

Franciscan History in England

In 1224 Francis at General Chapter decided to send some friars to England. He appointed Agnellus of Pisa to lead a small expedition. On Tuesday, 10 September of the same year, a boat landed near Dover and nine roughly-dressed figures disembarked. So the Franciscan Order was implanted in England.

It wasn't an easy beginning, they landed late in the day and so had to look for food and lodgings, which they were given in a barn by the wife of a wealthy local farmer. Her husband was not so trusting as she, and when he found out what she had done he had the barn locked and called the local justices. So the friars were faced the next morning when they awoke with the justices and an armed mob asking what they were doing. This was a dangerous situation, a few years before, in 1210 a group of religious people had landed in England and been executed when they were identified as heretics. The friars were running a real risk. The justices asked them for their motives in coming to England and they explained they had been sent by their Order, but as it was an Order he had never heard of and all the religious he had ever known were well dressed monks and canons, the justices were sceptical. "Why should we believe you, they asked, you could be criminals or heretics?" One of the friars took off the cord around his waist and said to the crowd: "If you believe us to be either, then take these cords from around our waists and hang us from the beams of this barn." The mob was won over by the simplicity of the friars, surely they would not offer themselves to death if they were not genuine.

The nine friars were led by an Italian, Agnellus of Pisa, who had previously been Custos in Paris. It included three Englishmen who had joined the Order, five Italians and one Frenchman. Their passage across the channel had been paid for by the Benedictines of Fécamp and when they arrived in Canterbury their first lodging was with the Benedictine monks of the cathedral priory. After two nights in Canterbury they were found a small room behind the schoolroom in the Poor Priests' Hospital. Here they huddled in cramped conditions, grateful that the boys left dregs of beer in their schoolroom where they could soak the crusts of bread they had begged for sustenance.

Five of the friars stayed in Canterbury and four set off for London. Alexander of Gloucester, the Warden of the Poor Priest's Hospital, found the Canterbury friars the land and built the first wooden chapel and wattle and daub huts the friars used on this very site, where the meadow grows across the river.

The land was not owned by the friars but given to the city authorities for their use – an early example of trust law, which developed to help sustain the mission of the Franciscans in England who could own nothing and so needed their property to be held in trust for them by others. In 1267 John Digges acquired the land this side of the river for the use of the friars and the main friary was built – our altar today is roughly in the position where the high altar was in the church, although it faced in a different direction.

The four friars who left for London were welcomed by the Dominicans there and soon found their own house in Cornhill, before moving within months to their final site in Stinking Lane – it isn't recorded whether the presence of the friars added to or subtracted from the general stink from which the Lane received its name.

Two of the friars moved on from London to Oxford where again they found hospitality with the Dominicans until they could find their own place at St. Ebbe's. Within seven weeks of arrival they had established friaries in Canterbury, London and Oxford, the ecclesiastical, political and

intellectual capitals of England. Once things in Oxford were established and enough recruits gained and trained the two friars in 1225 moved on to Northampton, the administrative centre of the North of England.

The pattern of this mission shows that, unlike some of the disastrous missions of 1217, where friars had turned up unannounced and been denounced as heretics, this one had been well planned. The friars had booked accommodation ahead, made sure that they contained four locals in their number and had planned to go to places where they knew recruits and patrons could be found.

In the years after their establishment in England they added new houses to the Province year by year: Cambridge (the second university town) was added in 1226; Norwich (an important town for the wool trade) 1226; Worcester 1227. By 1230 the Province was large enough to be divided into seven Custodies based at Oxford, Cambridge, London, York, Salisbury and Worcester. Just thirty years after arriving in England the Province consisted of 1,242 friars in 49 friaries. The Province covered Scotland and Wales as well as England and one of the first English friars, Richard of Ingworth, was sent to establish the Order in Ireland in 1230. Agnellus of Pisa became the first Provincial Minister of the English Province and established houses of studies for the friars in Oxford and Cambridge. Subsequent growth was slower as the Province settled into a more regular and less heroic life, but it appears it stabilised at 1,500-1,700 friars by the middle of the 14th century and continued that size until the Reformation.

To what did the friars owe their success? No doubt the example of Francis drew many, especially after he was canonised in 1228. He was compared by the Pope in his bull of canonisation with the Old Testament patriarchs who led the people of God and protected them from their enemies. He was described by Thomas of Celano as a new Martin of Tours, and soon preachers were speaking of him as a new Moses, or even comparing his life to that of Christ and the growth of the Order to that of the Church. But if the friars they saw had not impressed the people, then the example of Francis would not have drawn followers.

The friars lived poorly without owning anything, and this was an age that identified poverty with the life of Christ. Whereas worldly people might try to amass fortunes for themselves because they seek a treasure in this world, those who followed Christ did so best if they gave up worldly possessions – it was felt. Of course there were those who argued against this, but on the whole the mass of the people believed this to be true. The friars in England certainly lived a poor life as a couple of anecdotes from the early days show us. At one time in these early days one of the friars was suffering from exposure after a journey in the snow and the only way the friars had to warm him was to huddle up to him, because they had no way to buy firewood. The friars in Oxford would walk barefoot to class, even in the snow.

Thus one factor in their popularity with rich and poor alike, although not universally with the secular clergy, was their obvious poverty.

