

**Women on the Move:
Refugees, Migration and Exile**

Edited by

Fiona Reid and Katherine Holden

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**
P U B L I S H I N G

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO

TREVOR JOHNSON

URSULA MASSON

NEIL EDMUNDS

PATRICIA CLARK

ANITA HIGGIE

Women on the Move: Refugees, Migration and Exile,
Edited by Fiona Reid and Katherine Holden

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2010 by Fiona Reid and Katherine Holden and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2568-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2568-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Katherine Holden and Fiona Reid</i>	
Chapter One.....	9
Out of Sight and on the Margins? Migrating Women in Early Modern Europe	
<i>Raingard Esser</i>	
Chapter Two	25
Propaganda and the Supernatural: The Bridgettine Nuns of Syon Abbey in Exile, c.1539-1630	
<i>Virginia Bainbridge</i>	
Chapter Three.....	43
“An Unquiet Estate Abroad”: The Religious Exile of Catholic Noblewomen and Gentlewomen under Elizabeth I	
<i>Katy Gibbons</i>	
Chapter Four	59
Françoise ou American?: The Immigration Story of Josephine du Pont, 1795 to 1833	
<i>Evelyn Kassouf Spratt</i>	
Chapter Five	75
Moved to Minister: Christabel Pankhurst and Aimee Semple MacPherson in Los Angeles	
<i>Linda Martz</i>	
Chapter Six	93
Women, Exile and Islam: Some Notes on Recent Women’s Writing	
<i>Sharif Genie</i>	

Bibliographies	113
List of Contributors	131
Notes on Editors	133
Index	135

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edited collection was drawn from papers presented at the thirteenth annual conference of the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network: "Women on the Move: Refugees, Migration And Exile" held at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol in June 2007. We would like to thank both the UWE History Department and the Women's History Network for supporting the conference and for jointly financing the index for this book. We are also grateful to the History Departments at UWE and the University of Glamorgan for giving us time at work to edit this collection. Thanks are also due to Dr Jane Finucane for help with formatting and to committee members of the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network for general support and encouragement.

During the period between the conference and publication of this book, the editors and some of the contributors have had to cope with an unusually high number of serious illnesses and bereavements among family members and close colleagues. We have chosen therefore to dedicate the book to colleagues, partners and friends who have variously been cared for, remembered and greatly missed during these past four years.

CHAPTER TWO

PROPAGANDA AND THE SUPERNATURAL: THE BRIDGETTINE NUNS OF SYON ABBEY IN EXILE, c.1539-1630

VIRGINIA BAINBRIDGE

Syon Abbey was the most prestigious monastic community founded in later medieval England.¹ It was the only English house of *Bridgettines*, an order of women contemplatives, founded by St. Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373).² An outspoken member of the Swedish royal family, St. Bridget used her considerable force of personality to expose and condemn the corruption of world leaders, both religious and secular, and to advocate Church reform and world peace. The prayers of her strictly enclosed nuns were considered powerful because of their austere lifestyle and they were served by a college of priests who promoted St. Bridget's reformist agenda.³

Syon Abbey is renowned for its lavish foundation by King Henry V in 1415 and its patronage by Lancastrian, Yorkist and Tudor royal dynasties. The community was a centre of the Humanist reform favoured at court during Henry VIII's marriage to Katherine of Aragon, and was associated with the political faction which lost ascendancy over his divorce, his marriage to Anne Boleyn and his supremacy over the English church.⁴ Despite being royal servants, the community placed conscience over duty to the monarch and its continuing loyalty to Rome placed Syon at the forefront of political and religious opposition to the Tudor state. Like St. Thomas More and other leading conservatives, Syon supported Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, a political prophetess in the mould of St. Bridget, executed in 1534 for prophesying doom to Henry VIII if he married Anne Boleyn.⁵ The price of this support was the martyrdom of Syon priest St. Richard Reynolds at Tyburn in 1535.⁶ His speech to the tribunal which sentenced him to death and his dying words from the scaffold won a propaganda victory for the supporters of Rome.⁷ Syon featured in propaganda from both sides of the emerging religious divide.

Anne Boleyn was said to have visited the nuns in 1534, they met her with passive disobedience and a refusal to accept reformist literature, although this may have been a Protestant rumour spread to discredit the Bridgettines.⁸ Friar William Peto, a confessor of Katherine of Aragon, cast Henry VIII as the wicked biblical King Ahab, and by implication, Anne Boleyn as his wife Jezebel.⁹ Peto's prophecy of 1535 was said to have come true in 1547 when Henry's corpse, lying at Syon overnight, exploded in its coffin and dogs were found licking up his remains, the fate which befell Ahab.¹⁰

Syon Abbey played a significant role in forging English Roman Catholic identity in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Small but determined numbers of women made the journey into exile to follow their vocations at Syon, the only English-speaking house of nuns from 1539 to 1598. They endured uncertainty, poverty and danger in the Low Countries and Northern France. They were driven from place to place by the Religious Wars and in 1594 they finally fled to Lisbon, a port in Spanish territory. This was an era of fierce propaganda battles between English Protestant and Catholic factions and international political interests. According to official Protestant dogma the age of miracles was over but the seductive appeal of Roman Catholicism was that it continued to authenticate believers' experience of the supernatural in their daily lives.¹¹ The Bridgettines lived marginal lives as refugees, but their mediation of the divine through prayer, relics and miracles enhanced their status in their host communities.¹² They interpreted their exile and wanderings in biblical terms and this gave them the strength to survive as a religious community, like the Israelites in Babylon remembering Syon.¹³

