends at St. Albans, as providence would have it, he was told of one David, an inhabitant of that town, lately convicted and cast into prison for a popish recusant, and was desirous to go and talk with the prisoner, making no question that he could convince him of the errors and absurdities of the Romish tenets; for he had a sharp and ready wit, and a tongue well hung, and withal, was full of conceit of his own religion, and with false idea of catholic doctrine. To the prison therefore he went, and entered into discourse with the prisoner, upon the subject of his religion, who, though a mechanic, yet was not ill read in controversy, so that he was able to maintain his cause against all the oppositions of our young university man, and even pushed him so hard upon several articles, that Mr. Roe soon perceived he had taken a tartar, and knew not which way to turn himself. In conclusion, he who came to the attack with so much confidence of victory, left the field with confusion, beginning now to stagger and diffide in the cause.”

Later writers provide a little more detail, in particular the tireless scholar Dom Bede Camm in “Forgotten Shrines” (1910) and also in his chapter entitled “The Blessed Alban Roe” in “Nine Martyr Monks” (1931). It is believed that Bartholomew was probably the son of Bartholomew Roe, a gentleman, of Bury St. Edmunds, a town which itself was the home of a great Benedictine Abbey. Bede Camm was unable to identify the college which Bartholomew attended at Cambridge, blaming the carelessness of the Registrar’s record keeping for the period 1589-1604. A search made by the present authors has proved to be equally fruitless. He may have had a brother James who was also to become a Benedictine monk, taking the name Father Maurus. The prison which Bartholomew visited was the old gatehouse of St. Alban’s Abbey. Ironically, he was himself to be imprisoned there for a short time. The “grammar school” referred to may have been King Edward VI Grammar School, Bury St. Edmunds, established in about 1550. It served a wide area of Suffolk. The School’s website provides interesting information on the school rules at its foundation and therefore about the type of education Bartholomew would have received.

School rules for the boys in 1550.

- Those who cannot read and write shall be excluded. They must learn elsewhere the arts of reading and writing.
• No boy shall come to school with unkempt hair, unwashed hands or dirty shoes or boots, torn or untidy clothes. Any boy misbehaving himself either in Church or any other public place shall be flogged.
• They shall speak Latin in school. Truants, idlers and dullards shall be expelled by the High Master after a year's trial. Every boy shall have at hand, ink, paper, knife (used to sharpen a quill pen), pens and books. When they have need to write the boys shall use their knees as a table.
• The whole of the scholars (100) shall be assembled in the morning at 6 o'clock and at 1 o'clock. They shall go home to dinner at eleven and to supper at five. There shall be five classes, under two masters in two rooms, the older boys looking after classes when the masters were not teaching them. School shall finish at 3pm on Saturdays and half holydays.

Rules were also specified for the parents of the boys and for the masters, the most interesting of which states:
• They shall abstain from dicing, gaming and tippling. They must not keep their family on the premises. Women like deadly plagues shall be kept at a distance. The masters shall not be excessively harsh or severe or weakly prone to indulgence.

Perhaps it should be borne in mind that rules tend to indicate the sort of behaviour which was likely to be prevalent rather than preventing such activity.

Challoner explains that following the traumatic meeting with David, Bartholomew was “very uneasy in mind upon the score of religion…..till, by reading and conferring with catholic priests, he was thoroughly convinced of his errors and determined to embrace the ancient faith.” He went over to Flanders and sought to enter the English College at Douai.

In order to consolidate his control over the Low Countries, a university had been established at Douai in 1559 by Phillip II of Spain. It attracted several leading Catholic scholars who had fled from Oxford and Cambridge to escape oppression during the reign of Elizabeth I. William Allen became Regius Professor of Divinity and it was he who had the idea of creating a seminary linked to the university for the training of English Catholics for the English Mission. A house was leased in Douai in 1568 and a College founded in 1569. The Catholic historian, Philip Hughes, writes:

“It was the practical genius of William Allen, that the greatest achievement of early Elizabethan Catholicism came, the founding of the college at Douay. For here, under God, was the principal means of preserving the Catholic Church in England for the next two hundred years. Superlatives come very easily, even to practiced observers of human endeavour as history records it, but it is scarcely possible to exaggerate what the Catholic Church owes to the work of this Lancashire priest.”

Allen strove to supply a competent working clergy. He wrote:

“Our students, intended for the English harvest, are not required to excel or be great proficient in theological science... but they must abound in zeal for God’s house, charity and thirst for souls.”

By the end of the period of persecution in England, about a hundred and sixty College alumnae had been martyred whilst on “the Mission”.

After the optimism of its foundation the early years of the College were troubled. Political unrest led to it moving to Rheims in 1578, only returning to Douai in 1593. The Presidency of the College was assumed by Dr Thomas Worthington in 1599 whose leadership was to prove as ineffective as that of his immediate predecessor, Dr Richard Barrett. Dr Worthington’s Presidency began with a pontifical visitation of the College, as a result of which new constitutions were drawn up in Rome. It was enacted that not more than sixty persons were to be supported, that no student be admitted unless fitted to begin rhetoric, and that all students be required to take an oath to receive sacred orders in due season. The Cardinal Protector also agreed to Worthington’s proposal that a Jesuit be appointed ordinary confessor to the students. This was greatly resented by the secular clergy. The clergy saw the influence of the Jesuits in every action of the
President, and feared that control of the College would be handed over to the Society of Jesus. Confidence was further shaken by Worthington's dismissal of the existing professors, and their replacement by young men who explained their author instead of lecturing. Moreover, complaints were made that priests were hurried to the Mission without being adequately prepared or trained. A jaundiced account of the English College is given by the English government spy, Lewis Owen in “The Running Register”, published in 1626.

