Sermons, Sodalities, and Saints: the Role of Religious Houses for the English Expatriate Community (ca. 1660-1720)

The Catholic landowner Nicholas Blundell (1669–1737) of Little Crosby in Lancashire left detailed records of two extensive stays in the Southern Netherlands in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Blundell and his wife fled from England in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion in 1715, and stayed in the Southern Netherlands for two years. They returned to the Continent in the early 1720s to bring their daughters to their schools at the English Poor Clares. During both journeys, the Blundells did not remain in one place, but structured their itinerary around the towns where English Catholic religious houses were located. There they heard sermons preached by English clergy, visited the Jesuit sodality chapels, dined in the confessors’ houses, and had long conversations with their fellow countrymen. While

1 This is not the paper I originally read at the conference, as that already has been published in the meantime (‘Catholic Nuns and English Identities. English Protestant travellers on the English convents in the Low Countries, 1660-1730’, Recusant History 30 (2011), 441-459.). I am very grateful to the editors for permitting me to contribute a very different essay to this collection. I would also like to express my gratitude to Alexandra Walsham, Caroline Bowden, Tom Tölle, David Adams, and the anonymous reader of this journal, who all offered valuable suggestions and comments on earlier versions.

2 This essay is concerned with what will be called ‘the Southern Netherlands’. This terminology is chosen to give due regard to the geographical spread of the English Catholic networks. The English foundations and their networks crossed political boundaries on the Continent, uniting houses in the Prince bishopric of Liège, the Spanish Netherlands, and towns that from the 1670s were incorporated in the kingdom of France. Since this English network functioned irrespective of state borders, the term ‘Southern Netherlands’ rather than ‘Spanish Netherlands’ is opted for. The first allows us to see these regions as a geographical unit, not a political country, and, therefore, to be as flexible as the English themselves were with the borders between the Spanish Netherlands, France, and the Prince bishopric of Liège.
they also visited local churches, the Blundells appear to have celebrated the main
feast days among their compatriots in the English foundations.\(^3\) The close contact
they had with their compatriots within the houses was complemented by a network of
interactions with them through their own movements across the Low Countries and
through their frequent letter writing. These contacts did not cease after the Blundells
crossed the Channel again, and when they were home in their own estate in
Lancashire, they retained close epistolary contact with their kin and contacts in the
houses on the Continent.

Nicholas Blundell’s note keeping has produced a layman’s record of his
interaction with the English religious on the Continent in a way unparalleled in other
English Catholic families. However, complementing Blundell’s diary with archival
material from the English religious houses shows that, while the source itself was
exceptional, his relationship with the English clergy and religious abroad was not. As
this paper will argue, the spiritual provision offered by English religious houses on
the Continent was characterised precisely by its extensive geographical ambit. Rather
than being confined to isolated communities, the interaction between the religious
and their compatriots abroad took the shape of networks spanning the Southern
Netherlands and the Channel.

These networks linked male and female religious, and members of different
orders. In order to do justice to the full extent of these informal networks, this essay
embraces both male and female institutions of all orders. While the male religious
houses still await a successor to Peter Guilday’s study,\(^4\) historiography on the English
female religious is developing new avenues of enquiry. Scholars such as Claire Walker
and Caroline Bowden have analysed the English convents not only from an internal
institutional perspective, but also with the aim of understanding their relations to the
wider world. Far from being strictly enclosed as envisaged by the Council of Trent,
English nuns played an active part in the early modern world. Through their
extensive patronage networks, fuelled by prayers, correspondence and hospitality,
the nuns were in a position to play a significant role in politics and society.\(^5\) In

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\(^3\) N. Blundell, *The great diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire*, ed. by J.J.
Bagley (s.l., 1970), II, 161-206, III, 106-112. The editor J.J. Bagley has included maps of Nicholas

Colleges and Convents in the Catholic Low Countries, 1558-1795* (London, 1914).

\(^5\) C. Bowden, ‘Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as
Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth Century’, *English Studies* 92 (2011), 483-495; C.
Bowden, ‘The Abbess and Mrs. Brown: Lady Mary Knatchbull and royalist politics in Flanders in...
comparison with the male religious, who often fulfilled functions as priests, advisors or travel tutors for their compatriots, their field of action was limited. Nonetheless, each on their own terms, the nuns and their male counterparts were not separated from the world but were actively involved in it. Looking beyond the walls of their houses is, then, a fruitful exercise.

From these studies on the orders come glimpses of the English laity established on the Continent, since the religious communities relied to a large extent on their support, in terms of finance, logistics and recruitment. This essay discusses their relationship from an opposite perspective: how their interaction shaped the religious lives of the English laity abroad. The majority of English establishments in the Southern Netherlands were in the hands of religious orders, but as recent research has started to explore, these houses could be as much a focal point of early modern Catholics’ devotion as parish churches were. Indeed, work on the re-Catholicisation programme in lands that had previously been Protestant has noted the particular significance of the religious orders. They were in a position to provide for the needs of the Catholic population at a time when the parish structure was not yet finalised. Their members were also sought after by the bishops to aid in the process of creating the diocesan hierarchies. In the absence of an English parish structure in the Southern Netherlands, the religious houses might offer an alternative in the devotional lives of expatriates.


7 Johnson, Magistrates, Madonnas, and Miracles, 119-153; Pollmann, Catholic Identity, 143-153; M. Craciun and E. Fulton (eds.), Communities of Devotion: Religious Orders and Society in East Central Europe, 1450-1800 (Farnham, 2011); P. Stolarski, Friars on the Frontier: Catholic Renewal and the Dominican Order in Southeastern Poland, 1594-1648 (Farnham, 2010).
Examining the role of institutionalised religious provision for lay migrants and travellers offers a means of comparison with Protestant exiles, as religious institutions form the backbone of research on these migrants. The archival basis for both confessions is, however, very different in nature. The records of religious orders on which the following is mainly based show a focus very dissimilar from Protestant source material.