The First Exile and Return to England

Following the martyrdom of Richard Reynolds, Syon's fall from royal favour continued. The Brothers and Sisters maintained their opposition to Henry VIII's religious policies with few exceptions.¹⁴ In 1537, lay Brother Thomas Brownell died of fever in the squalid conditions of Newgate Jail, a common death for sixteenth-century Roman Catholic martyrs.¹⁵ Although Syon reached an uneasy truce with the government, it was dissolved with the other larger monasteries in 1539.

In 1539 Abbess Agnes Jordan (d. 1544) and her nuns left their home at Isleworth, Middlesex, for an uncertain future. Later they claimed that their community was never dissolved because they chose not to hand in their convent seal or the keys to their house. Some of the fifty-six Sisters and seventeen Brothers were placed under house arrest where their activities could be monitored, and others retired in groups to live, according to the

Rule, with relatives who were wealthy enough to accommodate them.¹⁶ Agnes Jordan supported a large group on her substantial pension of £200 a year, at Southlands, a house rented from Edmund Peckham at Denham, Buckinghamshire.¹⁷ Syon's Brothers were shared out among the groups of Sisters to provide access to the sacraments. As far as possible the community was organised and ready to return home to Syon as soon as religious policies allowed.

Sister Catherine Palmer emerged as the leader of a group which joined the exodus of Catholic intellectuals leaving England in 1539.¹⁸ Few details of this first phase of Syon's exile are known, but her group first found refuge with the Augustinian canons at Antwerp, known as the Falcon Sisters.¹⁹ On Agnes Jordan's death in 1544, Catherine Palmer returned to collect those who had lived with her and the enlarged group went to live with their fellow Bridgettines at the abbey of Mariatroon at Dendermonde (Termonde), Flanders. In 1553 Mariatroon received a visit from the young Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-87), who began an intermittent association with Syon.²⁰

By 1556 Queen Mary Tudor had successfully returned England to Roman Catholicism and leading religious exiles, including the Bridgettines, were recalled. They stayed with the Falcon Sisters at Antwerp once again while they were waiting to embark for England.²¹ In 1557, eighteen Sisters and three Brothers, around one third of those pensioned eighteen years before were solemnly re-enclosed at Isleworth under Abbess Palmer.²² Syon was apparently recruiting other exiled nuns through English networks in the Low Countries, as a place was reserved for Sister Elizabeth Woodford, a scholarly nun professed at Burnham Abbey in 1519. After Burnham Abbey was dissolved in 1538, Sister Elizabeth retired to the household of Dr John Clement and his wife Margaret (née Giggs), St. Thomas More's ward. At the start of Edward VI's reign Clement took his household into exile at Louvain and in 1548 Sister Elizabeth entered the Flemish-speaking convent of St. Ursula's where she was later joined by the Clements' daughter Margaret, a future prioress, and twenty-five other English women. Sister Elizabeth decided against returning to England in 1557.²³ Abbess Catherine Palmer and her Sisters did not remain at Syon for long. Queen Mary's death on 17th November 1558 was recorded in the Syon Martiroge, and in May 1559 Queen Elizabeth suppressed the few re-founded religious communities.²⁴ England's return to Protestantism left the Bridgettines no choice but to return to exile in the Low Countries, if they were to continue their shared contemplative life.

Exile in the Low Countries

The Spanish ambassador, Gomez, Duke of Feria (d.1571) arranged passports and chartered a ship to carry the Bridgettines, the Carthusian monks of Sheen, the Dominican nuns of Dartford and other Roman Catholic refugees into exile.²⁵ His family history shows how patronage of Syon was passed down through several generations and contributed to the community's survival in exile. The Duke was married to Jane Dormer (1538-1612), a lady of Queen Mary's court.²⁶ Jane's great-aunt was Sister Mary Newdigate of Syon (d. 1535) whose brother Sebastian, once a courtier and friend of Henry VIII, became a Carthusian monk after his wife died.²⁷ Sebastian's refusal to acknowledge royal supremacy over the Church led to his martyrdom in 1535, he was allegedly singled out for harsh treatment because Henry felt betrayed by his former friend.²⁸ Their sister Lady Joanna Dormer (d. 1571), supported leading Catholic intellectuals under Edward VI, and these were later promoted by Queen Mary. In exile, she was a benefactor of the University of Louvain and of Syon. Her son William Dormer was a member of Queen Mary's council. William and his wife Mary, the daughter of Sir Henry Sidney a prominent courtier, were Jane's parents. Her cousin Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86), was among the officers of English troops who protected the Syon nuns from Calvinist soldiers at Mechlin in the 1570s.²⁹ On her progress to Spain Jane became close to Mary Queen of Scots, and at the Spanish court she was a leading supporter of English, Scottish and Irish Roman Catholicism.³⁰ Her two great-nieces, Anne (Bridget in religion) and Lucy, daughters of Anthony Maria Browne, the second Viscount Montagu and the most powerful English Catholic of his generation, became nuns at Syon in the early seventeenth century.³¹