Given the state of the College perhaps it is of little wonder that Bartholomew’s time as a student was not to pass smoothly. His first attempt to join the College proved to be unsuccessful. An entry in the Third Douay Diary states:-

“On the 13th day of November (1607) there came to us Bartholomew Roe of Norfolk, a young man who brought commendatory letters from Mr. Thomas Doilans, but on account of the number of scholars in the College he could not be admitted, so after a few days he took lodgings in the town.”

It is strange that his county of origin is said to be Norfolk but subsequently this changes to Suffolk. Reference is made to him under various aliases. The delay in entering College was only brief. The Diary records that on February 21st 1608 he matriculated at the University of Douai with twenty two others, including the later martyr and saint Ambrose Barlow. On that occasion he was called James Rolfe of Suffolk. The following day “James Rosse alias Roe” was admitted to the College with another student who had lived for some time in the town. They were to study rhetoric, perhaps too effectively.
On October 15th, 1609 he made his profession of faith under the name Bartholomew Rous. Unusually he took an oath to do nothing deliberately to disturb the peace of the College or the observance of the discipline of the house. Also present was the later martyr Edmund Arrowsmith, who, like Bartholomew and Ambrose, was to be canonised in 1970.

His next appearance in the Diary relates to charges of insubordination which resulted in his expulsion. The entry for 16th December 1610 states:-

“Having taken counsel and carefully examined the conduct of Mr. Bartholomew Roe (who is here called James Rolfe) we, the undersigned, consider that the said Bartholomew is not at all fitted for the purposes of this College on account of his contempt for the discipline and for his Superiors and of his misleading certain youths living in the College, and also of the great danger of his still leading others astray. And therefore we adjudge that he must be dismissed from the College.”

Reference was made to his discouraging students from doing penance, advising others not to submit to punishment, arguing against withdrawal of food as a punishment, and discouraging students from revealing the offences of fellow students. The entry continues:-

“On another occasion, when a Superior by the President’s orders had removed from his bed-place in the dormitory certain private cupboards, he answered him with contumacious words, saying: ‘there is more trouble with a few fools than with all the wise; if you pull down I will put up, if you destroy I will rebuild.’ On
account, therefore of these things and the like, we, the undersigned, adjudg e that the said Bartholomew Roe must be dismissed from the College.

Signed JOHN NORTON, Vice President, S.T.D.
WILLIAM SINGLETON. S.T.D.
STEPHEN BARNES. Procurator
EDWARD WILLIAMSON. S.T.B. “

The President dismissed him from College in January 1611 but this was not the end of the matter as revealed by subsequent entries in the Diary.

“Therefore the President advised him to go quietly into England or some other place for a time, until he became more fit for our mode of life, but this he absolutely refused to do..... And on the following day he brought up in a tumultuous way eight other students of Theology, who on his behalf demanded that the cause why he was considered unfit to remain at the College should be told them.”

Roe demanded a testimony to his character; this was refused. He secretly encouraged about twenty of his fellow students to give him a testimonial, and this he took with him to Paris, where he gave it to a priest. Then, according to the Diary, on returning to Douai he obtained from the students another like it which he took with him to England.

The testimonial written by the students, as later recalled by one of them, was:-

“We certify by the testimony of all the undersigned to all who shall read these letters that the bearer, Mr. Alban Roe, sometime alumnus of the English College at Douay, as long as he dwelt in this College never did anything (as far as we could gather in any way) that made him unfit to be a good member of this community, but that he was always of good behaviour, so that we have felt ourselves bound in conscience by the dictates of justice and charity to give this testimony in his favour. And this the more because those who dismissed him from College, publicly testified that no bishop could or ought to refuse to ordain him, if he were presented for ordination, but should rather admit him to holy orders since he was a fit subject to undertake that office. Yet they judge that he ought to be dismissed as unfit for our institute. As then no particular cause for his dismissal was given, and as those who expelled him from the College said that they were not bound to give any (though this seemed necessary both for his own satisfaction and for the information of all in the future) we gathered that he was free from all reproach of evil life or reputation. And this we ask all good and pious people to believe with us about him, that in this matter, at least, we may restrain and put a stop to the insults of malicious men who are suspicious and prone to believe everything bad.”

When the production of this document was discovered it created uproar within College. The students would have been asked to consider the error of their ways; in modern parlance they would have been “leaned on”. All the signatories, except three, revoked the document by signing a subsequent statement:-

“I am sorry for having signed a testimonial of this sort, and therefore I revoke my signature, and I submit myself to the judgement of my Superiors for fuller satisfaction.”

