

SECTION 'H' – CATHOLICISM AROUND BURY ST EDMUNDS

The work of the History Group in this chronicle has concentrated on the history of St Edmund's Church, Bury St Edmunds and Coldham Cottage Church at Lawshall but it is worthwhile viewing this in the context of Catholicism around the locality. That said, to produce an all-encompassing chronicle would exceed the Group's remit, time and effort and would perhaps repeat what can be easily read elsewhere, especially in the excellent works of the local historians Joy Rowe and Francis Young.

History of Catholicism around Bury St Edmunds and at Coldham

The only places which can boast of an unbroken Catholic life from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I to the present day are Coldham and Stoke by Nayland. In 1570 a situation of religious turmoil prevailed. The actions of King Henry VIII and Elizabeth I had led to their excommunication from Rome and the intervening period of pro-Catholicism of 'Bloody' Mary had created periods of bloodshed, persecution and religious insecurity. The law branded Catholics as potential traitors and efforts were made to minimise risk by disarming them, encouraging informers and forbidding contact with foreign powers or the Papacy. To many Catholics this was anomalous - many wished to maintain their loyalty to their Sovereign and to Rome.

Coldham Hall and the Rookwood family have a significant place in local and national Catholicism. In 2015 a wealth of documents setting out the history of the Hall and including tracings of the building was deposited at the Suffolk Archives Office and summaries can be accessed in electronic form.

The Church, extended from the Presbytery, was opened on 28 August 1870 to replace the Chapels which had been used at Coldham Hall and interim arrangements at Barfords/Barfields Farm. It lies within sight of the original recusant family home of the Rookwoods.



Recusancy and suppression around Bury St Edmunds and at Coldham

A recusant was an English Roman Catholic in the period 1560 to 1791 who refused to attend services of the Church of England and thereby committed a statutory offence. This did not necessarily mean that they were rebellious to the State – it included people who did not attend for a variety of reasons but who rejected the Oaths of Supremacy and Uniformity. Suppression of recusants was used by the State as a way of keeping them in check – imprisonment; heavy fines on those who could not afford to pay impoverished them and denied them the money that would be required for them to go abroad to train for the ministry; sequestration of the land of the rich often resulted in the land being rented back to them. The Rookwood deeds preserved in Stonyhurst museum indicate the extent of fines and confiscations.

At different times recusants were not allowed to become doctors, members of parliament, members of the armed forces, own a horse or attend the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge. The effects of the Protestant Reformation were experienced in England following the excommunication of King Henry VIII and across Europe with the spread of Lutheranism. In 1561 Bishop Parkhurst of Norwich, during his Diocesan Visitation, required that all symbols of the Popish Mass should be removed – no longer was it acceptable to have altars decorated, tabernacles, vestments, rosary beads, holy water stoups, Catholic service books, statues.

Most importantly, information was required on those who contravened the Acts of Uniformity. Among the earliest recusants were the Rookwoods of Stanningfield and their cousins at Euston. Robert Rookwood of Stanningfield eventually made some attempt at a show of conformity, attending Lawshall parish Church, but declining to receive communion. His wife Elizabeth Rookwood, the daughter of Clement Heigham, was more stubborn still and did not even come to church at all. There are stories of Catholics putting wax in their ears, ostentatiously fingering rosaries or playing cards during sermons. These individuals were either 'Church papists', Catholics who regularly attended Church or 'occasional conformists' who attended Church just enough times to avoid incurring penalties or whenever the authorities were looking.

Recusant families amongst the local gentry included the Bedingfelds who lived in Suffolk at Bedingfield and at Oxburgh Hall and Quidenham in Norfolk, and the Rookwoods of Stanningfield and Euston. Their connections with the Duke of Norfolk who owned land at Fornham All Saints ensured that there were local Catholic connections functioning at a high social level. Other recusants included members of the Savage family of Long Melford, the Bond family at Bury St Edmunds (Sir Thomas Bond was H M Comptroller of the Hengrave Household) and the Tyldesley family of Fornham St Genevieve (a staunch Lancastrian Catholic family who moved to the area). There were other notable people who criss-crossed between Catholicism and Protestantism including the Drury family of Lawshall who married into the Rookwood family. The Jermyns of Rushbrooke (Sir Thomas Jermyn subsequently became Member of Parliament for Bury St Edmunds) also fell into this category.

