

The Resuscitation of the English Dominican Province 1850–1870

Tony Cross

“Resuscitation” is the appropriate word – the patient was so debilitated that a life-support machine and intensive care were desperately needed. The two dates that define the period of treatment are not arbitrarily chosen. On 30 August 1850, the life-support machine was provided by William Leigh, the convert Squire of Woodchester Park, near Stroud in Gloucestershire. Although there were too few friars qualified to form a quorum for Provincial Chapter (the Province had eight members : four entitled to vote and one too ill to do so), they had reconvened at Hinckley on 28 August under a Provincial, Dominic Aylward, appointed by the Vicar General. Two days later, the newly built neo-gothic church on Leigh’s estate was offered as a base for a Dominican Priory.¹

The story that this came about because William Leigh had been captivated by the medieval magpie habit of Dominicans who had attended the consecration at Erdington, is highly doubtful. He seems to have known Fr. Augustine Procter, a key figure in the revival of the Province, since the mid 1840s.² However that may be, Leigh wanted a religious community installed and soon. His daring aim was to Catholicise the neighbourhood. The Passionists, he felt, had let him down by declining to pledge themselves to maintain the mission.³ The little band of friars at Hinckley took a deep breath, thanked him and accepted. The life-support machine was in place.

Intensive care was provided by the energy, vision and remote-control strategy of Père Vincent Jandel, then Vicar General in Rome, later Master, effective head of the Dominican Order – a

¹ Sylvester Humphries OP, ed. Sebastian Bullough OP, *The Woodchester Story . . . 1846–51* (typescript in English Dominican Archives, Edinburgh – hereafter EDA).

² William Leigh to Augustine Procter OP, 2 July 1866, congratulating him on his Jubilee: “for half this time [*i.e.* 25 years] you have been a professed son of St Dominic, I have had the happiness and privilege of being acquainted with you” (MS in Woodchester Archives, EDA).

³ Humphries & Bullough, *The Woodchester Story*, op.cit. The term ‘mission’ is somewhat confusing: as there was no parochial system, all churches ministering to the laity were known as ‘missions’, but Dominicans and members of other orders conducted missions and retreats to revitalise Catholic spiritual life.

man unjustly underrated and overshadowed by the charismatic personality of Lacordaire. Jandel had been one of the earliest and closest disciples of that leader of the Dominican revival in France, but was increasingly at variance with the latter over the observance of the Dominican Constitutions. They disagreed over rising for the office at midnight, fasting rules, the chapter of faults and a number of other matters. Woodchester, Jandel hoped, might be a model of strict observance. It might be fashioned, *ab initio*, into a shining lamp of reformed Dominicanism, set upon a stand for others to see and imitate. It would be a version of his own observant Priory of Santa Sabina on the Aventine – austere, disciplined, influential.

Briefly to refer to the other date, 1870 – the year of the Infallibility Decree, of the extinguishing of the Pope's temporal power and the secession from the Church and English Province of its best-known preacher, Fr. Rodolph Suffield. He had been increasingly agitated by the turbulence in the Church during the 1860s and disturbed by his liberal religious reading and contacts.⁴ His dramatic response to the triumph of Ultramontanism was to abandon Catholicism and seek appointment as a Unitarian minister. His move shook the Province and many Catholics in England, Ireland and further afield, but the Province nevertheless continued to grow. 1870, therefore, would appear to be a suitable and dramatic *terminus ad quem*. Suffield certainly thought it so : claiming persistently and inaccurately that he left the very day Infallibility was proclaimed.⁵

My information on this period of the Province's history is derived largely from the English Province Archives at Edinburgh (EDA), but there are other sources which need exhaustive investigation. There is therefore a certain provisionality to this account, though I am doubtful whether my main contentions are likely to be invalidated. Many of the documents in the EDA are in difficult, sometimes illegible handwriting, much in French, some in Italian. Jandel had no English, Nickolds had Italian but no French and Aylward and Procter were fluent in French. What we have is mostly one side of an epistolary exchange, though I have garnered a score or two of letters from the Archives at Santa Sabina.⁶ Until that whole correspondence (approximately 700 items) can be copied and placed in the EDA, that is where we are likely to be halted for some time. But, at

⁴ Tony Cross 'Robert Rodolph Suffield's Dominican Decade 1860–70', forthcoming in *Recusant History*.. His liberal religious neighbours and friends, Viscount & Viscountess Amberley were probably the most influential.