In scholarship on Calvinist and Lutheran refugees, exiles, and migrants, the sources produced by the ‘exile churches’ offer a distinct entrée into the migrants’ lives. Protestant refugees were driven to Protestant societies, but very often they espoused a different vision of Protestantism, which encouraged the immigrants to organise a separate liturgical life in their own churches. In particular Calvinist expatriates could function independently in this regard, as Calvinist ecclesiology created fully autonomous churches, which did not require a global church organization like the Roman Catholic Church, or the territorial lordship of the Lutherans. Calvinist ecclesiology was largely born in the context of exile, and its structure was influenced by this. It had as its main component the independent localised congregations, which could function separately from their environment.

Exile churches, therefore, provided a strong focal point for the expatriate experience of migrants. While the migrants themselves increasingly integrated and assimilated, the institutions served as gate-keepers of a separate group in terms of confessional identity. This has resulted in detailed source material covering the migrants’ religious lives, as mapped in large serial sources of charity lists, conflict management records, baptismal, funeral and marriage registers. The survival of these records has

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resulted in our understanding of the Calvinist exiles as insular groupings. But to what extent did this reflect the reality of their lives abroad, and how far has the survival of these sources distorted our interpretation? An exploration of Catholic material might offer some nuances.

Calvinist organisation in separate congregations is in stark contrast with Catholic ecclesiology, characterised by its tight hierarchy. The various levels were dependent on the ones above to grant them legitimacy, with ultimate authority residing in Rome. Moreover, the Catholic Church understood its liturgy to be universally the same. Expatriate Catholics could, therefore, not establish independent churches as Calvinists did. Nor was there any need to organise a separate liturgical life, since the Latin and universally uniform liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church enabled migratory Catholics to attend Mass anywhere in Europe. While this situation encouraged the English to engage more closely with the local Catholics,\textsuperscript{11} it also prevented them from creating the distinct expatriate groups that Protestant migrants formed, and, therefore, made them less visible in the sources.\textsuperscript{12} The institutions they did establish outside their home countries were not erected to provide for the laity’s devotional life abroad. They were religious and clerical establishments, focused on life within the walls of the convent or college, and therefore their archival sources were primarily produced in the process of the houses’ internal organization. When the outside world does intrude in the records, this was often in connection with the English community at home. After all, beside the spiritual perfection of the religious, the raison d’être of the Catholic foundations was to foster devoted Catholics who were to cross the Channel again, either as priests or as staunchly Catholic future fathers and mothers. As a result, the records produced in these institutions bear witness to involvement in a much wider community than solely that of the town where the religious house was located.

Reading the religious records against the grain-in search of information which was not the main purpose in compiling these institutional sources- and complementing them with accounts from family archives


\textsuperscript{12} As is for instance noted in: É. Ó Ciosáin, 'Regrouping in Exile: Irish Communities in Western France in the Seventeenth Century', in: R. Armstrong and T. Ó hAnnrcháin (eds.), \textit{Community in Early Modern Ireland} (Dublin, 2006), 133-153.
does, nonetheless, offer insight in how the interactions between lay and religious worked, and how these helped the English Catholic community to preserve cohesion while geographically and ecclesiologically inside the universal Catholic Church. Central in this are the English Catholics’ informal networks. An institution was not the only means for the formation of a community, nor was belonging to a group strictly geographically confined. Studies of early modern communities have encouraged us not to think of ‘community’ solely as a physically locatable unit. Communities were constructed and defined by people who perceived of themselves as such, and gave expression to their belonging not solely in the locality, but also through abstract ideas of unity and exchanges over long distances. Informal networks played a crucial part in maintaining communities, and their role was all the more pronounced in the case of minority confessions. As Mark Greengrass has argued in the case of minority churches in a confessionally different country, informal networks are a key to understanding the preservation of minority groups. In an echo of sociological studies on twentieth-century communication networks, he has christened the interactions a ‘sociabilité à distance’, since they were an ‘exceptional means of sustaining dispersed communities and giving them a sense of common purpose’. The written word played a crucial role in giving shape to and maintaining these communities. On both sides of the confessional divide, the experience of being a proscribed religious minority, and the inability to instruct the faithful publically and formally, compelled Christians to resort to written instruction. Born out of necessity, the written interactions gave cohesion to a scattered community. A similar development can be discerned for expatriate Catholics dispersed over the Continent.

The following examines three typically Counter-Reformation encounters between clergy and laity: sermons in the vernacular, sodalities, and veneration of the

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16 This cohesion through written communication was not solely restricted to minority churches. The studies of Luke Clossey and Markus Friedrich have mapped similar developments in the global interactions of the Society of Jesus: L. Clossey, Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions (Cambridge, 2008); M. Friedrich, Der lange Arm Roms?: Globale Verwaltung und Kommunikation im Jesuitenorden 1540-1773 (Frankfurt/New York, 2011).
saints. For each of these, it will be shown how the universal Catholic institutions were adapted to an expatriate context. Apart from offering provision for expatriates near the religious houses, they had a wider geographical outreach through the circulation of texts, letters and relics. Though these exchanges were not unique to the English Catholic community, it will be suggested that they gained more urgency in maintaining their internal cohesion within a universal Catholic hierarchy. Through mapping the paper, people and objects that passed between the English houses in the Southern Netherlands, this essay will draw attention not so much to the ideas they contain but to the interaction they represent. The exchanges were not solely carriers of information, but also ‘material bearers of social connection’, to borrow a phrase from Gary Schneider.17

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1 Sermons

The first case to be considered in which the interaction between laity and clergy was adapted to the dispersion of the Catholic community is preaching in the vernacular. Preaching has been accorded great importance in the study of the Catholic Reformation initiative, as it constituted the principal means whereby the clergy could instruct their flock.18