Combined with that poverty, within the space of a few years the Franciscans in England had become an intellectual powerhouse both for the country and for the Order. With their schools at Oxford and Cambridge, established around 1230 in both places, the province of England had a greater ability to educate friars than any other province. One German historian, Hilarin Felder, said that, apart from St. Bonaventure, all the major contributors to the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition were from the Province of England. The friary at Oxford was founded in 1224 and the friary at Cambridge in 1226. Agnellus of Pisa arranged for Robert Grosseteste (1168-1253), Bishop of Lincoln, to be the first teacher of theology to the Friars at Oxford. At Cambridge, Moorman tells us

that the friar Vincent of Coventry was the first teacher, although others say that Thomas of York was the first friar to lecture at their school in Cambridge and that before then secular theologians taught the friars. Grosseteste was one of the leading thinkers of his day. The Franciscan involvement at Oxford would change the intellectual face of Europe. The Franciscan Oxford tradition is a veritable *Who's Who* of intellectual giants, not just in the Order, but in the history of Western Thought: Adam Marsh (d. 1259), Thomas of York (d. 1260), Richard Rufus of Cornwall, (d. c.1260-61), Roger Marston (1235-1303), William of Ware (who may have taught Duns Scotus) (f. 1270-1300), Roger Bacon (1214-1294), John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), William of Ockham (1285-1349), John of Peckham (1240-1292), who would later become Archbishop of Canterbury and is entombed within the magnificent splendour of Canterbury Cathedral.

So they were poor, they were well educated. But they could have been poor and well educated and simply served the powers that be – as so many have done before and since. Instead the friars took up the cause of the lesser ones in society – living up to their name of “Friars Minor” or “Lesser Brothers”. They headed for the burgeoning towns where a parochial system designed for rural society was struggling to cope with ministering to the masses. With their education they found ways to preach to people in a language they could understand. The friars’ preaching was praised by Robert Grosseteste in a letter to Pope Gregory IX in 1238: “*The Friars Minor illuminate our whole Country with the bright light of their preaching and teaching. If Your Holiness could see with what devotion the people run to hear from them the words of life...*’

The poverty of the friars ensured they were not distant from the concerns of the people to whom they preached – both because they did not cut themselves off by a lavish lifestyle and because they relied on the gifts of those to whom they ministered in order to survive – for they had no reserves of finance or constant revenue, but only that which they could beg from day to day. The brother questors, who begged from door to door, thus kept in close contact with the people, their concerns and the burning issues of the day. The friars’ reliance on begging to provide for their needs was not universally approved – Thomas of Walsingham, the historian of St. Albans monastery, when discussing the cause of the Peasant’s Revolt, includes among them the assertion that the friars “in order to win possessions and amass money ... call good evil and evil good, seducing princes by flatteries and the people by lies, and dragging both with them the evil way.”¹

The friars were known for their work among the sick in the disease ridden towns where they lived. They were at the forefront of popular movements against inequality and oppression, often in opposition to other religious orders. In 1264 they supported Simon de Montfort and the barons against the king at a time when most monasteries favoured the king. The treaty that followed upon the battle of Lewes, the Mise of Lewes, was negotiated by two Franciscan from Lewes friary on the barons side and two Benedictines from St. Pancras monastery representing the king. This support for the barons scandalised the Westminster Benedictine author of the *Flores Historiarum*.² In 1327 the friars were accused of supporting the townspeople of Bury St. Edmunds against their landlords in the Benedictine abbey. In 1381 they supported and were accused of inciting the Peasants Revolt which had among its targets the priories of the Knights Hospitaller.

They did not only espouse popular causes – in London in 1256 they intervened along with the Dominicans to protect a group of Jews accused of crucifying a Christian boy. The Benedictine Chronicler Matthew Paris, no friend of the friars, said that as a result of the friars’ intervention “The

1 Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History* 47.

2 Ibid. 51.

common people withheld their charity, and would not give them alms as before”.³

As the friars became established in towns they often brought fresh water supplies to their friaries from which the townspeople also benefited. London, Scarborough, Newcastle, Southampton, Bristol, Lincoln, Coventry and Richmond all received their first water conduits thanks to the Franciscans.

As the years went by the refusal to receive money alms appears to have been mitigated as Chaucer illustrates in his picture of a mendicant friar receiving both money and goods in alms, but it seems clear that the friars did not have fixed revenues, because the Kings’ commissioners in 1535 found time and again that the friaries they visited were poorly financed and not infrequently in debt.⁴

As has been hinted at above the Franciscan were not universally welcomed by the established Orders or the secular clergy. One monastic chronicler wrote of the year 1224: “In that same year, O Misery, O more than Misery, O Cruel Scourge, the Friars Minor came to England”.

Poor Clares before the Reformation

We know the Poor Clares – called Minoresses in England – had monasteries in England before the Reformation, unfortunately we do not have a great knowledge of them. The earliest record we have of them is mention of a monastery in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1286. We know also that there was a monastery in Preston and another, called St. Agatha’s, in London.

The only pre-reformation monasteries of which we have a considerable history, however, are those of the Minorities in London, Waterbeach, Denny and Brusyard. These are all mentioned in state papers and in the valuation of monasteries at Henry VIII’s dissolution. These four Poor Clare monasteries all followed a rule written by Pope Urban, rather than the one of St. Clare. The London Clares were founded by Blanche, Queen of Navarre, the sister-in-law of King Edward I. She brought nuns from the Paris monastery of Longchamps to establish the monastery in 1293. This monastery was directly subjected to the Pope in 1295 and so exempt from interference from local Bishops. It was dissolved in 1538 when its annual revenue of £318 16s. 5d. marks it out as one of the more wealthy of the Franciscan establishments in the country. At that time it contained 25 choir nuns, two novices and six lay-sisters.