The clergy who served those who sought to remain faithful to Catholicism during times of suppression often did so at great risk to themselves and those who hid them. To avoid detection, many of them travelled to and from the Continent or when in England remained mobile by riding to places of worship, some of which provided them with the refuge of priests' hiding places, for example at the Halls at Oxburgh and Coldham. However, there were some families who maintained a resident chaplain, amongst whom were the Rookwoods.

A family named Short, renowned as pharmacists, maintained a chapel in their home in Risbygate Street. Around 1691 they endowed a secular mission in Bury St Edmunds served by Hugh Owen who remained the only priest in the town until 1731 when Alexius Jones, a Benedictine became chaplain to the Bond family in Eastgate Street (many years later their home was ultimately demolished under a road-widening scheme). Fr Hugh Owen carried out his ministry in local hostelries including the Greyhound Inn (which later became the Suffolk Hotel and is now Edinburgh Woollen Mill), the Angel Hotel on Angel Hill and Hannibal's coffee house. Also in the area at that time was another Benedictine, Dom Francis Howard.

Whilst some families including the Rookwoods and the Shorts maintained a resident chaplain, at a more local level recusants included 'everyday' people who maintained a belief in and commitment to Catholicism. By way of example, in 1603 there were 11 recusants in the parish of Stanningfield.

Coldham Hall and the Rookwood Family

In 1357 the Rookwood family were owners of Coldham Hall, situated in the parish of Stanningfield and in the years up to 1559 their crests were depicted in the parish Church. From the mid-14th century their cousins occupied Euston Hall. In 1574 Robert Rookwood built a new house at Coldham to provide a Mass centre. In its attics, Coldham Hall contains a Chapel which was probably in use during the reign of Elizabeth I. Coldham Hall was owned by the Rookwood family to 1759 and by the Gage family until 1868 about the time that the mission of Coldham Cottage succeeded to the work of the domestic chaplaincy.



In 1869 the estate was sold to Richard Holt-Lomax, whose family held it until 1893. The estate was then purchased in 1893 by Colonel Henry Trafford-Lawson and it remained in his family until 1918 when it was sold to Colonel Everard Hambro who lived there until his death in 1952. In 1952 the estate

was purchased by Richard Duce who owned the property until 1979 before selling it to David Hart, an adviser to Margaret Thatcher. It then transferred to Jens Pilo. Since the beginning of this century it has been owned by Claudia Schiffer who is understandably protective of her privacy and the Hall is therefore not accessible to the public.

During 1578 whilst Queen Elizabeth I was on her summer progress of East Anglia she visited Euston Hall where she received the young Edward Rookwood and invited him to kiss her hand. Realising that he was a Papist, the Lord Chamberlain ordered him from his house and committed him to prison at Norwich and subsequently at Ely from 1588 to his death ten years later. It was alleged that a piece of plate belonging to the Court was missing and a search of the premises was commenced resulting in a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary being discovered concealed in a hayrick. The Queen ordered the image to be burned in the presence of those in attendance.

The secular priests Anthony Tyrell and John Ballard (who was subsequently hanged at Tyburn) visited Coldham Hall in 1585 as did many Jesuits. Thomas Garnett SJ who used the aliases of Rookwood and Sayer, was there from 1599 to his arrest in 1607. He was martyred at Tyburn on 23rd of June 1608. The secular priest Robert Keys SJ spent much of his time there.

The secret Chapel within Coldham Hall was one of the centres making up the 'College of the 12 Apostles' in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and Essex. This section of Jesuit activity in England had a generous patron in Lord Petre and was known as the Suffolk Mission, abbreviated as 'Miss: Suffolk' and encoded as 'Mistress Suffolk'. To go to mass or the sacraments was to call on 'Mistress Suffolk'.

The Rookwoods were much attached to this Society. Blessed Thomas Garnet who served Coldham and is reputed to have been arrested in the nearby woods, used the name Rockwood as his alias. Fr Robert Rockwood (died in 1632) and Fr Henry Rookwood (who, in 1699 lived at Coldham Hall and left Coldham in 1717 but was buried at Stanningfield church chancel in April 1730), as well as the lay brother Edward Rookwood (died in Liege about 1640). The daughters of the family provided subjects for various religious houses on the Continent, one, Mother Susannah Rookwood being the first superior of the Naples foundation of Mary Ward. A path by the Hall is still known as Nuns' Walk, whilst an Augustinian nun is said to haunt Coldham as a ghost.