Clearly Bartholomew was an awkward and uncooperative student who caused difficulties for his Superiors. Bede Camm speculates that there may have been other factors at work, both in Douai and in the wider Catholic community. Disagreement was growing about the best tactics to use in order to foster the revival of Catholicism in England and some criticised the key and somewhat aggressive role played by the Jesuits in this process. In Douai itself, a potential rival religious community had been created which was to become the Benedictine Abbey of St. Gregory. The Benedictines felt that they needed a base for training postulants nearer England than Spain or Italy. Douai was attractive, being the seat of a fine university and a secular seminary. Probably in 1606, a room was taken in the Anchin College at Douai as a dormitory for the Benedictines. John Roberts was involved in discussions which, by the end of 1606, led to a house being hired as a temporary monastery. The lower room was formed into a chapel and a community was created of about a dozen monks. Support was provided from the other Benedictine houses in Flanders. In 1608 the Vatican confirmed the establishment of a house at Douai and John Roberts was active in securing financial support
from Spain and became its first Prior. Dr. Worthington did all he could to wreck the infant community, or at least to drive it out of Douai. Bartholomew may well have been suspected of encouraging students to seek entry to the Benedictine Order. Another pontifical visitation took place in October and November 1612. This discovered a truly deplorable condition of affairs. There was disunion among the superiors, studies disorganized, discipline relaxed, the buildings were out of repair and finances crippled by a heavy debt. Complaints were raised by the students about the inefficiency of their professors, the influence of the Jesuit confessor, and the interference of the Society of Jesus in the government of the college. As a result Doctor Worthington was summoned to Rome in May 1613 by the Cardinal Protector and relieved of his post.

Douai College. Eighteenth century

After leaving Douai, Bartholomew went first to Paris, then back to Douai, then perhaps to England for a short time. He then travelled to Lorraine to become a postulant at the new Benedictine monastery of St Laurence at Dieulouard, where the community was struggling for survival.
His arrival was probably early in 1613. There he was “clothed” and took the name of Brother Alban of St. Edmund. He gave satisfaction during his noviciate and was professed with three others in October 1614 and ordained, probably in 1615. From Dieulouard, in the same year, 1615, he was sent to Paris as a member of a group of six monks to found the community of St. Edmund under the patronage of Princess Marie de Lorraine, Abbess of Chelles. Finally, according to Challoner, “being judged by his superiors thoroughly qualified by a long practice of all religious virtues for the apostolic functions, he was sent upon the English Mission..... Here he took great pains in preaching, conferring with protestants, &c, and gained many souls to Christ and his church; his zeal and charity making him proof against all personal dangers, where he thought he could be serviceable to the soul of his neighbour. After some time he fell into the hands of the pursuivants, and was committed to the new prison, which was then in Maiden-lane, and for a long time endured great hardships there; till by the mediation of count Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador, he was taken out of prison, and with many other priests, sent into banishment.”

He appears to have been in prison for at least five years, covering the period 1618-1623. Count Gondomar was highly influential in the court of King James I. His success in securing the release of these priests should be seen in the context of attempts to improve relations between England and Spain with the “Spanish Match”. This was the unsuccessful scheme to arrange a marriage between Charles, the son of King James I, and the Infanta of Spain, Maria Anna.

On his exile from England, Alban went to Douai and remained with his fellow Benedictines in the Abbey of St. Gregory, staying there, for a period of about four months before venturing again to England. Far from living the life of a typical Benedictine, Alban was an isolated missionary faced with the constant threat of capture, imprisonment and death. Quoting Challoner:- “after he had laboured for about two years more with his usual zeal, he fell a second time into the hands of the adversaries of his faith.”

Ironically on this occasion he was imprisoned in St. Albans gaol, where he had attempted to show David the errors of his faith. His imprisonment was very strict and he suffered from the cold and hunger. Fortunately after a period of about two months, after intervention by his friends, he was transferred to the Fleet prison in London where he was to remain for most of the period until his execution. Unlike at St. Albans, he was not a “close prisoner”. He was given the “liberty of the prison”, meaning that he could receive visitors and go out and continue to minister as a priest provided he gave his word to return to prison at night. He was ill periodically, suffering from “violent fits of the stone” which necessitated being “cut”. He translated some religious texts, including “The Treatise on Prayer” by John Fisher. His behaviour was not universally well-regarded. Within the Westminster Archives there is a document listing “scandalosi”, priests who were objectionable because they had sworn the Oath of Allegiance, contrary to papal command, or because of their conduct. The entry for Alban states:-

“Albanus Roe Monachus Benedictinus male audit ob frequentes compotationes, ludum et similia.”

He was accused of being too fond of drinking with his companions and playing cards and such like.

The extent to which stringent anti-Catholic legislation was enforced depended largely on the national and international picture. The Thirty Years war (1618 – 1648) in Europe brought Protestant and Catholic nations into conflict. Major trouble brewed in England during the reign of Charles I. The King had married a French
Catholic, Henrietta Maria, and the policies of his high-church Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, infuriated the Puritan element in England. Scotland rose in revolt between 1638 and 1640 over attempts to impose the English prayer-book. Combined with religious issues were arguments about the divine-right of kings as compared with powers of parliament. The fear that any House of Commons summoned would be puritan-dominated led to Charles ruling without this body after 1629 and resorting to desperate measures of fund raising such as Ship Money.

Major problems in Ireland and Scotland forced his summoning of a parliament and, after 1640, the struggle for power between King and Parliament intensified. In Ireland the age-old antagonism between Catholics and Protestants led to widespread slaughter. 1640 was not a good time for Catholics since they were doubly hated for loyalty to the Pope and fidelity to the King. Bede Camm quotes from Charles Butler’s “Memorials of English Catholics”, Vol II:

“The political manoeuvres which persuaded the multitude to believe that the sovereign was a favourer of popery, and which left him, as he too readily supposed, no means of repelling the charge, except that of causing the laws against them to be executed with due vigour”. John Hampden introduced to the Commons a tailor of Cripplegate who pretended that he was aware of a plot to assassinate a hundred and eighty leading members of parliament at the rate of £10 for every lord and 40s for every commoner so murdered. This “lashed the House into a frenzy”.

In response, on March 7th 1641 a royal decree ordered all priests to leave the kingdom within one calendar month or suffer the penalties of high treason.