A second monastery, also founded in 1293, was at Waterbeach, from which the nuns were subsequently transferred (not without vigorous protest) to the larger monastery of Denney that was founded in 1341. the fourth of which we have some information was at Brusyard in Sussex and was founded in 1366.

All four of these monasteries had lands assigned to them to provide for the upkeep of the sisters as was allowed in the Urbanite rule and as seems to have been the norm in England before the Reformation.⁵

3 Ibid. 49-51.

4 Ibid. 46.

5 V. Fitzgerald, *Seventh Centenary of the Franciscan Order in England. The Poor Clares*. St. Antony’s Press, London, 1924. 1-7.

Responses to the Reformation

After their establishment throughout the land the friars appear to have kept the good will of the people, despite the attacks of satirical writers such as Piers Ploughman and the sneers of the Benedictine Chroniclers. The storm that broke on the Order in the 16th century was unprecedented. But before we look at the response of the friars to that storm we do need to speak of the introduction of the Observant Franciscans to England in 1482.

The English province had largely been spared the upheavals that faced the Continental friars in the 13th and 14th centuries. This could well be because the friars neither own themselves the property they lived in, nor had it invested in the papacy. It was owned rather by the local corporations in the towns where friars lived. Thus they kept their poverty even after Pope John XXII had renounced ownership of the friars' property on the Continent. Reaction against this forced ownership of property and against the higher standard of living that accompanied it had led some friars in Italy, France and Spain to return to the older practice of not owning property in accordance with the Rule. These friars banded together, calling themselves "Observants", whereas those who accepted the papal dispensation from the Rule that allowed them to own property called themselves "Conventuals". In many parts of the world the Conventuals had a province, while the Observants had a Vice-Province, with the Vicar Provincial of the Observants needing the confirmation of the Conventual Minister Provincial in order to take office.

The Observant friars arrived in England from Cologne in 1482, invited by King Edward IV who built them a friary at Greenwich next to his royal palace. This Vice-Province was favoured by Kings Henry VII and VIII and had its headquarters at Greenwich. By 1517 there were Observant friars in Canterbury, Greenwich, Southampton, Richmond, Newcastle and Newark. In 1517 Pope Leo X transferred the right to chose Ministers Provincial and General from the Conventuals to the Observants. Not surprisingly, this displeased the Conventual Franciscans who did not want to be seen as subservient to the Observants⁶ – rather than accept that their superiors needed to be confirmed by the Observant Ministers, they sought to continue their branch of the Order separately. Thus the Franciscans split between the Order of Friars Minor (previously known as the Observants) and the Order of Friars Minor Conventual. In England the former had six friaries and the latter over fifty.

The two groups of friars were soon faced with a major crisis in the form of Henry VIII's, divorce from Catherine of Aragon, defection from the Church of Rome and establishment of himself as Head of the Church of England.

The reaction to the Reformation by the English friars, both Conventual and Observant, was not initially entirely negative. In England the Observants, the most vigorous of the English religious orders in the early 16th century, produced men like John Ryckes, Jerome Barlow and William Roy. John Ryckes composed a mildly evangelical tract *The Ymage of Love* (1525) and Barlow and Roy fled England to join William Tyndale on the Continent because of their sympathies for Reformation

6 The resentment is clear in a letter from the Conventual Vicar Provincial Thomas Cudwer written to the Father General in 1531, where he speaks of the injustice of the much larger group of Conventual friars being subject to the smaller number of Observants in England and asking that the Father General appoint William Catolle as Commissary and seek a direct papal confirmation of his election, so that he could avoid approaching the Observant Minister Provincial for approval. In the longer term Thomas seeks a division of the province in two so that the Conventuals are completely independent of the Observants. ABATE G. "I Frati Minori Conventuali in Inghilterra". In *Miscellanea Francescana* 29(1929) 13-114. Eventually the Conventuals achieved their aim under Pope Sixtus V in 1585 when their Father General was declared a Minister General in his own right, with the right to confirm the Ministers Provincial of the Conventual Franciscan provinces.

ideals. In December 1528 a disgruntled member of the community of Greenwich accused his fellow friars of being Lutherans and speaking ill of King Henry VIII and of Cardinal Wolsey. While the accusations of an unhappy friar need to be taken with a pinch of salt, the fact that he would accuse his fellow friars of such a sympathy may well indicate that discussions within the friary were not always unfavourable towards the reform.⁷ Another Observant William Peto was a friend of Thomas More's and well aware of humanist teaching and learning. However, like More and Erasmus, he remained faithful to the papacy, and, as we shall see was exiled by Henry VIII for preaching against his divorce. During his exile Peto became a member of Cardinal Pole's reforming circle in Italy. He returned with the Greenwich Franciscans and was appointed a bishop in Mary's reign.⁸

Just as with the Observants there were some Conventual friars who initially sympathised with reformed theology. Among the Conventuals in England Paul Luther, Guardian of Ware, got into trouble for preaching against excesses in the cult of saints, John Vvall, Guardian of Bedford, was censured for his preaching in 1536, probably because of the radical ideas he espoused. Several Conventual friars were influenced by Latimer's preaching and it appears Latimer sought out mendicant friars since they would make the best preachers of the reform.⁹ One of these Conventual friars converted by Latimer's preaching was John Cardmaker who features in Foxe's Book of Martyrs as one of the Protestant martyrs of Mary's reign.¹⁰

Let us examine in some detail the struggles of the English Observants against Henry and his Protestant successors. Their example merits attention since they were the first religious to stand up as a body in resistance to the King.