Thus, while the Catholic Church celebrated mass in Latin throughout the world, thereby ensuring Catholics abroad could attend services anywhere as if they were at home, the religious houses provided sermons in English. These were not solely for the benefit of their members, but also for lay countrymen and women who were in the vicinity. This started early on in the history of the English presence in the Southern Netherlands. Less than a decade after the foundation of the secular community in Douai, English living in the town flocked to the college to listen to sermons. This practice was celebrated by Gregory Martin in a letter to Edmund Campion, informing the latter that ‘there is one thing new, and an admirable novelty it is. Every Saturday and vigil of a Saint’s day at one o’clock, a sermon or rather

exhortation is delivered in the refectory, to which all our country people come from their lodgings in the town.\textsuperscript{19} This practice was continued over the centuries, and was shared by other institutions as well. Nicholas Blundell, for instance, noted in his diary on 3 April 1716 that he had ‘heard Pat Clark hold forth at the Daimes’ - the English Benedictine convent in Ghent.\textsuperscript{20} In the autumn of the same year, he regretted that his illness prevented him from attending a sermon in Dunkirk.\textsuperscript{21} Perhaps the clearest instance of the distinction between the universal Latin liturgy and the vernacular sermon is to be found in the chronicles of the English Augustinian canonesses in Louvain. When these noted the celebration of special feast days, or clothing ceremonies, they indicated that the local archpriest ‘sang the mass & performed the office’, but that their English father confessor was responsible for the sermon.\textsuperscript{22}

The religious houses regarded preaching in the vernacular as an important service, since hearing the faith explained in one’s own native tongue was crucial for its accurate understanding. Thus, in France, the English Benedictines had obtained privileges to support the laity in English, because of ‘the needs of the English, Scottish and Irish Catholics within our kingdom who do not understand French, to be assisted in their doctrine, instructions and exhortations’\textsuperscript{23} Likewise, in Antwerp, the bishops Gaspar Nemius and Ambrosius Capello both indicated this as their motivation for allowing English sermons to be preached in their bishopric in the 1650s.\textsuperscript{24}

Apart from their instructive function, the sermons were also a source of comfort. When numerous countrymen flocked to their walls during the Popish Plot (1678-1682), the English houses in the Low Countries attempted to offer the refugees spiritual guidance. Thus the Jesuit annual letters of 1679 reported that once on the Continent, English Catholics sought ‘edification and comfort’ in the Jesuit houses, and gathered for public sermons.\textsuperscript{25} John Warner, then

\textsuperscript{19} Quoted in: B. Ward, History of St. Edmund’s College, Old Hall (London, 1893), 55.
\textsuperscript{20} Blundell, Diurnal, II, 165.
\textsuperscript{21} Blundell, Diurnall, II, 184.
\textsuperscript{22} Woolhampton, Douai Abbey, St Monica’s Louwain, C 19: Little Chronicle vol 5. 1652-1680, 143, 158-159, 165.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘par la consideration de la necessité qu’ont les Catholiques Anglois, Escossois & Hibernois, estans en nostre Royaume qui n’en scacent l’idiome, d’estre assistez de leur doctrine, instructions & exhortations’ (Bath, Downside Abbey, Birt Papers, Box 3: 1679-1720, A 90: Lettres d’establissement des Benedictins Anglois, à Paris.)
\textsuperscript{24} Antwerp, Felixarchief, KK 44: Gaspar Nemius, 6e bisschop van Antwerpen, 1635-1652; Antwerp, Felixarchief, KK 46: Ambrosius Capello, 7e bisschop van Antwerpen, 1654-1676.
\textsuperscript{25} ‘in isidem vivebant domibus aedificatione & solatis...Templum nostrum summe cum piate magna aliorum aedificationum frequentarunt...’ (Brussels, Rijksarchief Anderlecht, Archives Jésuitiques Gallo-Belgique (hereafter RAASJ), Box 31: Annuae Anni 1679.)
Jesuit provincial, passed on to Archbishop de Berghe the request of the English in Ghent not to take their preacher away from them, as 'his sermons are a comfort, and a solace in exile'. In his letter, Warner further asked permission for Thomas Thompson to be allowed to preach in English for the new arrivals in Brussels. He recommended the Jesuit to the archbishop, informing him of his glowing reputation: 'he has acquired fame by preaching in London in private places, during Lent, on Sundays, and feast days.'

Warner thus put high store on Thompson’s preaching talents, but the role of sermons in the English expatriate community was not confined to extempore performances. It was complemented by the circulation of manuscript sermons. In recent years, the act of preaching has received close scrutiny. Historians have assessed how the spoken sermon was a moment of interaction between preacher and flock, and how printed sermons were often adaptations for wider public circulation, and not exact records of the sermon preached. However, in the case of communities denied access to the pulpits, written sermons were not solely additions to, but frequently also substitutes for the authors’ live performance. For instance, Catholics in the Dutch Republic and Christians in remote regions of the American colonies often relied on printed sermons, as did Catholics in countries suffering from a shortage of priests. Thus far, no clear evidence for the reading of printed sermons among the English abroad has been uncovered. Manuscript sermons, on the other hand, do feature in the sources. These were not solely notes taken by the preacher for his own benefit, or jottings by his hearers, but constituted an autonomous aspect of early modern sermons. These manuscripts were shared between different towns and orders. This circulation is perhaps the clearest demonstration of the importance of

26 ‘quod eius conciones us solatio essent, & in exilium Levamen’ (Mechelen, Aartsbisschoppelijk archief, Aartsbisschop de Berghe, nr 386 XVII, 10. I am very grateful to Tom Bervoets for providing me with a picture of this document.)
27 ‘humillime petens, dignetur permittere, ut P. Thomas Tomsonus conciones Anglice habeat Bruxellis....magnum sibi nomen iam olim acquisivit, & cum Londini, in Locis privilegiatis, per integram quadragesimam et Diebus dominicis, atque Festis’ (Mechelen, Aartsbisschoppelijk archief, Aartsbisschop de Berghe, nr 386 XVII 10.)
written interaction in the dispersed situation of the English, since these manuscripts were a written counterpart of words spoken in person.