These events were observed with interest and concern by the ambassadors of the Catholic powers in Europe. Comment is made in an account, the English title of which is “Act of his Highness touching the relics of England.” published in Paris in 1650. “His Highness” was the Spanish Ambassador, Louis, by the grace of God, Duke of Gueldres. This document was published by Richard Simpson in “The Rambler” in 1857. (“The Rambler” was a Catholic periodical, published between 1848 and 1862). The document opens:-

“Whereas the English Catholics, who had been allowed some little repose for a few years, were, after the opening of the parliament in 1640, oppressed with a new and most bitter persecution….. besides the resumption of the laws made by Queen Elizabeth against priests and Catholics (which had been a short time dormant), new and most savage acts were passed against the servants of God, forbidding a priest to minister to Catholics in England under pain of death…..During this persecution, England has beheld her most constant champions, her bravest heroes, enduring the most cruel torments for Christ and the Catholic faith……”

In Lancashire Ambrose Barlow, a priest and Benedictine monk, was apprehended on Easter Sunday, 1641. He had been present with Alban Roe at Douai during the Matriculation ceremony of 1608. His capture was due to the actions of a “neighbouring minister”. The parson, wearing his surplice, marched at the head of a mob of four hundred, armed with clubs and swords to the house of a Catholic family where Ambrose had just finished celebrating mass with a congregation of about a hundred. He was tried at Lancaster, found guilty of high treason and executed on 10th September 1641.

Alban too was a victim of the new political circumstances; ominously he was transferred from the Fleet Prison to Newgate towards the end of 1641. The main source of information on the final months of his life is the contemporary account of le Sieur de Marsys, a member of the French Embassy in London at that time. He wrote “Histoire de la Persecution des Catholiques en Angleterre.” The relevant chapter in this tome is in Book 3 entitled “La mort glorieuse de plusieurs prêtres anglais, seculiers et religieux”. The book was published in 1646 and dedicated to “The Serene Queen of Great Britain, Henrietta Maria”, whose doomed husband was losing a religiously-driven civil war. A transcription of this chapter was made by Bede Camm. Another source is a document from the Institute of Mary, commonly called the Convent of the Englischen Fräulein at Nymphenburg, Bavaria. It was written in London and dated 1st February, 1642. A copy may be found in Pollen “Acts of English Martyrs”, (1891).
On January 19th, 1642 Alban Roe was brought to the bar of the Old Bailey and charged with offending against “An act against Jesuits, seminary priests, and such other like disobedient persons, also known as Jesuits, etc. (27 Eliz.1, c. 2). He was accused of high treason by being a priest and having seduced the people. The chief witness against him was a fallen Catholic. Initially he refused to make a plea to the charge since, in the words of Challoner, “he boggled at being tried by his country, that is by the twelve ignorant jurymen, as being unwilling that they should be concerned in the shedding of his innocent blood.” The presiding judge, the identity of whom is unknown, warned him of the penalty imposed on those who would not plead. He would be subjected to “peine forte et dure”, that is violent and severe pain by being placed under planks loaded with weights and crushed until he did make a plea. He was sent back to prison to reconsider. After taking the advice of learned priests he did enter a plea of “Not Guilty”. Challoner gives a brief outline of the events which followed:-

“The jury went aside, and quickly returned, declaring him guilty of the indictment, viz. of high treason, on account of his priestly character and functions, and the judge pronounced sentence upon him according to the usual form, which he heard with a serene and cheerful countenance; and then making a low reverence, returned thanks to the judge, and to the whole bench for the favour, which he esteemed very great, and which he had greatly desired; and how little, said he, is this, which I am to suffer for Christ, in comparison with that far more bitter death which he suffered for me! He then acknowledged himself to be a priest but withal loudly condemned those laws by which the priests were put to death; and made a proffer, to maintain by disputation in open court, against any opponent whatsoever, the catholic faith, which he had for thirty years had laboured to propagate and was now about to seal with his blood. This the judges would not hear of, but sent him back to prison wondering at his constancy and intrepidity.”
On his return to Newgate he preached a sermon to the Catholic prisoners and others who had gone there to see him. He urged them to keep the Faith and accept persecution with joy as coming from the hand of God. On the 21st of January he said his last Mass and gave a blessing to the assembled Catholics. To be executed at the same time as Alban was Thomas Reynolds, alias Greene, a secular priest of more than eighty years of age. Reynolds considered himself to be weak and timid, fearing the death he was to endure. He found great comfort in having Alban, an intrepid “champion of the Faith”, with him in his final hours.

De Marsys describes the journey to Tyburn. Alban and Thomas Reynolds were tied on a hurdle, drawn by four carthorses. The route was extremely muddy so that their hands, faces and clothes were spattered with dirt. As they made their way to the Tyburn Tree there were cries of support, and no doubt some of derision, from the assembled crowds. De Marsys wrote that at Tyburn, Alban got up first and then helped his aged companion and they kissed the ropes that were hanging from the gallows. Three felons were to die with them, one of whom had been converted to Catholicism the previous day in prison. According to custom, those condemned were allowed a final speech. Thomas Reynolds was the first to do so, speaking for about half an hour. The Nymphenburg document gives a dispassionate account of what followed:-