Henry VIII, who had been very favourable to them in his younger days, turned viciously against the Observants, because despite being court preachers,¹¹ they were among the first to oppose his divorce from Catherine and uphold papal authority. John Forest organised defence of Catherine's marriage at the Provincial Chapter in 1532. He later wrote "that if he had not been there the king would have destroyed our whole religion."¹² John Forest was imprisoned in 1533 and burned at the stake five years later (the only Catholic in England to be burned at the stake for heresy). William Peto, the Minister Provincial elected in 1532, was imprisoned when he denounced Henry's actions in a sermon to the King on Easter Sunday that year – in which he compared Henry to King Ahab, whose marriage to Jezebel had led to the loss of his throne and the dogs licking his blood on the streets at his death. Henry subsequently allowed Peto to go to the General Chapter of the Order held at Pentecost in Toulouse but on his return Peto was arrested and imprisoned at Lambeth Palace. Elstow, the Guardian of Greenwich, supported Peto when Dr. Curwen preached in

7 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, iv, 5043 in: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

8 Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, 190-191.

9 Rex, "Friars in the English Reformation", 40-48.

10 Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, 13, 98, 120-121, plate 21.

11 The Observant friary at Greenwich was attached to the Royal Palace where Henry lived. The friars were frequent preachers in the royal chapel at the opposite end of the palace and significant events such as the baptism of the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth took place in the convent chapel. Henry was familiar with the friars and used them as intermediaries. When Dean John Colet had come under suspicion Henry had him invited to eat at the friars and then spoke with him in the friars' garden, after having dismissed his attendants. This former familiarity must have made the opposition of the friars all the more difficult to accept. Cf. Erasmus, "Letter on Vitrier and Colet", in: *Christian Humanism*, 178; *Lives of Vitrier and Colet*, 44-46.

12 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, v, 1591 in: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

favour of the divorce at Greenwich and was imprisoned first at Lambeth with Peto and then sent to prison with the Conventuals in Bedford. By June both Peto and Elstow, together with other friars from Greenwich, Richmond and Canterbury were in Antwerp campaigning against the King.¹³ Henry, hoping to win the Observant friars over, granted them an alms of 10 marks and on 8th September 1533 baptised Princess Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, in their chapel.¹⁴ On 21st December the friars in Greenwich made a formal act of submission, but this does not seem to have changed their ideas and on 13th April 1534 the Augustinian and Dominican Priors Provincial were appointed visitators to the Observants to bind them by oath to accept the royal supremacy and deny papal authority.¹⁵

The Visitators persuaded the friars at Richmond to allow four of their members to be chosen as discretos to decide for the whole convent, "specially to the intent that if the discretos should refuse to consent, it were better after our minds to strain (i.e. torture on the rack) a few than a multitude." The friars in Greenwich, however "stiffly affirmed that where the matter concerned particularly every one of their souls, they would answer particularly every man for himself." When they were examined individually these friars refused to accept the articles presented to them and declared that "they had professed St. Francis' religion, and in the observance thereof they would live and die."¹⁶ On 17th June two cartloads of Observants were taken to the Tower of London on account of their resistance to the King.¹⁷ By 11th August all the Observants were expelled from their friaries. Many were accepted into Conventual friaries, but there is some confusion about their treatment there. Some were probably accepted as members of the community, as they eventually signed the deeds of surrender when the Conventual friaries were closed – others, it appears were treated more like prisoners – no doubt resentment of Observant claims of superiority diminished the charity of some of their Conventual brethren. Charles V's ambassador Chapuys wrote to the Emperor about some of the Observants: "they were locked up in chains and treated worse than they could be in prison."¹⁸ Of 140 Observant friars imprisoned in state and convent gaols, 31 succumbed to the ill treatment they received and died.¹⁹ Some were subsequently given permission or permitted to escape to Scotland and Ireland. Thomas Cromwell, the friars' arch enemy and Chancellor of England, noted in his "remembrances" (a sort of "to do" list that he kept) about this time: "Item to remember the friars of Greenwich to have licence to go to Ireland."²⁰

The same year in 1534 the Guardian of Cambridge, Hugh Rich, and the Guardian of

13 Bernard, *The King's Reformation*, 151-154. Cf. *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vi, 705, 726 in: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

14 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vi, 1549, in: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

15 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vii, 587 (18), 590, in: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

16 Wright, *Suppression*, 42-4. In: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

17 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vii, 856. In: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

18 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vii, 1095. In: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

19 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vii, 1607; cf. the statement in Bouchier, *Hist. Eccl. de Martyrio Fratrum* (ed. 1582), 26. In: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

20 *L. and P. Hen. VIII*, vii, 49, 108, 850; cf. 957. In: Page, "The Observant Friars of Greenwich" in: *A History of the County of Kent*, 194-198.