⁵ Robert Rodolph Suffield, *Five Letters on a Conversion to Roman Catholicism* (Thomas Scott, 1873). On p. 11 we read: "I left the Roman Catholic Church on the day on which Papal Infallibility was proclaimed." A typical claim – in fact he left at least 20 days later.

⁶ English Dominican Province correspondence in Ordo Praedicatorum, Archivum Generale, at Santa Sabina, Rome – hereafter AGOP.

least, we have Jandel's letters illustrating his 'hands-on' approach to the resuscitation of the Province and a good deal of correspondence between English Provincials and other members of the Province. It is possible, in my opinion, to draw a not inaccurate outline history of persons, politics, strategies and occasional scandals during these two decades. Other historians have previously given valuable accounts of this crucial period.⁷

Because he was twice Provincial during this period and because he was a charming, affectionate, cultured man, zealously devoted to the Dominican apostolate, Dominic Aylward (clothed 1833, professed 1834) was Jandel's key and valued lieutenant. A somewhat cool relationship at first, rapidly warmed after Jandel's Visitation of the Province in the Summer of 1851. Fifteen years later, Jandel wrote to congratulate Aylward on his re-election as Provincial: "from that moment [*in 1851, when Aylward met him off the boat at Holyhead at 3 am*] my appreciation of your excellent spirit, your zeal and your devotion has not ceased to grow."⁸ But who could fail to grow fond of a priest who, sorely afflicted by heart disease and desperately anxious over urgent fund-raising for the building of the Priory at Newcastle, was nevertheless concerned for the shoe-black boys, pitifully poor, to whom he had ministered in the town? "I often think about them," he writes.⁹ And who, writing to Antoninus Williams at Newcastle, says of Pius Cavanagh: "I am sorry for the pain in his neck – I wish I could cure it with a Dominican kiss – I send him two x x one for each side that I may be sure of the right place."¹⁰ And who, hoping to get the most effective publicity about the foundation-stone laying at Newcastle, advises Williams to prepare: "A good, interesting, spirited but anti-boshy report"¹¹ to be sent to *The Tablet* with an advertisement appealing for donations. Confined to his room at Haverstock Hill, London, on Doctor's orders, he asks for books to be sent: "Tell Lewis [*Weldon OP*] I forgot to ask for Jones' Greek Lexicon, lying behind the armchair on the oil cloth over the big box and also for a little crimson book Auguste Comte's Philosophy by Lewis [*George Eliot's partner*], also Kant's Critik of pure Reason (both in the Glass case), also a smallish volume upon the Modern German Philosophies . . . I believe it is in the lowest shelf of the little

⁷ Bede Jarrett OP *The English Dominicans* (Burns & Oates, 1921) see pp. 202–207; Bede Bailey OP, Simon Tugwell OP & Dom Aidan Bellenger, *Letters of Bede Jarrett* (Downside Abbey & Blackfriars, 1989) see preface pp. x, xi.

⁸ Alexandre Vincent Jandel OP to Dominic Aylward OP, n.d., but note on letter records it reached Aylward on 28 July 1866 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.52, EDA).

⁹ Aylward to Antoninus Williams OP, 14 March 1870 (Newcastle Archives, EDA).

¹⁰ Aylward to Williams, 14 December 1869 (Newcastle Archives, EDA).

¹¹ Aylward to Williams, n.d., probably early September 1869, before Newcastle Priory foundation stone ceremony.

bookcase over the chest of drawers. Pray for me for I want it.”¹² This breathless style (left punctuated as in the letter) gives a true impression of this greatly loved man, insufficiently remembered in the Province today. His leadership was crucial in the revival.