The Rookwoods were fervent supporters of the Jesuits and during the year commencing 1590 they and the Drury family at Lawshall permitted Fr John Gerard to run the English Jesuit mission from their homes and encourage Anthony Rous (of Dennington), John Everard (of Linstead Parva) and Henry Walpole to take up the priesthood. Gerard, the first of the East Anglian Jesuits who resided at Lawshall from 1589 to 1591, was arrested in 1594. He was sent to the Tower and was tortured. In 1597 he escaped in a daring feat with the help of friends by means of a rope stretched across the Tower's moat. In the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, because he had connections with many of those arrested and had been named as a principal instigator, he left England. In his autobiography, he attributes his miraculous escape by ship at a moment when he was nearly rearrested to the intercession of Fr Henry Garnet, who died at that very moment. Fr Gerard's superiors would not allow him to return to England and he died in Rome in 1637 at the age of 73 years.

The Jesuit priest Thomas Garnet, nephew of the martyr Fr Henry Garnet, who also assumed the aliases of Rookwood and Sayer, was at Coldham Hall between 1599 until his arrest in October 1607 leading

to his martyrdom at Tyburn on 23 June 1608. Sir Robert Rookwood owned the Hall between 1606 and 1679 and his visitors included the secular priest Robert Keyes.

The failed plot (known as the Gunpowder Plot) to assassinate King James I in 1605 was led by Robert Catesby, a member of a prominent recusant family from Warwickshire. Although married to a Protestant he maintained his Catholicism and was disappointed that the promises of the King to bring tolerance for Catholicism were not fulfilled. He and Ambrose Rookwood of Coldham Hall were close friends. Catesby gathered a group of 12 like-minded people, including Robert Keyes and Ambrose Rookwood of Coldham Hall with the intention of carrying out the Gunpowder Plot in Parliament. It was Rookwood who allegedly bought the barrels of gunpowder that Guy Fawkes secreted in the basement of the Houses of Parliament and he was also responsible for arranging the 'getaway vehicles' – horses to be ridden by his accomplices.

It is apparent that attempts to dissuade Catesby from his plot were made by Fr Henry Garnet who was at that time Jesuit Provincial for England. In the early hours of 5 November 1605 Catesby informed Ambrose Rookwood of the arrest of Fawkes but it was not until around 11 am that day that Rookwood left London to ride north. He met Catesby at Brickhills in Buckinghamshire and they rode together to Holbeche House, Kingswinford, Staffordshire where they were given refuge. On 7 November 1605 a proclamation was issued in London for Rookwood's arrest. It did not take long for him and others to be tracked down and Rookwood was captured at Holbeche House during the course of which he was shot in the arm.

Their trial commenced on 27 January 1606 and, having been found guilty, on 31 January 1606, Ambrose Rookwood, Fawkes, Keyes and Thomas Wintour (alias Winter, cousin of Catesby) were hanged, drawn and quartered for high treason. Ambrose's assets were stripped and forfeited to the State. However, in 1622 Robert Rookwood (son of Ambrose) regained the estate by lease and in 1636, after legal argument, the assets seized were restored to him through a rather complex trust. Fr Henry Garnet was also indicted as a co-conspirator in the Gunpowder Plot and imprisoned in the Tower of London for three months where his treatment was less severe. However, he was then executed in May 1606 as a traitor.

Mary Ward (1585 – 1645) was a nun of the Order of the Poor Clares, initially in Flanders before returning to England in 1609 where she became acquainted with Winifred Wigmore, Susannah Rookwood (sister of Ambrose Rookwood), Jane Browne and Catherine Smith. Together they went to St Omer and opened a school for girls and in the face of considerable opposition from the State and Church (particularly the Jesuits who resented female intrusion), Mary Ward adopted the Jesuit constitution and led the English Jesuitesses. She established an underground mission in England which was led by her cousin Susannah Rookwood and operated at great risk at various locations to perpetuate Catholicism. Ultimately Susannah Rookwood became the first superior of a new house which was established in Naples in 1623 but within six months she died of illness. The two branches of the Mary Ward foundation are now known as the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The religious persecutions of the 1630s led to several members of the Rookwood family seeking a new life in Maryland, America where religious freedom prevailed. Several slaves there who took the names of their masters bore the name of Rookwood. In 1646 Edward Rookwood of the Rookwoods of Euston sided with the King in the battle against the Parliamentarians resulting in his capture and a massive

fine of £706. His downfall was exacerbated when six years later he was fined for recusancy. Unable to survive the financial ruin, he surrendered the estate of Euston to George Feilding in 1655.