Richmond, Richard Risbey, were hanged, drawn and quartered after supporting a visionary (the “Maid of Kent”) who fomented a rebellion against Henry. They were given the opportunity to save their lives if they acknowledged Henry's supremacy in the Church, and their refusal to do so condemned them to death by hanging, drawing and quartering.²¹

The five Observant friaries were handed over to the Conventuals until they too were suppressed in 1538. Thus the Observant Franciscans became the first religious to suffer from the attack of Henry VIII²² and, when they refused to be cowed, the first to be suppressed in 1534. Some were imprisoned, Bl. John Forest was martyred and many Observants went into exile to Pontoise, Paris. In 1555-1559, the friary at Greenwich was restored under Queen Mary, who remembered the friars' loyalty to her mother,

Under Mary Tudor the Observant province was re-established. The friars returned to Greenwich in 1555. This was not popular with some Protestant elements in London who ambushed two of the friars on their way back to the convent. They were seriously injured by the large stones hurled at the boat they were in, but escaped with their lives.²³ The friars flourished briefly and played a significant role in Mary and Cardinal Pole's re-establishment of Catholicism in England. but this friary was suppressed again only four years later in 1559 by Elizabeth I. The Observants scattered once more to Scotland, Pontoise and the Low Countries. One member, however, Father Nelson remained in England for the next thirty years in a Catholic household until his death in 1628.²⁴ Among those in Pontoise were: Thomas Langton, John Jones and William Stanney.

In 1610 William Stanney received the secular priest John Gennings into the Order. and in 1618, after having trained with the Flemish friars in Ypres, Gennings opened the English friary at Douai in what is now Northern France. Gennings, after a novitiate with the Recollects at Ypres, went to live in Gravelines and then Douai where he opened the friary in 1618. Here he re-established the English province with the help, among others, of the Conventual friar William Thompson and several seminarians from the English seminary in Douai – among whom was Christopher Davenport. English Franciscans who had joined other provinces came to join him and by 1628 the province was strong. From Douai the English province sent missionaries back to England until the house was destroyed by the revolutionaries in the late 18th century. Douai was a centre of English Catholicism, with a famous seminary founded by Cardinal Allen and several English religious houses. From there would originate the ‘English Mission’. One remaining sign of the activity of the friars is contained in the name of a new development in Birmingham, where the “Masshouse” retail complex has been built on the site of the Franciscan chapel or Masshouse. The friars ministered to Catholics in other parts of the country also. They would subsequently have residences and chaplaincies at London, Osmotherley, York, Abergavenny, Baddesley, Birmingham, Solihull, Hexham, and West Grinstead, and would undertake a mission to Maryland USA between 1672-1712. In 1793 Douai was suppressed following the French Revolution. But between 1793 and 1840 Provincial life and Chapters continued at London, Baddesley, Birmingham. Monmouth and Aston near Stone.

From Belgium, in 1858, friars were sent to England to revitalise the province there, which had been reduced to a rump of four elderly English friars. These Belgian friars came to Sclerder, in

21 Steck, *Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution in England*, 46-51.

22 Ibid. 60-64.

23 Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, 146.

24 Devas, A Franciscan Retrospect, 1924-1224, in *The Month* (Sept. 1924) 197.

Cornwall. As the Catholic Church expanded once more in Britain, so the Province opened houses to minister to the growing numbers of Catholics, many of them immigrants from Ireland. So it was that the Province entered into a new phase of expansion, opening friaries in Manchester 1861, Glasgow 1868, Stratford 1873, Bristol 1889, Chilworth 1890, Buckingham 1868. In 1902 some friaries founded in England by the Paris Province of France were incorporated into the English Province. These were: Clevedon 1882, Ascot 1887, and Woodford 1894. In the 20th century houses were founded at Liverpool 1909, Sheffield 1925, Edinburgh 1930, Nottingham 1932, Dundee 1937, Craigmillar 1938, Cambridge 1941, Aldridge 1946, East Bergholt 1946, Llanidloes 1951, Stony Stratford 1969, Canterbury 1974, and Hatch End 1980.

Since the 1980s the Province has withdrawn from some of its friaries in order to ensure that there are always enough friars in a house to live a good fraternal life. At present there are friaries in: Canterbury, Chilworth, Clevedon, Edinburgh (Craigmillar), Glasgow, Nottingham, Stratford and Woodford.

From the preceding history we can see that the OFM province can prove the presence of members in England for all but 17 years since its inception in 1224. In that short period from 1538 when John Forest was burned at the stake, to 1555 when Mary brought the friars back to Greenwich, there were still members of the province in Scotland. So the province can prove an unbroken continuity of presence, unparalleled by any other religious in Britain.

Conventuals

Like the Observants, the Conventuals were swept away in the tumult of Henry's church reforms. A few individuals resisted but the majority accepted that resistance to the will of a despotic king like Henry VIII was futile. Particularly after the failure of the rebellion against Henry that was called the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, the 50 or so Conventual friaries were surrendered to Henry's Commissioners and the friars forced to secularise.