“Immediately after him followed Dom Alban Roe, of the Order of St. Benedict, a man of dauntless soul, and brave in all things. When he also, according to custom, began to speak on the scaffold, he declared that enough had already been said by his brother, pointing to Mr. Reynolds with his finger, so that it would be unnecessary to repeat it; but that if he had as many lives as he had committed sins during his whole life, he would willingly lay them all down in so good a cause. When he began to speak a little more sharply of the laws against priests made under Queen Elizabeth, and called them tyrannical and heretical, he was commanded by the Sheriff to desist from this manner of speech. He then asked the Sheriff whether his life would be granted him if he embraced the Protestant religion, and was answered that his life would without doubt be spared and there was nothing they wished more. The man of God then called upon God and men to bear witness that he died for his God and his religion only.”
De Marsys provides more information. Alban spoke with a Captain Godfrey and another gentleman who could not be identified because he had covered his face. He gave to the Captain the little black skull cap which he always wore. It had not been known that the Captain was a Catholic and when this episode came to the attention of the leaders of Parliament a reward was offered for his capture. Alban also saw amongst the crowd one of the jailers from the Fleet prison where he had spent so many years. He said to him “My friend, I find thou art a prophet: thou hast told me often that I should be hanged; and truly my unworthiness was such, I could not believe it, but I see that thou art a prophet.” The priests recited together the Miserere and gave each other absolution. The cart was then drawn away and they were allowed to hang until they were fully dead. They were then cut down, and, according to de Marsys, “the hangman opened those loving and burning breasts, as if to give air to that furnace of charity which consumed their hearts.”

The Nymphenburg document explains that the Catholics piously vied with each other in taking away relics of the Martyrs. Many dipped handkerchiefs in the dismembered bodies: others carefully collected the blood-stained straw from off the ground; while some snatched from the flames the intestines, which, as usual, had been thrown into the cauldron, and carried them home. At the death of these two martyrs were present some Protestant noblemen, who could scarcely refrain from tears, and openly proclaimed that by the example of these two holy martyrs many persons would without doubt be converted to the Catholic faith.

De Marsys also comments on the impact on the Protestant spectators:- “Yea a Protestant said ‘It would be long enough before any of our religion will die as these men do for their faith they will sooner turn to a hundred religions’….. many Protestants wept, even the Sheriff himself. A Protestant Lord, to my knowledge, said that he was unwilling that they should be put to death, and that it be the cause that two thousand more papists would arise for these two priests…”

When the body of Alban was stripped for quartering, they found in his clothes a piece of paper which may have contained the speech he had planned to make. The Sheriff took control of this without revealing its contents and sent it to parliament.
Challoner records that after their death “The Catholics then present, many in number, seemed even beside themselves with fervour and zeal; and into them that were absent, their glorious example hath put life and alacrity.”

The completion of the account comes from an eye-witness, Father Bede of the Blessed Sacrament, otherwise Fr John Hiccocks, a Carmelite, who describes the scene in letters to a Spanish lady of Toledo. These letters were in the possession of Bede Camm when he was writing “Nine Martyr Monks”. Father Hiccocks wrote “This week the Assizes have been held here in which they condemned some twenty Catholics to the confiscation of their goods and perpetual imprisonment. Also they condemned a Benedictine Father to be quartered, who was taken when he was with me, and he had been my confessor and most dear friend. And another secular priest besides, condemned some twelve years ago. This morning they quartered them, and for the new year I send you some of the blood of both...”

After a brief description of their last hours Father Hiccocks account goes on:-

“Their martyrdom took place on Friday, and their quarters and heads were kept in the prison to be put in boiling water before placing them on the gates of the city, at the top of very high poles. The jailors gained not a little by allowing the faithful to visit the relics there, during these four or five days, when the faithful for the satisfying of their devotion, by giving money, obtained some parts of those holy members, or some of the prisoners cut pieces off to sell them to the Catholics ...... in the end they left neither hands nor feet, and thus the dismembered quarters were placed over the gates of the city last Tuesday during the night.”

Spanish Ambassadors showed great zeal in collecting relics of martyrs, especially Count Egmont, later Duke of Gueldres, to whom reference has been made above. The “Act of his Highness touching the relics of England.” states:-

“And as at that time our own business detained us in England, we were, by a sovereign grace of Almighty God, an eye-witness of the incredible constancy of divers martyrs.... We saw eleven suffer in London .....(including) one Benedictine Bartholomew Rho.....We, in order that the memory of such noble persons might be for ever preserved among the faithful, and desirous of having, so far as it lay in our power, some relics of their bodies, by the aid, the devotion, and the diligence of our servants, did procure certain relics, which on our departure out of England into France at the end of the year 1645, we carried with us, and have preserved to this day in our treasury.... We have judged it necessary to publish abroad this testimony, lest devouring oblivion should ever erase the name of these venerable men, and the glory of these most renowned martyrs. We did recover the relics of the said martyrs here underwritten, namely....of Bartholomew Roe, of the order of Saint Benedict, his Breviary, a thumb, a piece of burnt lung, a piece of kidney burned to a cinder, the interula with which he was martyred and a towel dipped in his blood.”

These relics were snatched from the flames or purchased from the executioners post mortem. This account was signed and sealed by a number of witnesses. The fate of the relics gathered by the Ambassador in Lille was unknown to Bede Camm and remains so to the present authors.