Ambrose Rookwood had left a widow Elizabeth Tyrwhitt and two sons Robert (previously mentioned above) and Henry. Robert was knighted by King James I in 1624 and his son Ambrose (1622-1693) married Elizabeth Caldwell of Essex and was the father of Thomas Rookwood (1658-1726) the last male of the Rookwood family. The daughter of Thomas Rookwood was Elizabeth Rookwood (1683-1759) who married John Gage the father of Fr John Gage who set up the mission in Bury St Edmunds.

The grandson of Ambrose Rookwood (of the Gunpowder Plot) was also named Ambrose Rookwood (1660-1696). He enlisted in the army and supported the Jacobite cause. He was led by Sir George Barclay in the planned abduction and assassination of William of Orange but one of their co-conspirators turned King's evidence and Rookwood was arrested. Following his trial and incarceration at Newgate prison he was taken to Tyburn where he too was hanged, drawn and quartered.

The Jesuits opened a school at the former Abbot's Palace in the grounds of St Edmund's Abbey, Bury St Edmunds during the time of James II, but in the Orange riots of 1688 following the flight of that monarch, this was destroyed and Mr Prettyman murdered leading the priests to hurriedly leave Bury.

The various priests serving the Suffolk Mission during these times may be found in Foley (Collectanea SJ) but who precisely was at Coldham was not recorded, probably for the sake of safety. Whenever possible the priest lived in his own house on the estate, although he might not always have been identifiable as a priest. It is likely that the present presbytery is an extension of the house originally used by the priest.

Following the departure of Fr Henry Rookwood in 1717 the chaplaincy at Coldham Hall continued through Fr William Anderton OSB until he died in 1718, succeeded by another Benedictine Francis Howard who remained until he went to Hengrave Hall around 1730.

The Benedictines took over their work in Bury St Edmunds for a time, but Coldham still continued. In 1728 the Rookwood estates and those of the Gage family at Hengrave began to have a common interest. Sir Thomas Gage took over Coldham Hall from his mother, a Rookwood, and used the name Rookwood until he inherited the Gage estates also, when he became Rookwood-Gage. His brother Fr John Gage SJ, (1756) reopened Bury for the Society, and as part of his scheme nearly brought the Coldham Mission to an end. Anxious, doubtless, to have a good number to fill his new church (now the chapel of St Edmund's Church) he arranged that the Coldham congregation should travel into Bury. He died in 1790 and is buried in Stanningfield chancel; but before then Coldham had its own priest again.

Elizabeth Rookwood was an extremely wealthy lady who was fluent in Latin, French and Flemish and by 1737 she had a library of nearly 2000 books at Coldham Hall, many of them scarce Continental works; her house was adorned with choice European works of art selected for her by her Jesuit chaplains, including Fr James Dennett. It is thought that a proportion of the library's contents had been retrieved from the former Abbots' Palace in Bury St Edmunds.

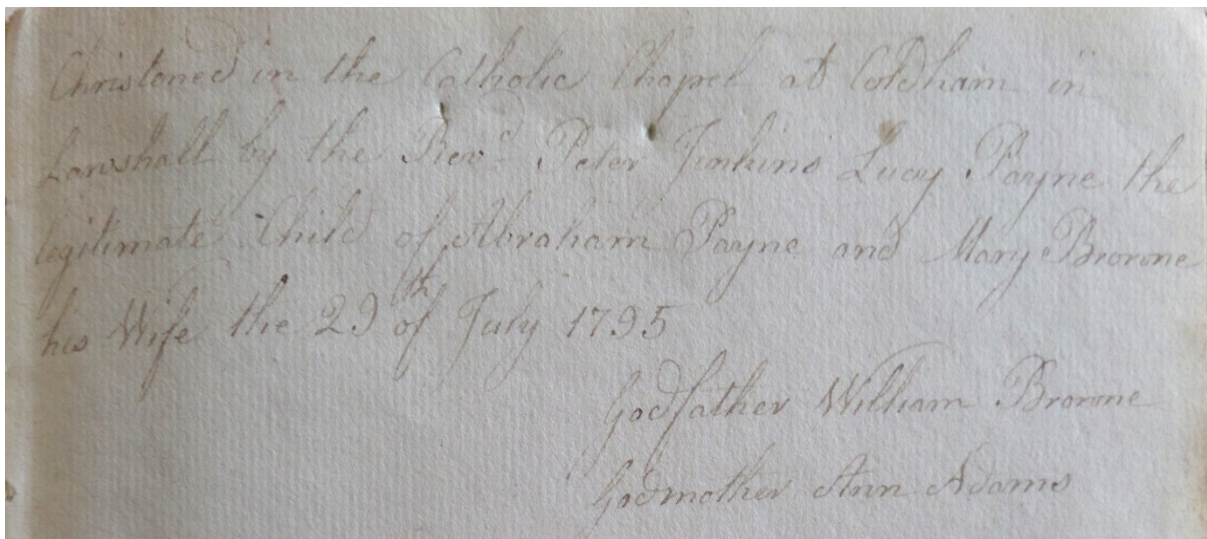
From 1762 until 1766 Fr James Dennett was the Jesuit Provincial for England and from 1733 until 1784 he was resident chaplain at Coldham Hall. His successor was Fr Edward Baptist Newton, described as ex SJ. By this time the congregation had declined to only four people. Fr Newton extended his ministry