The experience of the Bridgettines in the Low Countries paralleled the experience of their fellow-travellers the Carthusians, and the Dominicans: they all commenced a period of "wanderings" which lasted for decades.³² Their poverty and the dangers of the Religious Wars made it impossible for them to settle permanently. Initially the Bridgettines returned to Mariatroon at Dendermonde and the two communities, one English and the other Flemish, lived side-by-side under two abbesses. Inevitably pressure on living space, lack of money and issues of authority led to tensions.³³ Syon remained at Mariatroon for about four years relying on a small pension from Philip II of Spain, alms from other religious exiles and money from their families at home.³⁴ The outbreak of the Religious Wars made its position dangerous and so in 1563 Philip II's regent, Margaret of Parma, placed Bethany, an abandoned *béguinage* at the community's

disposal. This lay at Hemstede near Zurich Zee in the province of Zeeland.³⁵ Because the low-lying site was unhealthy, Dr Nicholas Sander (c. 1530-1581) the Roman Catholic apologist and brother of Sisters Margaret and Elizabeth Sander, bought the monastery of *Mons Pacis* (Mount Peace) and its lands from the Augustinians of Mishagen in 1567.³⁶ This became Syon's home between 1568 and 1571 and the community, which numbered twenty-two in 1569, re-established religious life there, praying for the Augustinians' benefactors as well as their own. *Mons Pacis* lay at Eeckeren in the countryside outside Mishagen, near the port of Antwerp. Antwerp was at the centre of fierce fighting and the monastery's isolated position made it vulnerable to attack. The Bridgettines experienced regular harassment by Calvinist and Lutheran troops, and in 1571 they were forced to take refuge in Antwerp.³⁷

From Antwerp they made their way south to Mechlin (Malines), where they lived from 1572 for around seven years.³⁸ Sir Francis Englefield helped the Bridgettines to rent a substantial house with gardens on *la Rue du Vieux-Bruul* near the Butter Market.³⁹ Englefield was one of the leaders of the English exile community.⁴⁰ He had been a member of Queen Mary's Council and his extended family included several generations of patrons and inmates of Syon. The Bridgettines came to Mechlin during one of its most troubled periods. Serious fighting between Catholic and Protestant forces ceased just before they arrived in 1572.⁴¹ In 1576 townsmen searching for soldiers and weapons broke into the convent, violated the enclosure and looted its goods. The mob was met by the aged Abbess Catherine Palmer at the head of her community: she never recovered from the shock and died soon afterwards.⁴² The town authorities also confiscated two-thirds of the annual Spanish pension of £600. In a diplomatic move that same year, Philip II revoked the pensions of exiled religious and expelled many English exiles. As a result of these events, the Bridgettines sank deeper into poverty necessitating desperate measures.⁴³ In 1578 the new Abbess, Bridget Rooke, was forced to break up the community by sending the younger sisters from well-connected families back to England to collect alms and to shelter until community life could be fully restored.⁴⁴ Renewed hostilities broke out and there was widespread destruction in the suburbs. The rest of the community was forced to abandon life at Mechlin in 1580. They left for Antwerp under an escort of English soldiers from the army of the Prince of Orange and embarked by ship for Rouen.⁴⁵

Recruiting Bridgettines

It is clear from this brief account of Syon's years in the Low Countries that religious life there was unpredictable and dangerous. Nevertheless, young English recruits continued to be drawn to the Bridgettines, in preference to the Dominicans, whose community numbered twelve, mainly elderly, members in 1559 and died out in 1585.⁴⁶ In 1587 Syon Abbey had twenty-four Sisters and six Brothers, a total of thirty members, and thirty-one in 1594 when there were twenty-three Sisters and eight Brothers.⁴⁷ What made English gentry women leave their homes to become nuns in exile? John Gee's pamphlet *New Shreds of the Old Snare* satirised the process by which they came to realise their vocation: unscrupulous priests and Jesuits interested in their money played on their emotions and convinced them to rely on the guidance of supernatural visions, then spirited them away through an underground network of contacts to join religious orders on the Continent.⁴⁸ This parodies the experience of the daughters of Sir John Arundel (d. 1590), whose household was served by the charismatic priest Father John Cornelius, a contemplative credited with supernatural powers.⁴⁹ The sisters' Anglican half-brother John, the ninth Lord Stourton (d. 1588) appeared to Cornelius when he was saying mass for his soul, begging for his family's prayers from Purgatory.⁵⁰ Others present, including Dorothy Arundel, also experienced manifestations. Cicely Arundel (d. 1623), had become a Bridgettine by 1587 and Cornelius reminded Dorothy of her own vow to St. Bridget when he wrote to her on the eve of his martyrdom in 1594. Instead, she and her sister Gertrude entered the English Benedictine house of Brussels when it was founded in 1598.⁵¹

The Life and Good End of Sister Marie, a contemporary biography of Sister Mary Champney of Syon (d. 1580), tells a similar story from a nun's perspective.⁵² The manuscript was based on Mary's own reflections as she lay dying of tuberculosis. She went abroad in the 1560s as a "waiting gentlewoman with one of good worship" and was placed with nuns at Antwerp to study Latin and the Divine Office. At first she was homesick, but following a crucial vision at Mass and with the support of local Jesuits, she decided to stay in Flanders and become a nun. During her period of training her friends took her to visit the Bridgettines at Meshagen. Their distinctive habit reminded her of a vision she received aged twelve, and she understood that this was the order for which she was destined. She was professed in 1569 and was Chantress by 1572. She was one of the younger nuns sent back to England for safety in 1578 and to help raise funds, when the community was approaching starvation.