We have mentioned some friars who sympathised with the Reformation, there were others who clearly resisted it. Robert Thyxtall preached against the reform in Colchester, England in Lent 1534. William Watts was preaching "sedition" in Salisbury in 1537 and against Latimer in London in 1539. The Reading Conventuals Lawrence and Conventry ended up in the Tower of London in 1539.²⁵

The Conventual Franciscan Province of England was dispersed in 1538 but individuals like the Scot William Thompson (d. 1654) continued to join continental provinces and work for the mission. Thompson was the titular Minister Provincial of England for the Conventuals and helped John Gennings revive the English OFM province. He was even Gennings's representative at the OFM General Chapter in 1616, showing that it was more important to him to encourage the Franciscan mission to England and Scotland than to engage in Franciscan rivalry.²⁶

Re-establishment

It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that Conventual Franciscans were able to return to England. Fr. Bonaventure Scerberras of the Maltese province arrived in England in 1906 with a resolve to restore the province. In 1907, he established the first foundation of the Greyfriars since the Reformation. This took place at St. Joseph's in Portishead. Later he was joined by another

²⁵ Rex. "Friars in the English Reformation", 55-56.

²⁶ Dockery. *Christopher Davenport* 21.

Maltese friar, Fr. Roger Azzopardi, and by the American Fr. Vincent Meyer of the Immaculate Conception province, USA. In 1910, at the invitation of the bishop of the Southwark diocese the friars started a new foundation in Rye, East Sussex. This was followed by other establishments in Liverpool (1926) and Manchester (1929). In 1949, the English Commissariate, which had been dependent upon the Immaculate Conception Province of the USA since 1919, became an independent unit under the direct jurisdiction of the Minister General. England continued to be a general Commissariate until the autumn of 1957. In that year the ancient Conventual province of England was fully revived under the patronage of Blessed Agnellus of Pisa – whose memory we celebrate today - and its first provincial chapter in England since the Reformation was celebrated at Mossley Hill, Liverpool.²⁷

The Conventual English province became a General Delegation of the Order in 2005. The province currently has friaries in Canterbury, Rye, Liverpool, London and Manchester in England and in Dublin and Wexford, in Ireland.

Capuchins

The Capuchins began in 1528 and were forbidden to organise outside Italy until 1574 so it was not until the end of the century that we first see Capuchins in Great Britain.

The first Capuchin missionary we have records of was the famous English Capuchin mystic Benet of Canfield who had joined the Paris Capuchin province in 1587. He returned to England in 1599 and was imprisoned for three years when he was caught. Men from England, Scotland and Ireland joined the Capuchin province in Belgium. In 1608 the Capuchins were granted permission by the Pope to undertake missionary work in Great Britain and Ireland. Francis Nugent was commissioned by the General chapter to organise this mission. However he was immediately afterwards sent to Germany to implant the order there so it was not until 1613 that he was able to begin preparing for his mission to Britain and Ireland. He was given the friary in Charleville as a base to prepare missionaries. From 1615 he was able to send missionaries to Ireland and in 1624 he found them a friary in Dublin. In 1618 a missionary was in prison in London and in 1620 the first Capuchin missionaries arrived in Scotland, but, facing criticism that the life of the missionaries was not really Capuchin because it was not lived in friaries, Nugent's efforts concentrated on his native Ireland where community life was easier to maintain and the English and Scottish missions were the work of a handful of friars.³

The mission in England was both reinforced and undermined in 1630 when Joseph de Tremblay, the Grey Eminence, sent a community of 13 French Capuchins as spiritual assistants to Queen Henrietta Maria, the wife of King Charles I of England. From this base they were able to work to convert members of the English court and had some success among the notables of the realm, including Lord Portland the Grand Treasurer and Dr. Vane, the King's Chaplain. In 1636 they received 700 into full communion with the Catholic Church and were administering the Eucharist to a weekly congregation of 800 from the Queen's chapel at Somerset House.⁴ The Civil War caused Henrietta Maria to flee to Holland, but the friars remained behind until in 1649, when Charles I was beheaded, they were banished from the realm. The negative side of this French mission was that it undermined Nugent's mission because at the same time de Tremblay forbade Scots and English Capuchins from engaging in the mission in Britain.⁵

It was not until the 1850s that the Capuchins resumed their presence in England and founded

²⁷ This section is taken from the website of the Conventual General Delegation of Great Britain and Ireland.

a province there as a result of the work of the Italian Louis of Lavagna and the beneficence of the convert Earl of Denbigh. The latter offered Louis the priest's house at his newly built church in Pantasaph and Louis established the first Capuchin community there. He departed for Canada and was succeeded as Superior by Seraphin of Bruges, a Belgian friar.²⁸ From Pantasaph, the friars established Peckham in 1854. In 1858 they settled in Chester and 1859 in Crawley. The friars began life in Erith in 1867 and Olton in 1873. Penmaenmawr was added in 1906 as was the house at Cowley, Oxford. In 1949 the province opened a house in Scotland in Glasgow. In 1980 the Capuchins opened a house in Canterbury.

After the high point of the 1960s declining numbers led to the closure of several houses so that the province today consists of friaries in Chester, Erith, Pantasaph, Preston and Oxford.