The exchanges are, for instance, illustrated in the correspondence of Philip Brebion (1630-1703). Brebion fulfilled administrative tasks for the various English Jesuit houses on the Continent.30 In 1678, he preached in Antwerp about the Popish Plot martyrs, and gave his sermon wider resonance by sending a transcript of it to the English Benedictine, Augustine Howard in Douai.31 Likewise, John Morphey, writing from Bruges, beseeched Louis Sabran, then rector of St Omer, to send him, if not a sermon by himself, then at least some advice on

the text he was working on.32 Sabran also repeatedly received requests from Lucy Herbert, abbess of Bruges, begging for products of his pen.33 In neither of these cases did Sabran go to the towns in person. Though the sermons mentioned in Sabran’s letter book have not been preserved, the Bruges convent does hold a 700-page collection of sermons which brings together sermons preached by Sabran, and one sermon of John Grisel.34 For most of these sermons it is unclear where the preacher gave a ‘live performance’ of the texts. Only one sermon,

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delivered on the occasion of a clothing ceremony in the Carmelite convent in Lierre, is geographically located. The inclusion of a sermon from the house of a different religious order, and from the other side of the Southern Netherlands bears witness to the circulation of sermons among the English. The fact that the sermons were uniformly copied out in a single volume suggests that they were more than a fleeting extempore event. The book, moreover, contains some notes in a different hand

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31 Bath, Downside Abbey, Birt Papers, A88: Philip Brebion to Augustine Howard, 8 September 1679.
34 Bruges, English Convent, Db 45.a 128: Manuscript Book of Sermons.
explaining difficult passages, indicating that the manuscript was amended and expanded upon after its initial composition.\textsuperscript{35}

Thus in the context of a dispersed minority community, manuscript sermons acquired further significance, for they not only documented an act of preaching, but, through their wider circulation, they themselves were tokens of exchange and contact. Moreover, by its very nature, scribal publication was more intimate than printed publication, providing for a more exclusive circle.\textsuperscript{36} In contrast with the large numbers of printed sermons which were a constituent part of the public sphere,\textsuperscript{37} the unique manuscript sermons were intended for a small circle. In that way, the exchange of manuscript sermons served to foster a shared set of ideas and values, in the absence of extensive face-to-face contact.\textsuperscript{38} It is, therefore, noteworthy that exchanges concerned moments of particular importance for the community. In a celebration of their Catholic identity, Lucy Herbert requested written sermons from Sabran on the main feast days, such as Palm Sunday and Good Friday. However, more specifically English moments dominate the sermon book in the Bruges convent, for the nuns have preserved texts on Saint Thomas of Canterbury, the conversion of Saint Augustine, and a funeral sermon for James II (died in 1701). Thus the manuscript brings together texts to celebrate a national saint, the coming of Christianity to England, and the death of the only Catholic English king since the breach with Rome. Brebion’s sermon, moreover, elevated the community’s victims to the status of martyrs. Their death in suffering for a righteous cause offered comfort

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\textsuperscript{35} Bruges, English Convent, Db 45.a 128: Manuscript Book of Sermons, 333, 516-517. Other books of sermons have been preserved: Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque Royale, 515: Richard F. Sermons; Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque Royale, 5145-46: Johannes Clare S. I. Sermons.


\textsuperscript{38} While these manuscript sermons circulated within the Southern Netherlands, many more texts produced on the continent crossed the Channel. Their circulation connected the expatriate with the stay-at-home English Catholics. For instance, Heather Wolfe has charted the Benedictine nun Dame Barbara Constable’s (1617-1684) agency in the dissemination of Augustine Baker’s work. (H. Wolfe, ‘Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor, and Closet Missionary’, in: R. Corthell et al. (eds.), \textit{Catholic Culture in Early Modern England} (Notre Dame, 2007), 158-188.) For other discussions of manuscript texts circulating in the Southern Netherlands and across the North Sea, see the work on the Blundell family by Geoff Baker and Margaret Sena: G. Baker, \textit{Reading and politics in early modern England. The mental world of a seventeenth-century Catholic gentleman} (Manchester, 2010), 52-53; M. Sena, ‘William Blundell and the networks of Catholic dissent in post-Reformation England’, in: P. Withington and A. Shepard (eds.), \textit{Communities in early modern England: networks, place, rhetoric} (Manchester, 2000), 63-68.
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and hope during a time of crisis. Sharing these moments through manuscript circulation fostered a closer community despite their geographical scattering across England and the Continent.

2 Sodalities and Confraternities

While the circulation of manuscript sermons offers perhaps the most explicit instance in which the written word could replace face-to-face contact, it was certainly not the only one. The prayers in sodality and confraternity chapels were likewise complemented by written interaction. Throughout Europe these foundations had started out as

devotional groups in the schools, but developed into a crucial driving force for the implementation of Tridentine ideals on the ground. They allowed close interaction between clergy and laity, and encouraged the Tridentine agenda of an intense active piety and frequent reception of the Eucharist. In the context of the English Catholic community as a minority religion within a Protestant state, they proved, moreover, a suitable instrument to preserve and invigorate Catholicism. They were a continuation of an age-old tradition, and therefore a poignant expression of the Catholic claim to the antiquity of their church. Apart from being pre-Reformation, they were also Tridentine, in that they brought English Catholics into contact with the new Counter-Reformation spirit, tuning them into the latest Continental currents in Catholicism. Their greatest asset for the English was their potential for celebrating the faith in the absence of a public Mass. They could be run by laity and could maintain Marian devotion and Catholic practice and cohesion without direct clerical initiative.