Suffering from advanced tuberculosis aggravated by conditions at Syon, she spent her last weeks at a Catholic safe house at Fulham. This final period of her life coincided with Lent and Easter-tide and her faith inspired her many visitors. Her funeral was a major gathering of recusants, celebrated by a college of priests.

The way in which recruits like Mary Champney reached Syon and other English-speaking nunneries founded after 1598 follows a common pattern. English recusants, especially poorer ones, gained the opportunity to travel abroad in the households of wealthy and influential persons. When the widowed Grace, Lady Babthorpe entered the religious life at St. Ursula's Augustinian convent, Louvain, she brought her maid Ursula Whitseal with her and later helped two more servants, Ann and Mary Stonehouse, to become nuns.⁵³ The household of Syon's patron, the widowed Jane, Duchess of Feria was run on semi-monastic lines, and one or two servants left each year to join various religious orders.⁵⁴ Her great-nieces Anne (Bridget) and Lucy Browne were accompanied to Syon by their maid Anne.⁵⁵

The Making of Syon's History in Rouen

For women like Margaret Woodford and Mary Champney, performance of the Divine Office, study and contemplation were the central activities of their religious life.⁵⁶ When Syon left the Low Countries for Rouen in 1580, having sold the property at Meshagen, the luggage the community registered with the port authorities for the voyage comprised of two great and two small casks and a great barrel all containing books, five more containers of unbound books and an enormous package of altar pieces.⁵⁷

At Rouen the Bridgettines were welcomed by John Leslie, exiled Bishop of Ross and former secretary to Mary Queen of Scots, who was to be one of their chief supporters during their fourteen years in France.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, they had travelled from one region blighted by civil war to another. The French Wars of Religion had begun in 1562 and were to continue until 1594. Rouen, like Antwerp, was a major port and economic centre and thus of strategic importance. The Bridgettines lived through two sieges of Rouen, one in 1589 and one in 1591-92, and both mounted by Anglo-French forces.⁵⁹ Both Bishop Leslie and Father Forster, Syon's confessor-general, supported the Catholic League defeated by Henry IV in 1593 and this necessitated Syon's flight to Lisbon in the Spanish territory of Portugal in 1594.

A *History of Syon's Wanderings* is the main source on Syon's exile.⁶⁰ Several versions were developed at Rouen by members of the community and their supporters for propaganda purposes. The account organised a fractured history into a coherent narrative around the theme of exile, thus identifying Syon with Israel, God's chosen people of the Old Testament. It highlighted certain themes including the vulnerability of Catholic womanhood as fighting forced the Sisters to move from place to place, their poverty and the support of wealthy benefactors. Potential benefactors were clearly an intended audience. It emphasised the supernatural guidance the Bridgettines received through dreams and visions as they moved towards their destiny and it provides a unique window into their mental world in the decades around 1600. The mythology of Syon's wanderings was created by Father Forster, Syon's confessor-general from 1584 to his death in 1628, assisted by leading exiles, Father Robert Persons the Jesuit, and Sir Francis Englefield.⁶¹ A longer version was written by one of the Bridgettine Brothers or Sisters once the community was settled at Lisbon.⁶²

The *History* discreetly ignored the majority of nuns who continued their monastic lives in England between 1539 and 1559. It focused instead on the group which went into exile under Catherine Palmer, linking Syon's sufferings abroad with the experience of hard-line English Catholics who chose exile rather than compromise the practice of their faith, or who sought exile of necessity because of their political acts and allegiances. They and their supporters in England were an intended audience of the narrative which centred on Father Forster, who shared this background.⁶³ Father Seth alias Joseph Forster (d. 1628) came from a prominent Yorkshire gentry family which produced a number of martyrs. He was well-educated, well-connected and politically astute, all qualities which were vital to Syon's survival in the late 1500s and early 1600s. His parents and Isabel, the wife of his elder brother William, all died while imprisoned for recusancy in York Castle in the early 1580s. William died later in exile at Antwerp and several of his children followed religious vocations, perhaps out of financial necessity as much as choice. Two became Jesuits, Seth and Thomas, a missionary who died in Lincoln gaol, and Clare Dowman alias Forster (d. 1627) was professed at Syon in 1609. Two of her Syon contemporaries, Sister Frances Holtby (fl. c. 1610-22) and Sister Anne Wharton (d. 1632) were probably her cousins. Clare's eldest brother Richard Forster (c. 1585-1661) was a Roman Catholic courtier of Henrietta Maria and Charles I.⁶⁴ Father Forster himself studied at Douai, he was one of the students Cardinal Allen sent to found the English College at Rome and he received a pension from the Pope. Forster helped

the Bridgettines to find a home in Rouen in 1584 after all of Syon's Brothers had died. Having been persuaded to become confessor-general, he recruited a new body of Brothers and secured some patronage from the King of France. Following the second siege of Rouen he arranged Syon's passage to Portugal and negotiated a pension from the King of Spain. In Lisbon he developed good relations with English merchants and his nephew, Richard Forster, helped him to recruit new members for Syon.