The Appendix in the chapter on “Blessed Alban Roe” contained in “Nine Martyr Monks” shows the Mortuary Bill of B. Alban Roe. This would have been sent to the various Benedictine monasteries in Europe to inform the communities of the death of one of their fellow monks. It starts:-

BENEDICTUS SIT GLORIOSUS
REX MARTYRUM
JESUS CHRISTUS
R.P.F. ALBANUS ROE

and ends:-
As early as 1642, the first steps were taken towards canonisation of the English martyrs but the process was suspended, partly because of the opposition likely to be faced in the wider community and partly because of the difficulties in obtaining the necessary evidence. The “Unam Sanctam Catholicam” website sets out the initial problems faced. To be accepted as a “martyr” it has to be established beyond any doubt that a person was directly put to death, and that this death was suffered on account of some point of the Faith. Meeting the criteria can be surprisingly demanding in situations where no documentary evidence was kept of the martyrdom, or when much time has elapsed.

Various attempts were made in 1866, 1871, 1874, and 1880 to get around this problem but, by 1881, almost a quarter of the English martyrs were still classed as “dilati”, or unrecognised, and even those cases which were not seemed stalled. Then, in 1880, the Promotor Fidei (Devil's Advocate) in the causes of the English martyrs was made aware of some extraordinary evidence of cult by the Rector of the English College, Rome. Mgr. Henry O'Callaghan called attention to the existence in the College of a series of frescoes depicting the sufferings of the English martyrs painted between 1580 and 1582 by the Italian artist Nicholas Ciciniani.

The frescoes depict traditional English martyrs such as St. Dunstan and St. Thomas Becket, but they also include depictions of the Reformation-era martyrs such as More, Fisher and many others. The titles "saint" and "blessed" appear on many of the depictions. Furthermore, contemporary letters were discovered describing the frescoes as being made at the request of Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585). This was extremely strong evidence of proof of cult, going back almost to the times of the martyrdoms, and showed papal approval. The Promotor Fidei recommended proceeding with the causes and the Sacred Congregation agreed. On December 9th 1886, Leo XIII signed the commission for the introduction of the cause of two hundred and sixty one martyrs, officially establishing them as venerabiles. Sixty three of the martyrs were beatified in 1886, the best known being Thomas More and John Fisher.
The French Revolution brought some sympathy to its Catholic victims. In England, Catholic places of worship were tolerated and Catholics were no longer required to swear the Oath of Loyalty. It was only in 1829 however, that most of the remaining penalties on Catholics were removed in the Roman Catholic Relief Act.

The erection of the Oxford’s Martyrs’ Memorial, outside Balliol College, in 1843 shows that some still thought it important to emphasise the conflict with Rome. This memorial has at its base an inscription which says:-

“To the Glory of God, and in grateful commemoration of His servants, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Prelates of the Church of England, who near this spot yielded their bodies to be burned, bearing witness to the sacred truths which they had affirmed and maintained against the errors of the Church of Rome, and rejoicing that to them it was given not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake.”

Anti-Catholic sentiment did increase with the influx of Irish migrants after the Potato Famine of the 1840s. In 1850, Catholic dioceses were re-established in Britain. The 1871 Universities Tests Act opened up the Universities to students of all religions. It would seem, therefore that all that Alban Roe and his fellow martyrs had desired had eventually been achieved. The struggle had, however, taken almost three centuries.

By 1910 Dom Bede Camm in “Forgotten Shrines” felt able to write:-

“Englishmen of all creeds have grown more sympathetic of late, as they have come to know something of the true story of that long persecution which made their Catholic fellow countrymen outlaws in their own land, and turned their most treasured religious convictions into crime against the State. We are beginning to understand the extraordinary loyalty of these Recusants, so faithful to the sovereign who persecuted them just because they were so true to the religion of their fathers.”

Further investigations Into the Cause were begun in 1923 leading to one hundred and thirty six beatifications of victims of religious persecution. Alban Roe, having been venerated by a decree of martyrdom on 8th December 1929, was actually beatified, together with other martyrs, by Pope Pius XI on December 15th 1929. The painting reproduced on the cover belongs to the Parish of Dieulouard in the Diocese of Nancy. It is likely that it was painted shortly after the beatification in 1929. A photographic copy was made for the Abbey of Ampleforth in 2009. The main features of the life of Alban are written at the foot of the painting. Both the Abbey of Dieulouard and the Tyburn Tree are accurately depicted. The tankard of foaming beer in the
bottom left corner relates to “la bière anglaise” brewed at Dieulouard which was said to sparkle like champagne. The revenue from this helped the Abbey maintain its pastoral work.

John Fisher and Thomas More were canonised in 1935. The Hierarchy of England and Wales then promoted the canonisation of a limited group of the martyrs. After patient work, the list of forty martyrs was presented to the Holy See on December 1st, 1960. The selection was based on achieving a spread of social status, religious rank, geographical location and the extent of popular devotion. The list included the Blessed Alban Roe. Sufficient data were collected about them to induce the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal William Godfrey, to send a description of twenty four seemingly miraculous cases to the Sacred Congregation. Two special cases were selected with one in particular standing out. This was the cure of a young mother affected with a malignant tumour in the left scapula; a cure which the Medical Council had judged gradual, perfect, constant and unaccountable on the natural plane. Pope Paul VI confirmed that this cure had been brought about by God at the intercession of the Forty Blessed Martyrs of England and Wales and on the strength of this one miracle he gave permission for the whole group to be recognised as saints. On May 18th 1970, the Holy Father in the Consistory asked the opinion of Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and Abbots about the canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. There was a unanimous answer in favour of canonisation.

In November 1969 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey, had expressed his apprehension that this canonisation might rekindle animosity harmful to the ecumenical movement which had become of major concern to the Christian churches, especially after the visit of Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, to Pope John XXIII in 1960, the first such meeting for almost five hundred years. In a Memorandum published in “The Tablet” of 29th November, 1969 Archbishop Ramsey explained “I cannot help thinking that the proposed canonisation will in the historical circumstances of England encourage on both sides the kind of emotions of which we are anxious to be rid.”