Poor Clares post Reformation

The dissolution of the monasteries in England in 1534-8 brought with it the dissolution of the Poor Clare monasteries. English women who sought an enclosed life were forced to join monasteries abroad, often in Spanish Flanders. Thus when the Marian Dominican William Peryn wrote his *Spiritual Exercises and Ghostly Meditations* he dedicated it to an English Poor Clare at Louvain, Dorothy Clement.²⁹

In England the restoration of Poor Clare life, apart from the community at Darlington, which derived from the monastery of penal days in Rouen, came from the Poor Clare Colettine monastery of Bruges in Belgium. This monastery was ruled by Mother Mary Dominic Berlamonte, who was abbess from 1831 (its restoration after Belgian independence) until 1871. From this monastery nine more were founded in Belgium, one in France and four in England. In 1850 Mother Dominic came to Baddesley-Clinton to found a monastery paid for by the Acton family of Wolverton Hall, whose ancestors had sheltered several Poor Clares seeking refuge after the suppression of the monasteries in the 16th century.³⁰ After the successful foundation at Baddesley-Clinton, Mother Dominic founded a second monastery in Notting Hill in 1857, with the support of Dr. Manning who would later become Cardinal Archbishop. Eight years later she founded monasteries in Levenshulme in Manchester and in York.³¹

From these four monasteries the other Colettine monasteries in England were founded. Bullingham was founded from Notting Hill in 1880 and Arundel from the same monastery in 1886. Liberton was founded from Baddesley in 1895. From Bullingham nuns went to Liverpool in 1902. Sclerder, which had been built as a friary by the OFM Friars of the English Province in 1858, was the eventual destination of nuns from Bullingham who had begun their community in 1917 in Crapstone in Devon. Woodford was founded next door to the friary in 1920 by nuns from Notting Hill.³²

In 1904 religious orders were expelled from France and Poor Clare nuns fleeing from Rennes had a monastery built for them in Lynton, inaugurated in 1910. Poor Clare Colettine nuns from

28 Holland, *The Capuchins*, 34-38.

29 Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, 191.

30 Fitzgerald, *The Poor Clares*, 20-22.

31 Ibid. 23-24.

32 Ibid. 25-29.

Nantes eventually founded a monastery at Lutterworth in 1911.³³

Today there are Poor Clare monasteries in: Lynton in Devon, Arundel in Sussex, Arkley in Barnet, Bulwell in Nottingham, Ellesmere in Shropshire, Woodchester in Gloucestershire, Baddesley Clinton near Birmingham, York in York, Bothwell near Glasgow, Humbie in East Lothian, Hawarden in Wales. There is also a monastery of Anglican Poor Clares in Freeland.

TOR Women

I would be impossible to look into the history and development of all the groups of Third Order Regular women working in this country in this short overview of our Franciscan history so I am going to concentrate on saying something about those congregations that were founded here in this country.

All the modern groups were founded in the 19th century, but before that the beleaguered 17th century English Catholic Church founded Third Order Franciscan monastery in Brussels in 1621, subject to the re-emerging OFM Recollect Province of England.³⁴

Among the congregations founded in England in the 19th century we find those that trace their origins to Alice Ingham. Their foundation illustrates some common themes of foundations at this time: 1) collaboration between a friar and a woman desiring to lead a religious life, 2) beginnings as a group of women living the Third Order Secular Rule, 3) hardship and final recognition as a diocesan congregation, 4) division because of different apostolates and spreading into different dioceses. Alice was sustained and supported in her desire to found a religious community by the Belgian Recollect friar Gomair Peeters who was part of the group rejuvenating the Province of England. Alice gathered a group of women around her in Rochdale and undertook the work of visiting the poor, the sick and the dying. They began their work as members of the Third Order Secular, but sought to become a religious congregation. Bishop Turner of Salford seems to have been on the verge of giving the group his recognition before his death in 1872, but his death delayed the process. Alice faced discouragement at ever being recognised as a religious institution but Gomair encouraged and advised her through his letters and kept her spirits up. He died in 1878, shortly before Alice and her friends were recognised as the St. Joseph Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart by Bishop Henry Vaughan in 1880.³⁵ Bishop Vaughan had brought the group down to Mill Hill near London to help out at the missionary college of St. Joseph that he had established there. From there the group expanded. In 1884 they responded to a call for help from Canon Purcell to help in St. Vincent's Orphanage and school he had established in Hampstead. In 1885 missionaries were sent to Borneo and elsewhere in the Far East. In 1888 the Motherhouse and novitiate of the group were established in Blackburn back in the Salford diocese from whence Alice came. Growth in apostolates and disputes about them led this founding group to split into four different congregations. The sisters at St. Vincent's eventually went on to form the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Littlehampton, especially engaged in the home mission.³⁶ Those who remained at Mill Hill became the Franciscan Sisters of Mill Hill. The sisters attached to the Motherhouse in Blackburn formed the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph and those more concerned with the foreign missions, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. Thus a

33 Ibid. 27-28.

34 S.M.F. *Hidden Wheat*. 1-9.

35 McGrath. *Father Gomair OSF*. Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph: Burnley, 2004. passim.

36 McDonnel. *The History of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Littlehampton*. Littlehampton: FMSL, 1999. 8.

range of English TOR women's groups emerged from the original inspiration and determination of Alice Ingham.

Anglican Franciscans

Since we are considering Franciscan history in England, it would be incomplete not to speak of the contribution of the Anglican communion to this history.

Religious life was absent from the Anglican communion for 300 years from the beginning of the break with Rome under Henry VIII to the founding of the first orders of sisters in the 1850s. The Oxford Movement influenced some in the Church of England to see religious life as a jewel lost for three hundred years rather than a papist superstition. In 1855 John Mason Neale (1818-1866) founded the Society of St. Margaret, which still exists in England and America. The early foundations usually followed either the Augustinian or the Benedictine rule and lived mixed lives, with monastic practices and apostolic ministries. Men's communities followed soon afterwards. The Society of St. John the Evangelist was founded in 1865 and the Community of the Resurrection in 1892. Some of the early groups, faced with misunderstanding and persecution within the Church of England, became Roman Catholics. Many Anglican Bishops were still suspicious of religious life and some would not allow the new religious groups to set up in their dioceses. With the background of the controversy over ritualism, the religious life was still seen by some to be too Roman.