An early chapter of the *History* recounts Forster's near death from alleged poisoning when he was Syon's only priest, and his miraculous recovery.⁶⁵ He was already given up as dead and prayers were being offered for his soul in English seminaries when Sister Gertrude Tyrrell was given a sign that his life would be spared. As she prayed earnestly before an image of Our Blessed Lady, her candle was extinguished as if he had died and the flame miraculously re-lit to indicate his recovery. As a person of holy life, Gertrude's prayers were considered powerful and she became a channel through which the divine will was revealed to her community.

At Rouen, poverty continued to be a major problem despite the generosity of some leading citizens and English exiles. In 1587, A *supplication made for poore Syon*, an early version of the *History* was addressed to "all charitable and well-disposed Catholics on behalf of the religious virgins and brethren of Syon."⁶⁶ The document summarised the wanderings of the community under Abbesses Catherine Palmer and Bridget Rooke, and it begged for alms in order to avert its dissolution. It was signed by twenty-four Sisters headed by Abbess Rooke, including Elizabeth Sander, who had recently returned from imprisonment in England, and six Brothers headed by Father Forster. Numbers were replenished by a steady flow of recruits from families of Roman Catholic activists.⁶⁷ Prioress Ursula Hoorde (d. 1598), came from a family which belonged to the pre-Reformation intellectual and clerical elite and she and her cousin William Hoorde were heavily involved in Roman Catholic resistance to Elizabeth's regime.⁶⁸ William was imprisoned with Sister Elizabeth Sander in 1580 for distributing Campion's *Challenge* and later he helped her to escape. Jane Wiseman, who took her children to visit the Roman Catholic prisoners in the notorious Wisbech gaol and was later condemned to death for treason, was the mother of Anne (d. 1650) and Barbara (d. 1649) Wiseman who both became abbesses of Syon.⁶⁹ Such women were propelled into exile by their family's ideology. Others, like Father Forster and his relatives, were refugees fleeing from the effects on their families of martyrdom and persecution. The *Supplication* was

obviously successful in attracting funds as Syon survived, although in very difficult conditions.

In one of her letters to her kinsman Sir Francis Englefield, Elizabeth Sander vividly described the suspicion the community lived under and the very real possibility of the Brothers' execution as English-speaking traitors within Rouen. Syon was searched for concealed weapons, accused of destroying the city's water conduits when the convent was flooded, and of spreading the plague.⁷⁰ The *History of Syon's Wanderings* recorded situations when God intervened miraculously: the preservation from death of a Brother from a canon ball and of Father Forster from a chain shot, were "two special favours of God," and when the authorities failed to find provisions when searching the enclosure, the Bridgettines interpreted this as "the manifest finger of God" preserving their precious rations.⁷¹ Their prayers, their church, a place of refuge which held relics including a piece of the true cross given by Queen Mary Tudor, and miracles attributed to St. Bridget, all considerably raised the esteem in which the community was held in such troubled times and attracted patronage from influential citizens.⁷² The *History* describes three miracles of St. Bridget.⁷³ A public notary experienced an "amazing miracle wrought by our holy mother St. Bridget," when a candle set his papers on fire one evening and he called out to her and the flames were immediately extinguished. In gratitude he gave the community alms, free legal advice indefinitely and a stained glass window painted with an image of the Holy Trinity. Around the same time, a pilot who had witnessed the devotion of the people in the convent church, invited his ship's company to call upon St. Bridget when they were caught in a dangerous storm and had lost all hope of escape. After the tempest ceased and they found themselves in safety he collected alms and sent them to the Bridgettines with a record of the miracle. In the third miracle, Captain Pedrier in the thick of fighting at the Battle of Dreux, was in grave danger of being killed, but miraculously escaped by vowing a silver lamp to St. Bridget, which he placed in the convent church.

By the time the Abbess Bridget Rooke died on the feast of the Epiphany in 1594, the Bridgettines had achieved a measure of respect in Rouen. The Abbess's funeral was well-attended by people of all ranks, including members of the Court of Parliament, and her body was accompanied by her Bridgettine brethren, the four orders of friars, and twelve virgins dressed in white, each carrying a white taper, organised by a wealthy lady benefactor.⁷⁴ The funeral was conducted by the Bishop of Ross and the Cathedral theologian preached the sermon. The *History* recorded the effect of exile on this woman, who died after a long sickness, worn out by travels and troubles, and heart-broken by poverty and the break-up of the

community in Flanders. Her life as a religious woman in exile was described in paradoxical terms: she was a captain or general who led her company through terrible events, a pattern of humility to all though a superior, an example of the greatest mildness though a governor and corrector. Father Forster considered her prayers so powerful that they caused him to enter Syon.⁷⁵ He sought her interpretation of a disturbing dream which seemed to foretell the need to leave France.⁷⁶ When the community was praying for guidance about where to go, she appeared to him in a dream, and was a comfort "knowing her great affection to him and that convent and that she certainly prayed and used all her interest with Our Lord for us in these great dangers."⁷⁷