Two other senior friars played vital rôles in the resuscitation process. The more senior was Augustine Procter (clothed 1816, professed 1817) – a formidable, schoolmasterly figure who, having taught at the Bornheim College, wound up affairs there and in Belgium generally in 1825, settling at Hinckley, a long established Dominican centre. When later he was Prior at Woodchester, he so enthusiastically adopted strict observance that Jandel stresses the wisdom of tempering wind to shorn lambs: in a letter to Aylward, the Provincial, Jandel urges him “to re-establish 7 hours of uninterrupted sleep for your novices from 8 o’clock to 3 am.”¹³ They had been rising at midnight and making their way down the hill from their temporary and overcrowded Priory, in all weathers, to sing Matins. But Fr. Procter claimed: “Pious Englishmen usually like to push things to the limits.”¹⁴ Had he canvassed the opinions of his devout compatriots? There was a characteristic Procterian reaction when an ardent young visitor from Oscott, Arthur (later Fr. Bertrand) Wilberforce, mightily impressed by the gothic conventual buildings at Woodchester, exclaimed: “Why this is more like a monastery than anything I have yet seen in England!” “Sir!” came the reply: “It *is* a monastery!”¹⁵ Beneath this formidable manner, however, there was real affection for confrères. There is even a slight smile on his face in the photograph taken at his Golden Jubilee.

The other senior figure who played a prominent part in administration and teaching in the Province during this period was Thomas Nickolds (clothed 1826, professed 1827). He was permanently resident at Holy Cross, Leicester, first as Missioner from 1841 to 1874 and then as Prior. He was something of a martinet. In Lent 1860, Mother Margaret sent a group of Third Order (Tertiary) Sisters to establish a convent at Leicester. Fr. Nickold and the Sisters did not hit it off: “Things are not working well. Father Nickolds and the

¹² Aylward to Williams, n.d., probably after Diffinitors’ Memorandum on the building fund for Newcastle Priory, 8 May 1868 (EDA). The Diffinitors were, in essence, the finance committee of the Province.

¹³ Jandel to Aylward, 3 April 1852 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.15, EDA): “. . . je vous engage beaucoup à rendre à vos novices 7 heures de sommeil non interrompu de 8 h. à 3 h.”

¹⁴ Procter to Jandel, 6 November 1851 (AGOP XIII, No.10): “Les Anglais pieux aiment ordinairement de pousser le chose à bout . . .”

¹⁵ H.M.Capes OP, *Father Bertrand Wilberforce*, (Sands & Co., Edinburgh & London, 1906) p. 16. Arthur Wilberforce was Henry Wilberforce’s son and grandson of William Wilberforce.

Community cannot get on together,” writes Austin Maltus to Procter.¹⁶ Indeed, the Sisters withdrew after twenty months, in late August 1861. Who is to say where the main faults lay with two such strong-minded superiors? – six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, one suspects.

Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan, one of those tough-minded superiors, is a notable foundress of the 19th century – a period of unbelievably rapid growth, particularly in women’s Orders. Encouraged by Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham, a good friend to Dominicans, Margaret Hallahan, already a Tertiary, adopted a Dominican Rule. With enormous energy, charisma, impulsiveness and piety, she soon established several convents of Third Order Sisters, beginning in 1844 at Clifton and thereafter at Stone, Stoke, Marychurch and East London. There are a great many incidents and sayings which might serve to characterise this extraordinary woman: “Thank God I am a bigot !”¹⁷ she would say. She celebrated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1851 as if it had been proclaimed specially for her. A much venerated little statue of our Lady went with her wherever she lived the conventual life.

A typical incident involves a workman at Stone during the building of the chapel. She found him at work there and interrogated him: was he a Catholic? He was not. “What do you do for your soul? – I suppose you know you’ve got one?” “Well, Ma’am, I suppose I have.” “Do you ever go to church?” “I can’t say I do.” The accompanying Sister wisely departed at this point to get her meal. A little later, Mother Margaret came into the refectory: “Take that man a catechism and a *Garden of the Soul* and give him the address of a priest in Birmingham.” The Sister returned to find the man kneeling before one of the altars, weeping: “No-one,” he said, “ever seemed before to care whether I had got a soul.”¹⁸

It is important to realise that these four senior Dominicans were already in place before the Woodchester church was offered. It is not the case that the Province had no life left in it before 1850. When Jandel began the intensive care treatment, these senior Religious were available to supervise and direct the process. A few chiefs are needed if one is planning an influx of Indians. In fact, there were not nearly enough seniors available to avoid some unfortunate key appointments. Nevertheless, Jandel quickly drafted in auxiliaries – some remarkable and useful men.

To ensure that the Woodchester novitiate developed along observant lines, he sent a young protégé to help in the training of the novices – a deacon just 21, originally from Galway, whose crucial

¹⁶ Austin Maltus OP to Procter, 18 April 1860 (EDA).