The publication of the life of St. Francis by Paul Sabatier in 1894 and another, less scholarly but very popular one, by Mrs. Oliphant in the same year, had a great impact in the Catholic wing of the Church of England. So it is not surprising that the first Franciscan foundation for men dates to that year. The group founded was the Society of the Divine Compassion (1894-1952). The first foundation for women was the Community of St. Francis (1905). In the United States the first Anglican Franciscan Foundation was the Society of the Atonement (the Graymoor Friars and Sisters) who in 1909 became Roman Catholic but have always worked for ecumenism.

After the First World War, the Brotherhood of St. Francis emerged from an outreach ministry to homeless wayfarers and from the work of retraining men unemployed in the depression that followed the war. This is an example of the combination of ritualism with social action that was such a powerful force in promoting Catholic theology in the Church of England at this time. In 1919 Br. Giles started a ministry to homeless wayfarers at a farm in Dorset and in 1921 the leadership of this group fell to Br. Douglas.

In India in 1922 Fr. Jack Winslow founded the Christa Seva Sengha (Christ Service Society) which had both those living celibacy in vows and those living the life of the third order. In 1930 Fr. Algy Robertson returned to England from this community owing to ill-health and founded the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ, which retained much of the rule of the Christa Seva Sengha both for its First and Third Order members. In 1937 the Brotherhood of St. Francis and the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ merged to form the Society of St. Francis in both its First and Third Orders. The Society still retained much of the spirit of the Christa Seva Sengha in its Rule. Between 1947 and 1950 three sisters underwent a noviciate with a view to founding a Second Order monastery, and in 1950, when they took vows, the Freeland monastery was founded.

In 1963 there began close co-operation between the Society of St. Francis and the Community of St. Francis and in 1966 this co-operation was formalised. In 1973 the sisters were declared to be "Sisters of the First Order" since their lifestyle and ministries closely matched that of the friars.

In 1967 the Order of St. Francis in America joined the Society of St. Francis to become its

American province and subsequently the American Second and Third Orders merged with their English counterparts.

In 1959 the SSF were invited to open a house in Papua New Guinea and began to receive Papuan novices. In 1964 the SSF began work in the dioceses of Brisbane and Newcastle in Australia and from 1970 they expanded into New Zealand. The SSF has been active in the Solomon Islands since 1970 and has received many Melanesian novices. The SSF began work in Africa in Zambia in 1965 and in 1970 opened a friary in Tanzania. The friars in the United States, based originally in New York, in 1970 opened a friary in San Francisco, California.

The Society of St. Francis has always been a small group, as are all religious communities in the Anglican Communion, and in the 1970s there were 240 friars, many fewer first and second order sisters, and about 1000 in the Third Order. Today there are many more Third Order Franciscans and the First Order has seen an expansion through growing links with groups in Korea and Brazil. Breaking free from its English roots, the First order men and women have both elected non-English Ministers General, the men from the United States and the women from Australia.

Mission of the Franciscans in England

The current mission of the Catholic Franciscan friars in England is largely parochial. Nearly all of the friaries of the three First Orders have parishes attached to them and most of the pastoral ministry of the friars is in these parishes. However, the mission is not restricted to parishes. Franciscans from these islands are present in the missionary endeavours of their orders in Africa and India. The English province of Friars Minor contributed to the foundation of provinces in South Africa and India and have been responsible for missions in Maryland and Peru. One member of the province, Kenneth Campbell, was responsible for the move of the friars' school in the Holy Land from Jerusalem to Amman as war threatened in the 1960s. Capuchin friars from this country participated in the foundation of the Order in California, India and Papua New Guinea.

Perhaps the greatest missionary endeavours have been undertaken by the Third Order sisters, and of those congregations founded from the inspiration of Alice Ingham, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood have contributed most to the missionary endeavour of the Church in Africa and the Far East. English sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary are also present in many of their regions and have contributed to the growth of the institute in many areas.

In Britain today the Third Order Regular sisters run nursing homes and teach in schools, colleges and universities, they engage in social work and in parish ministry, helping in formation of seminarians and teaching formation skills.

I have said little of the history of the Secular Franciscans, not because it is insignificant but because it is largely unwritten. Silently they have acted as a leaven in society to instil a Franciscan vision in our wider Church and society. Especially since the adoption of the Rule of Paul VI, they have become increasingly aware of their Franciscan vocation and the vital part they play in the Franciscan family. I hope there will one day arise an historian able to catalogue their development and influence.

I want to end by mentioning a project dear to my heart, that is a collaborative project of all three Orders, First Second and Third. At the Franciscan International Study Centre, we have a third level college that is rightly known as one of the key focusses for the transmission of the Franciscan theological and spiritual traditions. Students come here to study in Canterbury from throughout the world, in order to be able to respond to the needs of our world for a genuine Franciscan vision.

That vision is, of course, not just or even primarily in the hands of scholars. It is entrusted to all of us here to ensure that the vision Francis had of his mission to rebuild the Church in a fraternal following of the poor Christ, lives on today. As Francis has told his followers down the ages, “I have done what was mine to do, may you be given the grace to do what is yours”.