From Rouen to Lisbon

The whole process of travelling from Rouen to Lisbon over Easter 1594 was guided "by the divine help and providence of God," a necessity given the lack of information for such a voyage in hostile military conditions.⁷⁸ Earlier that year, Queen Elizabeth's physician Dr Rodrigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jew and double agent, was condemned to death for plotting to poison her. Hostile factions hampered the journey, believing the community's hurried departure from Rouen and choice of Portugal as their destination revealed their involvement in this notorious plot.⁷⁹ Father Forster called on St. Bridget, an experienced traveller and pilgrim, for guidance and received a series of dreams: he saw weapons of war turned into instruments of the passion, he wrestled with the devil and heard him say "now I will be revenged of thee presently," causing them to lose their ship at Newhaven and many other problems.⁸⁰ He later heard a voice singing of Israel's delivery from Egypt, meaning that the Devil's power had been broken by the prayers of the English Capucins; and afterwards he discovered that God had sent fog to protect their ship from capture by four English men-of-war.⁸¹

The reception Syon received in Lisbon was mixed, reflecting the uncertainties of exile.⁸² They were greeted warmly by the archbishop, but later experienced difficulty having the Bridgettine Rule recognised by the diocesan authorities. There were the usual problems of finding suitable accommodation for an enclosed religious order on very little money and of attracting new patrons. However, by the 1620s, Syon was well established at Lisbon and Father Forster was repositioning the Bridgettines for a possible return from exile after the death of James I. Syon's patrons Anthony Browne, Viscount Montagu in England, and his aunt Jane, Duchess of Feria in Spain, were leading supporters of a marriage between

the future Charles I and the Spanish Infanta, hoping it would lead to toleration for Roman Catholics in England.⁸³ Forster commissioned an illuminated manuscript of the *History of Syon's Wanderings* as a gift for the Infanta, emphasising Syon's foundation by King Henry V of England and its protection by the King of Spain.⁸⁴

Thomas Robinson's scurrilous pamphlet, *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon*, was first printed in 1622 and reprinted several times in the 1620s and 1630s, a time of heightened anxiety about Roman Catholicism in England.⁸⁵ The author claimed to have been a novice Brother at Syon but the account may have been merely Protestant propaganda. Syon was part of the Counter-Reformation resurgence of English monasticism and Father Forster was well-placed to play a significant role in English politics. The author had little to report, but implied that the aged father had improper relations with Abbess Preston and the nuns and that his shrewd investments in Portuguese trade supported Syon financially. More significantly, the pamphlet attacked Syon's continuing ability to recruit young nuns and priests by appealing to parental anxieties: it suggested that Syon was in the third rank, below the aristocratic foundations of the Low Countries, and even the Poor Clares.⁸⁶

The failure of the Spanish match was not the end of Father Forster's ambition to renew Syon's special relationship with the English monarchy. Forster probably used his nephew Richard Forster to gain influence at the court of Charles I. His queen, Henrietta Maria was a devotee of St. Bridget and Richard Forster was a prominent member of her household in England and later in exile in France.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Syon Abbey was founded to intercede on behalf of its royal patrons with God and his saints in the supernatural realm. However, the community's refusal to accept royal authority over the English church in the 1530s had severe consequences which included persecution, martyrdom and exile. Both before and after its dissolution in 1539, Syon Abbey played a significant role in the propaganda battle for hearts and minds in the English Reformation. Although they were pioneers of monastic exile, the Bridgettines have not been assessed alongside other English exile communities in the Low Countries and Northern France until recently because of their relocation to Lisbon in 1594.⁸⁸ Surviving propaganda of both the Bridgettines and their enemies from the 1580s to the 1620s reveals that Syon was still regarded by contemporaries as politically significant. The community continued to recruit postulants from

English court circles and patronage by the Kings of Spain maintained its profile. While the Spanish Infanta was the intended bride of the future Charles I, Syon seemed poised to return to its old role serving the English monarchy.

Despite Syon's ability to attract powerful patrons, its existence came at the price of poverty, near starvation and frequent homelessness for its members. For them the age of miracles was not over, and the *History of Syon's Wanderings* and their other writings testify to God's miraculous preservation of the community on its journey from England in 1539, and its subsequent journey to Lisbon in 1594.⁸⁹ Supernatural guidance was part of the daily lives of the Sisters and Brothers who received signs to determine their vocations abroad, and dreams and visions revealing God's will for the whole community. According to Psalm 137, the Israelites, in exile in Babylon, wept when they remembered Syon.⁹⁰ In exile in Lisbon for over 250 years, the Bridgettines celebrated their Englishness and their royal connections by venerating early medieval English royal saints whose portraits they commissioned for their convent.⁹¹ The judicious use of propaganda, powerful patrons in England and abroad and extended family networks all contributed to the community's survival. Their religious faith was rewarded by God's guidance in the uncertainties of exile and on their return home to England in 1861 following Roman Catholic emancipation. After an unbroken 600 year history Syon Abbey is currently located in Devon.

Notes

I would like to thank my colleagues in the History Department at the University of the West of England for encouraging my research, especially Dr. Trevor Johnson (d. 2007).