This anxiety, although shared by some Anglicans and Catholics, was not widespread. Right from the first announcement of the Re-opening of the Cause of the 40 Martyrs, decreed by Pope John XXIII in 1961, the Hierarchy of England and Wales let it be clearly understood that nothing was further from the intentions of the Bishops than to stir up bad feelings and quarrels of the past.

Most of the information concerning the surviving relics of Saint Alban comes from the works of Bede Camm. In his book “Forgotten Shrines”, published in 1910, he wrote:-

“There is at Downside a large piece of coarse sacking thickly clotted with blood, which is stated to have been dipped in the blood of the Venerable Alban Roe, O.S.B. It has been suggested that it may possibly form part of the "apron of the torturer," which was among the relics of this martyr secured by the Duke, as it is of precisely the material which one would expect such a garment to be made of.”

Also he was aware that “the relics of these martyrs preserved to this day at Lanherne, Colwich, and Erdington, consist precisely of pieces of linen soaked in blood, and little bits of straw.”

The manner in which Bede Camm learned of the location of many relics and, indeed gained possession of some, is fascinating. “The Tablet” of December 8th 1900 contains an interesting letter headed:-

RELICS OF THE ENGLISH MARTYRS.

Sir,- I am engaged in compiling a catalogue of the relics of the English Martyrs which are still preserved among us, and should be very grateful if those of your readers who possess such relics, or know where some may be found, would kindly communicate with me. I should be grateful for a minute description of the relic, its size, appearance, &c., and, if possible, for a full size sketch or drawing. A rough tracing would be sufficient in most cases....

Under the term “English Martyrs” I include, of course, the Venerable as well as the Blessed.

I am, your, &c.,

D. BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

Erdington Abbey, Birmingham
December 1, 1900, Feast of the English Martyrs
In 1901 he summarised the information gained in a manuscript entitled “Descriptive Catalogue of the Relics of the English Martyrs”. This is now at Downside Abbey to where Camm transferred his stability in 1913. The page dealing with this Downside relic is shown below.

In his 1931 work “Nine Martyr Monks” he again referred to the coarse sacking at Downside and explains that it came into the possession of Count Egmont, the Imperial Ambassador. It reached Downside from the old imperial abbey of Lambspring.
The major addition to his list of relics are pieces of linen dipped in the blood of Saint Alban in the care of Tyburn Convent. Bede Camm had some of these in his possession. He wrote:-

“They were sent, duly authenticated, by Père Robert de Vantelet, Capuchin, one of the Chaplains of Queen Henrietta Maria, to the Benedictine Abbey (of nuns) of S. Menoux in the diocese of Moulins. They were given to Tyburn Convent by the Superior of the Grand Séminaire of Moulins, into whose possession they had come; the authentication attached to this particular relic is written on a small piece of paper by Père Robert. It is now venerated in the Chapel of Benet House Cambridge. It reads:-

Hoc Linteamen sanguine intinctum sudarium erat intinctum sanguine Beatorum Martyrum Bartholmaei Rooz monachi benedictini et Thomae Reynolds sacerdotum pariter coronatorum die 21 Januarii 1642 stilo veteri quod ego attestor
Fr Robertus de Vantelet Cap. Indi.”

Bede Camm was not merely a scholar and historian; he was actively involved in the maintenance and support of religious houses. In 1904, he published “Lives of the English Martyrs”. Whilst working on this book he came to know Mother Mary of St. Peter who had led her monastic community from Paris because of anti-clerical legislation being enacted in France. The nuns built a new monastery at Tyburn, where many Catholic martyrs had been executed in sixteenth and seventeenth century England. In 1909, financial problems had led the nuns to decide to sell the property. Bede Camm approached Mother St. Peter and offered financial support, using a legacy received from his father. He went on to help develop the site, erecting stained glass windows and constructing a larger shrine. This close link probably explains how some of the pieces of blood-soaked linen from Tyburn were given to Bede Camm.
During the Great War he served as a military chaplain, initially in Stobhill Hospital Glasgow and then from December 1915 until 1919 in Port Said, Egypt. In 1919 Bede Camm became Master of Benet House, Cambridge and remained such until 1931. Benet House was a small outpost of the Downside Benedictine community created to give members of the Order access to the University. It merged with St. Edmund’s College after 1992. The present authors have not been able to locate the authentication referred to by Bede Camm as being in Benet’s House.

Some relics remain at Erdington but we were informed in the course of previous researches that identification of these is virtually impossible. The Carmel of Lanherne in the Diocese of Plymouth was the oldest Carmel in England, founded by the Antwerp Carmel in 1619. It amassed an extensive collection of the relics of English martyrs including a piece of linen soaked in the blood of Alban Roe. The authentication certificate created by the hand of the Bishop of Plymouth covers the relic of Saint Alban Roe. In 2001, Lanherne merged with the Carmel of St. Helens and the relics were translated to the new location. In 2015, the impending closure of the St. Helens Carmel led to these relics being transferred once more, this time to Downside Abbey.
Gustianus,
Dei et
Sedis
Apostolicae
Gratia,
Episcopus Plymuthensis,
SS. D. N. Praetulus Domesticus ac Pontificis Solo Assistent, &c.