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40 The seminal study for sodalities and their role in the Counter-Reformation is: L. Châtellier, L'Europe des devots (Paris, 1987).
On the Continent, however, the initiative lay with the English religious foundations. In the English houses, confraternities and sodalities brought together members of the religious house and their neighbours. These neighbours could include local Catholics, as was, for instance, the case with the English Sepulchrines in Liège. They established a confraternity in their convent chapel, maintaining that they had ‘every reason to believe that the people of Liège of both sexes will not fail to participate’. While the Sepulchrines brought together English and local Catholics, they also preserved the sense that the confraternity had English origins, as it had been instituted by St Helena, whom they believed to have been ‘of the English nation’. Other English source material mainly maps the involvement of English members. When the English Benedictines in Douai founded a Confraternity of the Rosary, its privileges extended to the religious of the house, to the English students, and ‘to any friends from England living there’. Lay compatriots did indeed live in the monastery, and became active members of their confraternity. Likewise, Nicholas Blundell’s daughters were ‘enrolled for the privilege of the cord’ among the English Franciscans on the Continent, even though they were only visiting schoolchildren. But one did not have to live within the walls of a house to partake in the organisation. The establishment of the sodality in the English Jesuit college in Louvain, for instance, was to a large extent furthered by Sir Thomas Leeds and Sir Ralph Bapthorpe, who became, respectively, prefect and secretary – and neither of them lived in the college.

The influence of these sodalities and confraternities was not confined locally. Recently, scholars have shown interest in the transportability of the model. Catholics from the Low Countries who gathered in Douai and Cologne during the Dutch Revolt, where they organised themselves in Jesuit sodalities, transferred this model and its militancy to their home towns when
they returned in the wake of the Spanish reconquest. Claire Walker has indicated that in the English convents, schoolchildren gained first-hand experience of these Catholic congregations and of practices related to the rosary. On their return home, the children were expected to contribute to the strengthening of this devotional practice on the English mainland, by practising their devotions and encouraging others.

The influence of the confraternities on the Continent was not restricted to a mere place of instruction, for bonds were not broken once their members returned to England. The organisations united members across the Channel, as can be gauged, for instance, from the Rosary Confraternity list of the English Dominicans. They had established the confraternity in their house in Bornhem, in Flanders, but they enlisted individuals across the Southern Netherlands, as is testified in the appearance of Augustinian nuns from the English convent in Bruges, and English Carmelites from Lierre in the Bornhem list. What is most interesting, however, is that it mixed together both schoolchildren and members enlisted on the mission in England. The lack of distinction between members on both sides of the Channel hints at the wider scope of these confraternities. That geographical span was further shaped by the role of epistolary communication, through which prayer networks were constructed. These prayers united English Catholics across geographical distances. The prioress of the English Augustinian cloister of St Monica’s in Louvain, Winefrid Thimelby, expressed this graphically in a letter to her niece: ‘I make a shift to meete thee in a Corner every night after Mattins wher though I can not speake with thee I am allowed to speake for thee as much and as longe as I will’.

The Jesuit sodalities on the Continent offer a pertinent example of the construction of prayer networks. While the members of the sodality travelled frequently, they maintained spiritual connections through their letters and prayers, thus contributing to the geographical dissemination of the sodality. The rules of the sodality in the English college in Louvain stated that when a member left the town ‘let

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51 'Two Rosary Confraternity Lists', ed. by Bede Jarrett, *Miscellanea IX* (Catholic Record Society; 14) (London, 1914), 204-217.
him remember also to pray often for the spirituall advauncement & good progresse of
the Sodalitie: as the sodalitie is in like manner to pray for him; And if he is to be
longe absent, let him nowe and then give accompte of himself by letter to the
congregation.'54 In the English college in Rome, members were to pray for all
members ‘both those present and absent.’55 Likewise, the sodales who left St Omer
‘must remember to write once at least, if not oftener, every year to this sodalitie;
certifying it of their progresse in vertue, and testifying the desire

they have of being accounted good members therof; and soe long as they shall
observe this, they shall be partakers of the merrits of the sodalitie, and when they
departe this life they shal be prayed for as they who dye heere.'56 Sabran’s letter book
and entries in the Jesuit account book testify that members did indeed request to be
remembered by their fellow sodales.57

Thus by means of letters, the sodalities in the colleges managed to overcome
the distance, and to treat remote members as if they were present. This epistolary
communication and mutual remembrance in prayers created an English cohesion
within the archcongregation. The sodalities were constituent parts of the
archsodality. The rules of the Benedictine sodality in Douai stressed that the main
benefit of being admitted was that thereby one became part of the ‘universall
Communication & being made partaker of all the Prayers, Masses, & other good
works of all the same fraternity in the whole Catholick Church. How great a benefit is
this!’58 Yet at the same time, the rules stated that there were benefits particular to
their own sodality, thus preserving a sense of uniqueness.