¹⁷ Francis Raphael Drane OP, *Life of Mother Margaret Hallahan* (Longmans, 1929) p. 314.

¹⁸ Drane, *Life of Mother Margaret Hallahan*, op.cit., p. 239.

formation had been at Santa Sabina.¹⁹ He would become the most celebrated English-speaking Dominican preacher of the Age – Tom Burke, a member of the Irish Province on loan, as it were, to the English. Augustine Procter, who was still officially novice-master, was at first suspicious of the new arrival and Burke was particularly anxious to show how seriously he applied himself to the work, but the older man was won over eventually by Burke’s irrepressible humour, his intelligence and capacity for hard work. From Rome came admonitions from the Vicar General : “Tell me also if you have forbidden Br. Burke to sing? This is an essential step.”²⁰ This was the young man with a weak chest who, 27 years later, was chosen to deliver the oration at the reburial of Daniel O’Connell’s remains at Glasnevin in the presence of a galaxy of senior churchmen and 50,000 fellow Irishmen.

When, two years later, the Irish Provincial insisted on Tom Burke’s return, Jandel drafted in Louis Gonin from Sorèze – a Frenchman who was never to belong to the English Province, but spent eleven years in office as a highly competent Novice-master and as Prior at Woodchester until, in 1863, he was appointed Archbishop of Port of Spain. A northern Italian, Paul Vincent Utili, en route for California, was diverted to serve as Lector²¹ at Woodchester. It took a while for these men to acclimatise to English ways and for senior English Dominicans to cope with their temperaments. In response to a complaint of a lack of steadiness in one Italian recruit, Jandel urges that greater allowance be made – it was, wrote Jandel : “a consequence, no doubt, of the impressionableness of the Italian temperament.”²² Another Lector drafted in was Vincent Ferreri – son of a desperately poor Italian peasant family. Often, political troubles in Italy – the risorgimento struggle with all the anti-clerical and anti-monastic policies that accompanied it – worked to Woodchester’s advantage. Filippo Pozzo, deprived of his University professorial post in Turin, was sent to England : “No less zealous in study than in observance,”²³ writes Jandel to Aylward with the good news that Pozzo was willing to go to the Province. And there were others – Irish, French and Italian – sent to strengthen “this novitiate which holds the future of our Order in England.”²⁴

¹⁹ William J.Fitz-Patrick, *The Life of the Very Rev. Thomas N. Burke, OP* (Kegan Paul, 1894), pp. 85–91.

²⁰ Jandel to Aylward, 26 October 1852 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.21, EDA) : “Dites moi aussi si vous avez interdit le chant au fr Burke? C’est une mesure indispensable.”

²¹ A lector is a lecturer and tutor in the Dominican Novitiate or Studium House.

²² Jandel to Aylward, 18 October 1855 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.39, EDA) : “. . . cela tient sans doute à l’impressionabilité des natures Italiennes.”

²³ Jandel to Aylward, 14 December 1853 (*Jandel Letters*, Book II, No.93, EDA) : “. . . non moins zélé pour les études que pour l’observance . . .”

²⁴ Jandel to Aylward, 29 June 1854 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.31, EDA) : “. . . vous connaissez assez tout l’intérêt que je porte à ce noviciat, qui renferme l’avenir de notre ordre en Angleterre.”

The word soon got around – English Dominicans were very much ‘in business’ again with a purpose-built gothic monastery in a beautiful Gloucestershire valley and recruits soon appeared. Indeed, even before the conventual buildings were erected, eight novices came in the first year at Woodchester. Official lists hardly give an accurate picture of the flow of vocations. There is evidence of at least 40 men who were temporarily members of the Province between 1850 and 1870, besides those who were eventually professed. Catholicism was gathering strength. The terrible Irish famines brought tens of thousands of Catholic Irish into the country. The lay-brothers seem to have been nearly all Irish – mostly by birth, some by parentage. We have learned to be wary of claims made about the number of converts following the ‘Second Spring’, but a significant number of those arriving at Woodchester were converts or from convert families. The chief factors which help explain the steady growth of the Church during these years inevitably had their impact upon the English Province’s revival.