1. George J. Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, Isleworth* (London: J.B. Nichols, 1840).
2. Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1999).
3. Virginia R. Bainbridge, "Women and the Transmission of Religious Culture: Benefactresses of Three Bridgettine Convents," *Birgittiana* 1 (1997): 55-76; Virginia R. Bainbridge, "The Bridgettines and Major Trends in Religious Devotion c.1400-1600," *Birgittiana* 19 (2005): 225-240.
4. Maria Dowling, "Humanist Support for Katherine of Aragon," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 57 (1984): 46-55.
5. Alan Neame, *The Holy Maid of Kent: the Life of Elizabeth Barton 1506-1534* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971).

6. Adam Hamilton, *The Angel of Syon: the Life and Martyrdom of the Blessed Richard Reynolds* (Edinburgh: Sands, 1905); Virginia R. Bainbridge, "Reynolds, Richard" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *DNB*) ed. Lawrence Goldman. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23430> (accessed August 30, 2010).
7. *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London: HMSO, 1864-1932) Vol. 7, 661.
8. "William Latimer's Chronicle of Anne Bulleynne," ed. Maria Dowling, *Camden Miscellany*, Vol. XXX Series 4, 39 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1990): 23-65.
9. Dowling, "Humanist Support for Katherine of Aragon," 52-55.
10. Aungier, *Syon*, 92; Neame, *Holy Maid*, 155-57.
11. Alexandra Walsham, "Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England," *Historical Journal* 46 (2003): 779-815.
12. Trevor Johnson, "Blood, Tears and Xavier Water: Jesuit Missionaries and Popular Religion," in *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400-1800*, eds. Bob Scribner and Trevor Johnson (London, MacMillan, 1996), 183-202.
13. *The Bible*, Psalm 137.
14. Aungier, *Syon*, 83-88.
15. British Library (hereafter BL), Add MS 22285, fo. 60v; Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community 1535-1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
16. T.F. Knox, ed., *Records of the English Catholics under the Penal Laws* Vol. 1 (London: David Nutt, 1878), 360-2.
17. Exeter University Library (hereafter EUL) MS. 95, Canon John Rory Fletcher's mss. Vol. 18, 87-103; John Rory Fletcher, *The Story of the English Bridgettines* (South Brent, Devon: Syon Abbey, 1933), 37-39.
18. Peter Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent 1558-1795* (London: Longman, 1914), xv.
19. F. Donnet, "Les Brigitines Anglaises à Mishagen," *Annales du Congrès Historique et Archéologique de Malines* 2 (1911): 57-58; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 56.
20. A. De Vlamincq, ed. *L'église collégiale Notre-Dame à Termonde et son ancien obituaire*. Part I (Cercle Archéologique de la ville et de l'ancien pays de Termonde. Publications extraordinaires, VIII Dendermonde, 1898), 280-1.
21. Donnet, "Les Brigitines Anglaises," 56-8.
22. Aungier, *Syon*, 97-8.
23. J. Morris, ed., *Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers* (London: Burns and Oates, 1872-77), Vol. 1, 32-3; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 378.
- 24 BL, Add MS 22285, fo. 63 v.
25. David Loades, "Suárez de Figueroa" in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70578> (accessed August 30, 2010); Henry Clifford, *The Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria*, trans. E.E. Escourt, ed. J. Stevenson (London: Burns and Oates, 1887); Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 4, 43, 57, 201.
26. M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado "Suárez de Figueroa, née Dormer," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7836> (accessed August 30, 2010).
27. BL, Add MS 22285, fos. 26 v., 191 v.
28. V. Bainbridge, "Newdigate, Sebastian," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68241> (accessed August 30, 2010); *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, Vol.7, 354.
29. W.T. MacCaffrey, "Sidney, Sir Henry," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/255220> (accessed August 30, 2010); H.R. Woudhuysen, "Sidney, Sir Philip," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25522> (accessed August 30, 2010); Francis R. Johnston, *Syon Abbey* (Eccles: Eccles and District History Society, 1964) 13.
30. Clifford, *Life of Jane Dormer*, 115; Rodriguez-Salgado "Suárez de Figueroa, née Dormer," in *DNB*.
31. G. E. Cokayne et al, *The Complete Peerage*, 12 vols. (London: 2nd. edition, St Catherine Press, 1910-59) Vol. 4, 412; Aungier, *Syon*, 99-100; Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
32. Maurice Chauncy, *Historia Aliquot Martyrum Anglorum* (London: Burns and Oates, 1888), xix-xxv; Geoffrey Anstruther, *A Hundred Homeless Years: English Dominicans 1558-1658* (London: Blackfriars, 1958), 1-15; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 41-55. The Carthusians were living in a similar situation in Bruges.
33. Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 43, 47, 57.
34. Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 57.
35. Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 58; Donnet, "Les Brigitines Anglaises," 55.
36. T.F. Mayer, "Sander, Nicholas," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24621> (accessed August 30, 2010); Donnet, "Les Brigitines Anglaises," 58-29.
37. Donnet, "Les Brigitines Anglaises," 56, 60, 62-63. Their interest in the property was eventually sold in 1580; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 58.
38. R. Lechat, "Une communauté Anglaise réfugiée à Malines au XVIe Siècle: Les Brigitines de Sion," *Annales du Congrès historique et Archéologique Malines*, 2 (1911): 243-259.
39. Lechat, "Une Communauté Anglaise," 246-49.
40. A.J. Loomie, "Engelfield, Sir Francis," in *DNB* <http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/8811> (accessed August 30, 2010).
41. Lechat, "Une Communauté Anglaise," 247.
42. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 12, 138-43, Vol. 19, 35.
43. Lechat, "Une Communauté Anglaise," 253-56.
44. EUL, MS 95 Vol. 19, 73 ; Lechat, "Une Communauté Anglaise," 256-57.
45. Lechat, "Une Communauté Anglaise," 257-58; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 58.