3 Saints

The foregoing account has drawn attention to the particular importance of the
written word among English Catholics in a geographically dispersed minority church.
Textual exchanges could obtain yet another meaning, and gain the status of relics

54 Rules of the Englishe Sodalitie, of the Immaculate Conception of the mostglorious Virgin Mary
Mother of God, in the Englishe Colledge of the Society of Jesus in Lovaine (Mechelen, 1618), 25.
55 ‘tum pro Praesentibus, tum pro absentibus’ (Birmingham, Archives of the Archbishop of
Birmingham, C89: Constitutions of the English College, Rome ([c.1680]).)
56 Clitheroe, Lancashire, Stonyhurst College, MS. C. II 19, The custom Book o
f St Omers College:
Rules of the Sodalitie, of the most Glorious Assumption of The Immaculate Virgin Mary Mother of
God Erected in the English Seminarie under the charge of the Societie of Jesus St Omers (1629),
236.
57 Sabran, Letter book, 46, 94, 151, 181; RAASJ, Nr 26, fol. 42v; Clitheroe, Stonyhurst College, D I
when their authors had died at the hands of the English government.\(^{59}\) This might, for instance, account for the preservation of some random letters, mainly about financial business, written by Catholics who had died in the upheaval surrounding the Titus Oates plot. The letters’ status as remnants of a martyr is for instance explicitly mentioned in a note scribbled on top of one by Philip Evans: ‘Manuscript by the glorious martyr Philip Evans’.\(^{60}\) His martyrdom imbued the letters with a new meaning, as a marginal note on another of his letters acknowledges: ‘these letters of the martyr should be preserved as relics’.\(^{61}\) The first page of some financial correspondence of another Popish Plot martyr, the Jesuit William Ireland, also features the same words: ‘these letters of the martyr should be conserved as relics’.\(^{62}\) More conventional relics also travelled over the same networks as the letters and books. Though they did not use the words of epistolary and textual exchanges, their messages were similar and they had an equally bonding effect. They were particularly suitable for uniting a scattered community, because their mobility enhanced their ‘capacity for linking two places ... in a way both sacred and physical’.\(^{63}\)

These relics constitute the third and last case of how universal Catholic practices could take the shape of networks in the case of a dispersed English Catholic community: the cult of saints. By the seventeenth century, the Roman Catholic Church had regained full confidence in this devotion. During the sixteenth century, the combination of Protestant derision and humanist questioning had made Rome

\(^{59}\) The existence of grapho-relics has enabled Ulinka Rublack to nuance the misunderstanding of Lutheranism as ‘an anti-sensual, disembodied religion of the word.’ Lutherans held the autographs of reformers in high esteem, and centred on them a memory culture that is only with difficulty discernible from Catholic relic-worship. The existence of these grapho-relics among English Catholics confirms Rublack’s argument, as they blur the boundaries from the other side of the confessional divide as well. They were not the preserve of ‘the religion of the word’, which puts into question once more the stereotypical assignations of Lutheranism as a religion of the word, and Catholicism as a confession solely focused on the senses and material. (U.C. Rublack, ‘Grapho-Reics: Lutheranism and the Materialization of the Word’, in: A. Walsham (ed.), Relics and Remains (Past and Present Supplement; 5) (Oxford, 2010), 144-166, quotation p. 166.)

\(^{60}\) ‘manuscript gloriosissimi mart. Philippi Evans.’ (London, Archives of the Archbishop of Westminster, Main series A XXXIV nr 53: Philip Evans to Jesuits in Hollywel 31 May 1673.)

\(^{61}\) ‘conservande haec epistola martyris tanq reliquia’ (London, Archives of the British Province of the Society of Jesus (hereafter: ABPSJ), Anglia V, document 83.). The papers of the exiled king James II were also regarded ‘as a great relic & treasury’, when after his death they were preserved in the Scottish college in Paris (BL, add Mss, 10,118, fol 410v.).

\(^{62}\) ‘Conservanda haec epistola martyris tanque reliquia’ (ABPSJ, ‘Anglia V’, 86: Fr William Ireland, SJ (St Omer) to Fr Christopher Anderton (Rome) (27 January 1677.).) A letter Ireland had sent the previous year has also been preserved, because it was, as an additional note on it indicated, ‘the autograph of the martyr’ (ABPSJ, ‘Anglia V’, 85: Fr William Ireland, SJ (St Omer) to Fr Christopher Grenet, SJ (Rome) (6 May 1676.).)

wary about saintly intercessors. A century later, however, the saints had become a hallmark of Catholicism, elaborated in a rich Baroque culture.64

As research on the Counter-Reformation increasingly indicates, veneration of the saints provided a means of engagement between clergy and laity, since the Tridentine clergy used rather than suppressed the laity’s need for saintly intercession.65 However, the precarious balance between clerical support and lay appropriation was complicated in the English context. Since Catholicism was proscribed, the clergy could not wield a strong hand with the backing of secular authorities, leaving the laity more scope for appropriating holy objects.66 On the Continent, however, the clergy were not hampered by an unsympathetic government, and could get a firmer grip on defining orthodoxy. This is evident in the fact that most knowledge about the relics in the colleges resulted from the foundation of the Congregation for Relics and Indulgences in 1669, and the Jesuits’ eagerness to have their relics officially authenticated, whereas the only testimony of authenticity of many of the relics remaining in England are unofficial statements jotted down on papers preserved with the relics.67 The relics’ destinations in the Southern Netherlands are equally revealing of the clergy’s influence. In stark contrast with their underground position in England, the relics were channeled to the religious houses on the Continent. For instance, the arm bone of Thomas Cantilupe passed from a lay woman, referred to merely as ‘dame Ravenhill’, to the English Jesuits in the 1640s.68 In those houses, they were part of public, not private, veneration. Many of the benefactors who donated a relic, stated that they had done this ‘to the end that it was to be kept in custody and exposed to the public veneration of the faithful’.69 The clergy did indeed comply with the wishes of their benefactors, and offered the relics for public veneration. This can be deduced from the fact that on many of the

65 M.R. Forster, Catholic Germany from the Reformation to the Enlightenment (Basingstoke, 2007), 167-172; T. Johnson, Magistrates, Madonnas and Miracles: the Counter Reformation in the Upper Palatinate (Aldershot, 2009), 239; P.M. Soergel, Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria (Berkeley, 1993).
67 The authentication papers of the relics of the Jesuit houses can be found in: RAASJ, Box 32, and in Ghent, Rijksarchief Gent, 37569 B 3036, 37570 B 3752, 37571 B 3863/9, 37572 B 3037/4, 37573 B 3037/1.
68 ABPSJ, St Omer’s Letters, papers of between 1651-1756, document 4.
69 ‘quae asservatur & publica fidelui venerationi exponitur’ (RAASJ, Box 32: Testimonium de Reliquis s. Thomae Apostoli.)
authentication papers the local bishop added a note to grant permission to venerate the objects publicly.\textsuperscript{70}