It is not possible to give an accurate social analysis of the backgrounds of those professed in the Province during these years – the records are incomplete and often confusing. It appears that well under a third of the friars were converts. There were one or two of aristocratic birth and a half-dozen from landed gentry families. Most were sons of professional or prosperous tradesmen’s families. Rodolph Suffield, a new recruit in 1860, wrote delightedly of “the modest easy gentlemanly tone possessed by all the novices.”²⁵ There was a firm strategy to keep it that way. Jandel wrote to Nickolds in 1864: “I am very pleased that your Reverence dismissed the majority of the Hinckley postulants . . . this College was the main obstacle to better class vocations since men of good family . . . were preferring to enter other Religious Orders.”²⁶ This is not just 19th century snobbery. The demands of liturgy and lectorship required men who had some grounding in Latin and presupposed recruits who had at least a basic education in the language. It is no surprise, therefore, that the friars of the 1860s and 1870s were drawn predominantly from the middle classes. Moreover, well educated friars were needed to take up the two study places at Louvain. But the Province was desperately poor and young Jerome Hargrove had to be transferred to Rome for training in Autumn 1863. There were no Provincial funds available to train him and Jandel had no intention of letting a promising candidate’s formation languish for that reason. The resources which accrued from the profession of wealthy novices were also sorely

²⁵ Suffield to Procter, “October 1860” (Procter Papers, EDA).

²⁶ Jandel to Nickolds, 25 July 1864 (*Jandel Letters*, Book I, No.78, EDA): “Ho sentito con molto piacere che V.P. avesse licenziato buona parte dei postulanti di Hinckley.”

needed : Cuthbert Wolseley, a baronet's son, thus enabled the Province to pay for the site of the Priory in London.

There is an illuminating letter from Bernard Morewood to Jandel on the prospects at Newcastle where, it had been agreed, a Priory would be established within seven years of the 1860 agreement with Bishop Hogarth. It was impossible to lay the foundation stone until 1869, largely because Fr. Bernard ran off, leaving a gaping hole in the building fund.²⁷ He had been an enthusiastic church builder and something of a favourite with Jandel. He writes, in 1860, from Newcastle: "Our mission contains about twelve thousand Catholics, most of them poor Irish, working in the factories and mines . . . Unhappily a large number neglect their duties . . . Six priests . . . would be insufficient to meet the needs . . . we are obliged to adapt our Dominican life to the exigencies of our rôle as missionaries here." He asks for some mitigation of strict observance and ends with an urgent plea for another priest to join the four at St Andrew's.²⁸ I suspect that the overwhelming burden of pastoral responsibility was the chief factor in this priest's moral and vocational breakdown. As a consequence of his depredations, there followed an unavoidable stripping of assets and juggling of accounts in the 1860s to the keep the extent of the financial disaster strictly within the circle of the Diffinitors. Few outside this inner group of friars would have been aware of the mortgaging of Woodchester. The culprit and cause of these desperate measures, Morewood, had been inadequately trained, over-promoted and allowed to assume responsibility for an intimidating task – the consequence of a Province trying to run before it could confidently walk.

Writing to Gladstone on 30 January 1880, Suffield claims to have been an exception in the Province during the 1860s where fund-raising was concerned – he declined to do it and was so careless about it, he claims that "the countess of Tasker [sic] gave me a cheque for £3,000 and I forgot all about it until the following day."²⁹ That would be in today's values about £150,000 – a substantial proportion of the sum needed to build the London Priory. The Countess was a wealthy Dominican Tertiary (Third Order member), like the Dowager Duchess of Argyle, like Minna, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, Helen Gladstone (W.E.Gladstone's convert sister) and that Catholic version of Jane Austen's Lady Catherine de Burgh, the widow of the 12th Lord Arundell of Wardour. The latter signed her

²⁷ Nickolds to Aylward, 18 May 1863 (EDA) : ". . . Fr. Bern. is *gone abroad*, and as he wishes to sink into oblivion I think it is better for us and no worse for him to allow him to do so."

²⁸ Bernard Morewood OP to Jandel in August 1860 (typescript copy in EDA of AGOP XIII, No.12 – my translation from French original).