Hoc litteris insigniissimo testamento, Nos ad supplementum Dei gloriam, et Sancctorum eorum
adsumamus Domino partibus ejus, tribusque susceptris aegrescentem, si postea et aliorum
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ex auctoritate sanctae ecclesiae Romanae, quae in hac scriptura littera latina aepice
ex auctoritate sanctae ecclesiae Romanae, quae in hac scriptura littera latina aepice
ex auctoritate sanctae ecclesiae Romanae, quae in hac scriptura littera latina aepice
ex auctoritate sanctae ecclesiae Romanae, quae in hac scriptura littera latina aepice

Ex antiquo monumento aedifici, quae in hoc scriptura littera latina aepice
Ex antiquo monumento aedifici, quae in hoc scriptura littera latina aepice
Ex antiquo monumento aedifici, quae in hoc scriptura littera latina aepice
Ex antiquo monumento aedifici, quae in hoc scriptura littera latina aepice

Crystallo munifici, finiendo serio rubri coloru et sudis aequilibri, et nostro sigillo impresso super hac
Crystallo munifici, finiendo serio rubri coloru et sudis aequilibri, et nostro sigillo impresso super hac
Crystallo munifici, finiendo serio rubri coloru et sudis aequilibri, et nostro sigillo impresso super hac
Crystallo munifici, finiendo serio rubri coloru et sudis aequilibri, et nostro sigillo impresso super hac

Datum Plymutha loc. die 16 mensis Augusti aedifici, quae in hoc
Datum Plymutha loc. die 16 mensis Augusti aedifici, quae in hoc
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Contact with St. Mary’s Abbey, Colwich provided interesting information. Since 1664 this Benedictine community of nuns had been in Paris in the Monastery of Our Lady of Good Hope. The nuns were imprisoned at time of French Revolution but succeeded in leaving for England in 1794, eventually arriving at Colwich in 1836. The Archivist, Sister Benedict Rowell, has confirmed that the Abbey does possess a small relic contained in a glass tube. She explained:

“In the tube is a paper in the hand of a nun of our community in Paris before the French Revolution:

Fa: Allban Row Martir

From this we can tell that it is one of a collection of English Martyr relics brought by our nuns when they left Paris. When the revolutionaries were searching the house, the nuns sewed them up in pincushions. Once in England they were all kept in a bag, which nuns used to hold when they had operations without anaesthetic. The sealed tube is of later date. There is correspondence with Fr Ethelbert Horne of Downside about the process of sealing them. The glass tube is about 9 mm long and the relic is only a few millimetres.”

Since the beginning of Christianity, believers have seen relics as a way of coming closer to the saints and therefore to God. Saint Jerome wrote in “Ad Riparium”, I, P.L.,XXII, 907:

“We do not worship, we do not adore but we do venerate the relics of the martyrs in order the better to adore Him whose martyrs they are”.

The Council of Trent (1563), in its Twenty-fifth Session, defended invoking the prayers of the saints, and venerating their relics and burial places:

“The holy bodies of holy martyrs, and of others now living with Christ, which bodies were the living members of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Ghost, and which are by Him to be raised unto eternal life, and to be glorified, are to be venerated by the faithful; through which (bodies) many benefits are bestowed by God on men.....Those that teach that the places dedicated to the memories of the saints are visited in vain are wholly to be condemned.....The bishops shall carefully teach this.....If any one shall teach, or entertain sentiments, contrary to these decrees; let him be anathema. If any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the Holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished.....Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust; nor the celebration of the saints, and the visitation of relics be by any perverted into revellings and drunkenness; as if festivals are celebrated to the honour of the saints by luxury and wantonness. .....In fine, let so great care and diligence be used herein by bishops, as that there be nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God.”

A recent statement of the Church’s attitude to relics may be seen in an article in the “Catholic Herald” of June 23rd, 2011, in connection with an exhibition of relics and reliquaries at the British Museum. The Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, now Cardinal, a contemporary at the Venerable English College in Rome of one of the present authors, was reported as saying:-

“It’s perfectly clear that relics are a very important part of the expression of religious faith as well as of cultural importance in the way that people cling to a souvenir from a person they’ve loved or a place that they have been to. And what that conveys is the connecting of this moment with the treasured moment of the past. And if that connection is made through an object which, maybe, forensically won’t stand up to the test, that is of secondary importance to the spiritual and emotive power that the object can contain, and does contain.

I think that’s where the setting of the relic is as eloquent as the relic itself. If you look at a lot of these reliquaries you do not actually see
the relic. The relic is, as it were, the end of an inner journey. So what they’re looking for is the viewer to really enter their own soul to understand how they enter into the value of the treasure of the relic that is before them.

So it’s a spiritual dialogue that takes place between this object and the person themself. That is why they’re called “Treasures of Heaven”, because it is through the spiritual that our hearts are raised to heaven.”

In 1792 the monks of St. Lawrence, Dieulouard were expelled. In 1802, Fr. Anselm Bolton handed to them Ampleforth Lodge as a new monastery. In the modern Ampleforth Abbey complex is to be found Alban Roe house, the chapel of which is dedicated to St. Alban, a former member of the Dieulouard community.

Alban Roe was put to death as a traitor. His execution can only be understood in the context of the history, politics and culture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries which made Catholics different and dangerous. To the Catholic Church, he and scores like him, were martyrs; dying for the faith of ages rather than accept the “heresy” which is Anglicanism. According to Bede Camm “If it wasn’t for the sacrifice and witness of these men and women the Catholic faith in this country would have been extinguished.” The reduced emphasis on religious divisions today can only be explained within a similar broad context. Some would see the martyrs and their relics as a hindrance to this process of reconciliation, others as a reminder that religious principles are not to be discarded easily.
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