The authentication papers bear witness to another process: the frequent circulation of the relics. They were not just rescued from the island to find a stable resting place on the Continent. The relics travelled between the various towns inhabited by the English, and united different houses, both Jesuit and Benedictine, male and female, in the Southern Netherlands and Northern France. This mobility is remarkable, as recent studies of early modern Catholic devotion to saints have drawn attention to its physical rootedness in the landscape. Catholic territory was littered with shrines, routes of pilgrimage, and roadway crosses.\textsuperscript{71} This physical manifestation in the landscape was even more of a confessional statement in re-Catholicised lands. By reinstating the holy in the landscape, the Catholics overturned decades of iconoclasm, and expressed their victory physically.\textsuperscript{72} In the process, they often were able to reinvigorate spaces that had clandestinely remained the focus of Catholic devotion under Protestant dominance. The English situation shows similar signs, for the ancient shrines on the island were preserved, and remained part of Catholic devotional lives in the expectation of a future return to full glory.\textsuperscript{73} Despite and also because English Catholics were unable to manifest themselves as overtly as their co-religionists elsewhere could, they developed a deep attachment to old and demolished sites of veneration and new sites of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{70} RAASJ, Box 32.
\textsuperscript{72} Johnson, Magistrates, Madonnas and Miracles, 247, 271-291; H. Louthan, Converting Bohemia: force and persuasion in the Catholic Reformation (Cambridge, 2009), 265-269.
\textsuperscript{73} Some first steps in the same direction can be discerned in the reign of James II. St Winefride’s shrine at Holywell, for instance, was given to the Jesuits by Mary of Modena in order to have it properly served and embellished. After the saint had granted James’s prayer for a son, the queen gratefully endowed a priest to say Mass at Winefride’s shrine. This elaboration of the relation between the Stuarts and Holywell makes one wonder: ‘had the Stuart dynasty survived, might the site have become the Baroque centrepiece of a British Counter-Reformation?’ A. Walsham, ‘Holywell: contesting sacred space in post-Reformation Wales’, in: W. Coster and A. Spicer (eds.), Sacred Space in early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 2005), 230; A. Walsham, The Reformation of the Landscape. Religion, Identity & Memory in Early Modern Britain & Ireland (Oxford, 2011), 198. The links between the Stuarts and the pilgrim site were not broken at the Glorious Revolution, and it developed into a bastion of Catholic and Jacobite pilgrimage: C. Haydon, ‘St Winifred, Bishop Fleetwood and Jacobitism’, in: P. Clarke and T. Claydon (eds.), Saints and Sanctity (Studies in Church History; 47) (Woodbridge, 2011), 295-306.
Throughout Europe, more mobility in the veneration to saints can be found in the role of relics. However, their movement was generally limited. The discovery of numerous bodies in the catacombs in Rome in 1578 resulted in a thriving trade in early Christian martyrs. The distribution of the bodies of the catacomb Christians served both as an instrument for Rome to manifest its claims to universality, and for the territories that received them to demonstrate their Catholic identity and bonds with the ancient martyrs. The shrine in Cologne which held the bones of Ursula and her 11,000 virgins brought about a similar distribution of relics. Nevertheless, in these instances, the transportability of relics was confined to one occasion. Even though the arrival of the catacomb saints was marked with great celebrations, afterwards they were entombed again and made a fixed part of the local community.

Among English Catholics on the Continent, on the other hand, relics were not enclosed in fixed shrines, but remained mobile. Indeed, all relics were expected to make at least one more move in the future: back across the Channel upon the return of the English Catholics themselves. This permanent mobility of relics had its own meaning and a function particularly well-suited for a scattered community.

As mentioned above, the authentication papers often recorded the itinerary the relic in question had traversed. For instance, a bone of St Adrian, a martyr under the emperor Diocletian, was carried over from England to Rome, from Rome to the Benedictine nuns in Pontoise, and from Pontoise to St Omer, where it was kept in 1662. The arm bone of Thomas Cantilupe, eleventh-century bishop of Hereford, spent a brief interval in Paris with the Benedictine nuns before it was transported to St Omer. Such continuous movement of saintly remains reinforced the bonds created by the written exchanges discussed in the previous sections.

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77 RAASJ, Box 32: Testimonium de Religuis S. Adriani Martyris.
78 ABPSJ, St Omers Letters, papers of between 1651-1756, document 5; RAASJ, Box 32: Testimonium Sti Thomae Herefordiensis Epis et confess; RAASJ, Box 32: Joseph Simons to John Poyntz 5 November 1668.
Thomas Cantilupe’s remains were scattered over the continent and England, illustrating another means of connecting English Catholics.79 Apart from the arm bone the Jesuits preserved on the Continent, the Society held another bone in Holywell.80 The saint’s head was sent to the English Benedictine abbey in Lambispringe.81 This dispersal of bones was not only the case for relics of English saints, but also for universal relics that had been appropriated in England. In the case of an English relic of the True Cross, the Benedictine abbess Mary Vavasour in 1627 explicitly mentioned that her family in England held the other half: ‘With much instance and many petitions at last I obtaııned this greatest favour, that my Father voutsafed to bestowe upon me the half of this most sacred treasure...the other half of this sacred Wood my Father would never part with till his death, and then bequethed the same as a most preıuous Legacy to my Nephew his Heire Sr Walter Vavasour, alwaise to be kept in his howse and famuly’.82 Likewise, the English college in Liège granted a fragment of the spine bone of Thomas the Apostle to St Omer in 1671, while keeping the major part.83 Various fragments of the same saint or cross dispersed through the community, and the explicit acknowledgment thereof bonded Catholics across the Channel.