²⁹ Suffield to W.E.Gladstone, 30 January 1880 (Flintshire Record Office, GG 697). Miss Tasker had a papal title and the correct form, therefore, is 'Countess Tasker'.

letter to Fr. Aylward : “Mary Dominic Magdalen Arundell of Wardour, Ter’y OSD.”³⁰ Nobody, it appears, has done any substantial work on the lay and clerical Dominican Tertiaries of the period. They were extremely important for the prestige of the Order and particularly for their financial contributions. Yet the Catholic poor gave sacrificially when Joseph Porter and Philip Limerick went around Ireland and England begging for under-funded English Province projects. Fr. Limerick was sent off to Chile on a fund-raising tour.³¹ Nevertheless, for the substantial sums needed to build the Newcastle and London Priors, wealthy patrons were essential and begging letters went out to all Tertiaries and Catholic gentry who might be expected to contribute.

The rôle of the revived ‘Perpetual Rosary Association’ was crucial in building up the wider constituency of the Order. Fr. Suffield was Administrator and chief organiser. Hefty indulgences were attached to the recitations. An article in *The Tablet*³² informed readers that those who joined committed themselves to one hour of the day or night, per month, to pray the first chaplet for those particularly commended by the Associates, the second for the dying and the third for Holy Souls. Names of those for whom intercessions were asked were published in *The Rosary Magazine* of which Fr. Suffield was editor. Thus a chain of prayer was formed through every hour of every day and night. By the end of 1864, the number enrolled at Woodchester had reached 7,398 and by 1870, there were approximately 36,000 Associates. As Dominican friars went out to churches, convents and colleges throughout the British Isles, preaching missions and conducting retreats, they extended this very large constituency of men and women nourished by Dominican spirituality. At the same time, they drew lay people and clergy into the Third Order (Tertiaries) – no mere confraternity – some of whom sought conventual life, but the vast majority continuing to live and pray ‘in the world’. The first new monastery to be erected in England, the Cistercian House at Mount St Bernard, was founded through the generosity and devotion of Ambrose Phillips de Lisle of Grace Dieu – a Dominican Tertiary.

One of the wealthy Tertiaries, the Countess of Clare, settled at Ryde in the Isle of Wight, but had already formed a close relationship as patroness with the enclosed nuns of the Second Order at Atherstone in Warwickshire. She regarded herself, and the nuns did nothing to correct her assumption (they could hardly afford to do so !) that she was ‘Honorary Abbess’ of the Community. She lifted them

³⁰ Lady Arundell to Aylward, 15 February 1869 (EDA)

³¹ Aylward to Williams, 5 January 1870 (Newcastle Archives, EDA).

³² Anonymous article, ‘The Association of the Perpetual Rosary’ in *The Tablet*, 14 October 1865, pp. 645, 646.

out their financial difficulties by building them a pretty gothic convent on the hill just opposite Carisbrooke Castle. She provided two rooms for herself and an underground corridor to the chapel. When she was resident, she attended their meals on Fridays in the refectory, wearing her Tertiary's habit, sitting at the Prioress' table and eating food prepared by her own cook.³³ This House was visited by the Queen and two of the princesses in January 1869. "Our sisters," writes Aylward to Jandel, "took her over the whole monastery. She asked them several questions : did they work for the poor and the neighbouring town? Did they take part in the education of the young? . . . When she learned that . . . their vocation was not in exterior works . . ." she told one of the Ladies-in-waiting to place a "modest order" for some of the artificial flowers they made . . . "She was very gracious."³⁴ Her comment in her Journal is not particularly "gracious" – "What a dreary existence and to our ideas a useless one."³⁵ When so many Catholics fail to understand the vocation of enclosed Religious, it is hardly surprising that this Broad Church Anglican would fail to see the point of it. Alas, this Community, founded in 1661, dispersed in 1989. Of the five remaining nuns, four went to Bushey and one to Lisbon.

Having made a special study of the Dominican career of Rodolph Suffield, I have tried to resist the temptation to refer to him in this paper too frequently. However, he does illustrate tellingly the strengths and weaknesses of the Province during this period of revival. He joined the novitiate in 1860 when Woodchester was up and running. A beginning had been made at Newcastle where he himself had been parish priest at St Andrew's and deeply involved in bringing of the Dominicans back to the city. I suspect that it had been he who persuaded Bishop Hogarth to 'lease' the parish and schools to the Province. In a characteristically ardent lecture which Suffield gave in Newcastle on Whit Monday 1860, subsequently published as *The Holy Order of St Dominic*, he praises the Dominican system of governance : ". . . a constitution calculated to unite Christian liberty with Christian authority."³⁶

No doubt Suffield's much interrupted training was not unique in the Church of the day, but it appears to have been peculiarly irregular and inadequate. Between 1841 and 1843 he was at Peterhouse, Cambridge, but did not continue long enough to take his degree ; he

³³ Peter Clarke, *The Life of Elizabeth, Countess of Clare* (privately published by the Isle of Wight Catholic History Society, 2002) see chapter 5, 'St Dominic's Priory'.