46. Virginia R. Bainbridge, "Who were the English Bridgettines? The Brothers and Sisters of Syon Abbey, 1415-1600," in *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena*, eds. Claes Gejrot, Sara Risburg and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2010) 37-49; Anstruther, *A Hundred Homeless Years*, 6-14.
47. Knox, *Records of the English Catholics*, 36-2., Aungier, *Syon*, 109.
48. J. Gee, *New Shreds of the Old Snare, containing the apparitions of two new female ghosts etc.* (London: printed by John Dawson for Robert Milbourne, 2nd edition 1624).
49. Richard Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests, 1577-1684* (London: Burns and Oates, 1924), 198-202; Morris, *Troubles*, Vol. 1, 138 n; Morris, *Troubles*, Vol. 2, 127-30; Pamela Y. Stanton, "Arundel Family," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/41331> (accessed August 30, 2010).
50. Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, Vol. 12, Part 1, 308-309; Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002), 242-45.
51. Kate Aughterson, "Arundell, Dorothy," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68019> (accessed August 30, 2010).
52. BL MS 18650; Ann M. Hutchison, ed. "Mary Champney: a Bridgettine Nun under the Rule of Queen Elizabeth I," *Birgittiana* 13 (2002); see also Ann M. Hutchison, "Syon Abbey: Dissolution, No Decline," *Birgittiana* 2 (1996): 245-59; Ann M. Hutchison, "Beyond the Margins: the Recusant Bridgettines," in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order* ed. J. Hogg (Salzburg: Analecta Cartusiana, 1993) 267-84.
53. Morris, *Troubles*, Vol. 1, 222-4.
54. Clifford, *Life of Jane Dormer*, 148.
55. Aungier, *Syon*, 99-100.
56. Virginia R. Bainbridge, "Women and Learning in Syon Abbey c.1415-1600," in *Syon Abbey and its Books, 1400-1700*, eds. Edward A. Jones and Alexandra M. Walsham (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 82-103.
57. Donnet, "Les Brigittines Anglaises," 61-63; Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 58-59.
58. Guilday, *English Catholic Refugees*, 58-9; Aungier, *Syon*, 108-9.
59. Fletcher, *English Bridgettines*, 70-111.
60. For a summary of the various versions and publication dates see Hutchison, "Beyond the Margins," 269 n.
61. Hamilton, *Angel of Syon*, 82-3, 97-113.
62. Hutchison, "Beyond the Margins," 269 n.
63. I cite the version of *A History of Syon's Wanderings* annotated by J.R. Fletcher, EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19.
64. M. Forster, "Forster, Sir Richard," in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101075054> (accessed August 30, 2010).
65. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 25-27.
66. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 18, 120-23; Knox, *Records of the English Catholics*, 360-2; Fletcher, *English Bridgettines*, 76, dates the document.
67. Bainbridge, "Who were the English Bridgettines?" 48.
68. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 12, 58-60, Vol. 19, 180; David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* Vol. 3 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1959) 238; A. Davidson, "Roman Catholicism in Oxfordshire, c.1580-1640" (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 1970), 178, 256-59; Hutchison, "Beyond the Margins," 281.
69. Morris, *Troubles*, Vol. 2, 268; BL, MS 22285, fo. 2 r.
70. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 210-15.
71. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 43, 45.
72. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 48.
73. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 69-71.
74. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 73-5.
75. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 73.
76. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 59.
77. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 141.
78. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 127.
79. Fletcher, *English Bridgettines*, 107 n.
80. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 139, 141.
81. EUL, MS 95, Vol. 19, 145.
82. Aungier, *Syon*, 97-99.
83. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, 8, 332-3, 387-400; Glyn Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta* (New Haven: University of Yale Press, 2003).
84. C. de Hamel, ed. *Syon Abbey, the Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and their Peregrinations after the Reformation* (London: Roxburgh Club, 1991).
85. Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* (London, 1622).
86. Glyn Redworth, *The She-Apostle* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2008), 81, 205-6.
87. Questier, *Catholicism and Community*, 8, 417-25, 482-86; Forster, "Forster, Sir Richard," in *DNB*.
88. Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Walker, "Continuity and Isolation."
89. Walsham, "Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England," 786-94.
90. *The Bible*, Psalm 137.
91. EUL, Syon Abbey unnumbered MS: "English Saintes of Kinges and Bishoppes in the primitive times of the Catholique church," Michael E. Williams, "Paintings of Early British Kings and Queens at Syon Abbey, Lisbon," *Birgittiana* 1 (1996): 123-34.