Moreover, the circulation of relics could imbue the community with a certain defiance. Though less well-documented for the recognised saints, this is particularly clear for the relics of recently martyred Englishmen. The Popish Plot martyrs serve as a case in point. As in

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the sixteenth century, some of the relics snatched from the execution scene were sent to the Continent,84 and similar to the itineraries of the relics of saints, they were
handed around. The fingers of the five Jesuits executed during the Popish Plot, for instance, were given by Penelope Plowden to the college in St Omer. Even though the five relics were collectively assembled in a reliquary, the Jesuit Thomas Whitebread’s remains were sent to Liège only to return in 1703. Likewise, John Warner sent relics of cloth dipped in the blood of the Popish Plot martyrs to various English houses in the Southern Netherlands, as did Louis Sabran and Richard Simons—both English Jesuits stationed in the Southern Netherlands. These linen relics were reported to have wrought miracles. In November 1682, Warner wrote that ‘I have heard that in Ghent remarkable miracles have been performed by water in which a handkerchief dipped in the blood of our martyrs [killed in the Popish Plot] had been immersed’. When Sabran and Simons sent a sample of this linen, together with portraits of the martyrs, to Thomas Eberson—an English student in Ingolstadt—the two fathers enclosed an account of the ‘miraculous cures granted by God on very many occasions, through the merits and blood of the aforesaid martyrs’. Most of those celebrated by Sabran and Simons were the cures and subsequent conversions of non-Catholics. The manuscript frequently stressed that ‘most of them [the recipients of the cures] were previously ignorant’ of the use of the relics. For instance, ‘Mrs. Hantgrave, who derided this remedy as superstitious, after experiencing in herself its many wonderful results, testified under her own hand, on June 7, 1682, that she was abundantly convinced of its power’. Catholics thus informed one another that the battle against Protestantism was not lost, as even the hardship suffered during the Popish Plot was no deterrent to the growth of their community. On the contrary, it gained them converts. The relics thus circulated bound together Catholics across the Channel and the Continent, and reminded them of their shared fate that was encapsulated in a relic of a martyr for the Catholic cause in England.

Conclusion

This essay has outlined how the interaction between English Catholic laity and their religious and clerical compatriots took shape in an expatriate context. The importance of communication over long distance, and of informal community

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86 Warner, Letter book, 39v, 89r, 90r.
88 ‘Audio insigne miraculu gandavi factu per aq in q immersus fuerat sudariu conge nostre s martyrum tinctu.’ (Warner, Letter book, fol. 39v.)
formation above institutions sheds new light both on research on early modern exile, and on early modern Catholicism.

Assessing the encounter between lay and religious has involved piecing together snippets of evidence, and reading religious records against the grain. This search for scattered material opens our eyes to the impact of the nature of source bases on our understanding of early modern refugees. As noted in the introduction, the convents and colleges were established not specifically for the sake of the English already living abroad, but were focused on the community in their home country. Accordingly, their archives bear witness to these preoccupations. The scarcity of source material dealing in particular with the English Catholics abroad may have played a part in their relative absence in discussion on early modern exile, which is dominated by work on Protestant refugees. The experiences of the latter are well-represented in archival material, but this in turn raises the question of how these detailed records have influenced our perception. Do Calvinist well-defined refugee churches’ archives perhaps eclipse the significance of interactions outside these churches, as the archival records tend to conjure up an intensely local image? Recently, scholars have started to question the impression of isolated communities, and disclosed that the exile churches were not as insular as the serial records would suggest. They have drawn attention to the importance of communication and travel in linking migrants with their home countries, and with the different exile communities. These interconnections shaped the exiles’ movements and ensured their influence beyond what an isolated group could achieve.\(^90\) The different orientation of Catholic source material helps to reinforce the calls for cautiousness in dealing with institutional records, and highlights the importance of looking beyond the mere formal structures they conjure up.

The evidence discussed above also probes the role of the ecclesiological structure envisaged at the Council of Trent, as it indicates how Tridentine ideals were adapted in an expatriate context. The English abroad did not organise themselves in parishes tightly bound in a universal hierarchy, nor did they feel part of localised parish-based communities. In order to tease out the self-understanding of English Catholics abroad, one has to search further than formal institutions and pay attention to the more informal ways of community cohesion, and to its geographical spread.

The circulation of texts and objects fostered bonds among the English abroad and at home. They were the material traces we can still track, and offer us an insight into their ‘sociabilité à distance’, to refer once more to Greengrass. They helped to maintain and give shape to an English community in the wider Catholic Church. This is most clear in the case of the sodalities, since the English were united among one another by prayers while still taking part in the universal sodality structure. But the circulation of sermons in English combined with Latin liturgy, or the devotion to specifically English saints and the mobility of their relics also indicate how the English were balancing their position between an English community and the universal Catholic Church.

That universal Church, nonetheless, remained an important part of the expatriates’ experiences. This article has aimed to point out that total assimilation was not what characterised the English situation, not in order to deny that they engaged with Continental Catholicism, but to put into question the assumption that Catholic migrants would be completely absorbed into the global structures of the Catholic Church. By drawing attention to the instances in which English Catholics highlighted their distinctive identity, and how they preserved internal cohesion, this paper has added nuance to the encounters between English and universal Catholicism. One could even suggest that this allows for a more genuinely transnational understanding of their lives abroad, instead of conceptualising their situation as an instance of absorption would imply. Since they approached continental Catholicism while still holding on to some of their own characteristics, the experiences of these mobile Catholics were encounters between different Catholic cultures. Through their incessant interaction and communication, the English gave their geographically scattered community a sense of common purpose without canceling out their universal allegiances. The networks were the veins through which English blood streamed, but in a universal body.