³⁴ Aylward to Jandel, 26 January 1869 (AGOP XIII, No.228) : "Elle a été très gracieuse . . ."

³⁵ Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria R.I.* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 4th impression 1987) p. 571.

³⁶ Robert Suffield, *The Holy Order of St Dominic*, (Richardson, London, Dublin & Derby, 1860) p. 18.

spent only seven months at the Grand Séminaire of St Sulpice between 1847 to 1848 ; he was priested after just over twelve months at Ushaw in 1850.³⁷ True, there followed arduous training ‘in post’ – ten years on mission, based largely at Wooler in Northumberland. He was an energetic, intelligent, eloquent, affectionate, idealistic, conscientious man, already at Wooler establishing a form of community life with his fellow missionaries. When he applied to join the Dominican novitiate, that leading friar of the Province, Louis Gonin, wrote to Jandel on 21 July 1860 : “Among these vocations, there is one well worth noting – that of Fr. Suffield, one of the Newcastle priests, a celebrated preacher”.³⁸ Just over a year later, following his novitiate, he was preaching a mission at Stroud and, shortly after, was assigned to Kentish Town to assist the London foundation with Frs. Procter, Aylward and Albert Buckler. Yet, six weeks later, we have a letter from Procter to Jandel, complaining that all his fellow friars at Fortress Terrace were away conducting missions and retreats and leaving him “almost” on his own.³⁹

Being out and about on mission was to be typical of Suffield’s Dominican ministry – he was needed, his gifts appreciated, his assistance requested as a preacher throughout the British Isles. It is hardly surprising that this over-willing horse, with an inadequate ‘formation’ both as a Catholic and a Dominican, broke down in 1868 and his faith was shattered. Nevertheless, during those years, he had revived ‘The Perpetual Rosary Association’ ; also, with Raymund Palmer’s and other friars’ assistance, he had published a very influential update of *The Garden of the Soul* called *The Crown of Jesus*⁴⁰ — 98,000 copies were sold in the first four years ; and by his charismatic preaching and affectionate personality he had drawn a number of gifted young men to the novitiate at Woodchester – among them, one can identify with certainty, Giles Montgomery, Jerome Hargrove and Bertrand Wilberforce. The two most shocking ‘apostacies’ (condemnatory term used by Catholics as late as the mid 20th century) of Morewood and Suffield were both largely due to an overstretched Province over-promoting, over-employing and under-supervising talented, potentially unstable, inadequately trained friars. Some small blame attaches to the Provincials concerned, but they were very hard pressed. There are surely lessons to be learned here for today’s Church and Order.

³⁷ Ushaw College Diary gives dates of conferment of orders (Ushaw College Archives).

³⁸ Joachim Hyacinth Gonin to Jandel, 21 July 1860 (AGOP XIII, No.207) : “Parmi ces vocations, il y a d’assez remarquable, elle de P. Suffield l’un des Prêtres de Newcastle, ayant une renommée de prédicateur . . .”

³⁹ Procter to Jandel, 22 January 1862 (AGOP XIII, No.4) “. . . j’ai été presque seul.”

⁴⁰ Anonymous (Suffield, probably assisted mainly by Raymund Palmer OP) *The Crown of Jesus* (Richardson, London, Dublin & Derby, 1862).

Painstakingly, the Province recovered from these secessions and other scandals and got on with the intimidating tasks ahead. No wonder that the ailing Provincial, Fr. Aylward, writing from his sick-room in Kentish Town, to Fr. Antoninus Williams, who had been appointed to see that the Priory was built at Newcastle, laments: “£9,000 [*the sum needed to complete the Priory there*] is a tremendous hill to face – It already makes me feel very shaky.”⁴¹

Williams was a lovable and outstanding recruit to the Order: aged 15, he went to study under Nickolds at Hinckley; was a postulant there in 1852; clothed at Woodchester in 1855; professed 1856; studied at Rome 1857–59; then transferred to La Quercia, near Viterbo, to continue his studies; recalled thence to England to escape the danger of being caught up in the Garibaldian insurrection; served at Hinckley, Nuneaton and Stone until 1864 when he was sent to Newcastle. He was the indispensable ‘builder’ of two huge priories and had the church and priory there completed by 1873 and remained in post until he was elected Prior at London in 1878. They needed someone of his dynamism and competence to complete that vast church in Kentish Town which was opened in 1883. Williams was a big man, it was said, in every respect. One can tell by the way in which his brethren write to him that he could be teased and even rebuked. On one of those Victorian train journeys where crucial encounters often occurred, he converted the teenage Wilfrid Meynell from lapsed Quaker to ardent Catholic worshipper at the Newcastle Priory.⁴² It was largely the Meynell couple who rescued Francis Thompson and published his poems. Perhaps, then, we owe the publication of one of the great Catholic poems of the 19th century: *The Hound of Heaven*, indirectly to Fr. Antoninus.

Nevertheless, there is a letter from Fr. Joseph Portley to Fr. Antoninus which does not put that lovable man in quite so favourable a light. He seems to have written to Portley making some damning remarks about Suffield’s secession from the Order and the Church. Portley was on a fund-raising tour of Ireland and writes from Co. Donegal: “And now my dear fellow excuse *this* . . . Poor Suffield *may* be gone to the *dogs* but why send him *further*. I think we might leave him to God as to his future career . . . He had his talents and did good in his day and if he has fallen, so have others . . . I will not repeat your words and I think they ought not to appear on paper at least from the pen of a religious man. I am not *defending* Fr. Suffield. But I think charity *even* towards a fallen man (*one of ourselves*) would not be out of place.”⁴³

⁴¹ Aylward to Williams, 21 March 1870 (Newcastle Archives, EDA).

⁴² Viola Meynell, *Francis Thomson & Wilfrid Meynell* (Hollis & Carter, 1952) pp. 1, 2.

⁴³ Joseph Portley OP to Williams, 9 September 1870 (Newcastle Archives, EDA). Portley’s underlinings are italicised.

Admirable sentiments which express a truly Christian and Dominican spirit. It is pleasant to recall that Fr. Vincent King, newly elected Provincial in 1870, was equally charitable and generous in spirit. To estimate the quality of their charity, we should remember how bitterly such secessions and desertions were resented in a Church which still felt itself severely embattled.

So, to resume the metaphor, how was the patient in 1870? Certainly long out of intensive care, with health at times precarious but pretty well restored. The Province had grown to nearly 70 members, all but six professed. It continued to grow to about 100 by the end of the century. If we look forward to 1898, when Antoninus Williams was assigned to Woodchester as Prior, a remarkable young man entered the novitiate there. He became and remains the most celebrated of all modern English Dominicans – only Vincent McNabb comes anywhere near challenging him for that eminence. He was elected Provincial in 1916, aged only 35, and held that office for 16 years, during which time the Province grew from 124 to 183 members. He was a loving, erudite, zealous, just, boldly enterprising friar whose portrait hangs in the refectory of the Oxford Priory. He was Bede Jarrett and his picture, with that noticeably kind expression, richly deserves to be there. He was related to William Leigh⁴⁴ who had given the Woodchester church and the land for the Priory in 1850. Fr. Bede, against the gloomy prognostications of some of his brethren, was determined to bring Dominicans back to Oxford seven centuries after they had first established themselves there in 1221. Trusting that the Lord, and a few of his wealthy friends, would provide the finance, he built the Priory of the Holy Spirit in St Giles, Oxford. He is buried at Woodchester, but should you seek his memorial, there it stands in Oxford as today's Dominican Studium. It is a fitting symbol of the resuscitation of the English Province.

[This article is a revised version of a lecture given at Oxford Priory in 2003. I wish to pay tribute to the English Province's Archivist, Bede Bailey OP, for continuing generous assistance, advice and friendship. Any errors of fact and judgement are mine.]

Tony Cross
Email: tony.cross@hmc.ox.ac.uk

⁴⁴ Bede Jarrett's aunt (his father's sister) married William Leigh's son (Bailey, Bellenger & Tugwell, *Letters of Bede Jarrett*, op.cit.p.xvi).