to include the area surrounding Sudbury, Long Melford and Clare but died in 1787. Next came a period of eight years when Coldham was served from Bury again. By this time the Jesuit Fr John Gage had become chaplain to his mother Elizabeth Rookwood Gage in a house at 43 Southgate Street, Bury St Edmunds. This led to an era when Catholicism was practised in the Chapel in Westgate Street, Bury St Edmunds which was built in 1762.

Elizabeth Inchbald (born Simpson at Stanningfield in 1753) was educated by the Jesuits at Coldham Hall. Famous as an actress, novelist and playwright, her novel 'A Simple Story' published in 1791 was based on characters who were Catholics of the Suffolk gentry. It was acclaimed for its realistic portrayal of the Catholic lifestyle of that era, showing the strong character of the personalities in the book and the tensions that arose for practising Catholics.

It was an era when perhaps the community struggled to find its moral compass – whilst the persecution of witches had waned in other parts of the Country, in 1795 a witch was discovered in Stanningfield, resulting in trial and her being condemned by drowning in a pond close to the Churchyard.

Fr Peter Jenkins came to Coldham in 1795 and remained until 1800. In 1794 a brick chapel was built onto Coldham Hall and this served the Rookwood family and members of the community. A register commencing 1795 not only indicates the beginnings of activity at the chapel but is significant in the context of local religious and social history. Its first entry relates to the baptism by Rev Peter Jenkins of Lucy Payne, the child of Abraham and Mary Payne on 29 July 1795.



Five further entries are recorded by Rev Peter Jenkins, these relating to two other members of the Payne family (Abraham 1798 and Mary 1800) and three children named Mayston (Lucy 1796, William 1797 and Sharron [?] 1800).

Towards the end of the 1700s, Fr John Talbot SJ was also at Coldham.

From 1801 Coldham was tended by an emigre priest Pere Francois Marie of Bayeaux Rev who conducted 28 baptisms between 1801 and 1811, of families named Goodrich (Simon 1801, Frances 1803, Elizabeth 1805, Thomas 1806, Clement 1807, Teresa 1808, Cecilia Mary 1809, Robert 1811); Mayston (Ann 1801, Martha 1803, Agnes 1804, Teresa 1804, Robert 1805, Joseph 1806, Edward 1807);

Payne (William 1802, Harriot 1804, Elizabeth 1805, John 1807, Mary Ann 1809); Bowers [?] (Lucy 1802, John 1805, James 1808, John 1811); Churchyard (John 1810); East (Harriot Ann 1810); Betts (Robert 1811, James 1811). It should be realised that in some instances the names related to cousins and that the details of the parents are included in the register. Pere Marie died in 1823.

A lack of entries in the register occurs until 1824 when the Abbe Louis Pierre Simon of Rouen Diocese baptised 16 children from families with the surname of Reeman, Wilding, Howe, Mayston, Wright, Alderton and Gill.

In 1834 Fr John Laurenson SJ of Bury St Edmunds explained to his superior that there was Mass at Coldham once a fortnight and all the indulgences, the people going into Bury on alternative weeks in a covered cart. Their numbers were dwindling - from 70 or 80 Easter communicants they had dropped at one time to only 13.

In 1837 Rev Henry Brigham recorded the baptism of George Reeman, followed by two entries from Rev Tate for the baptisms in 1838 of William Smith and William Betts. Between 1838 and 1841 Fr James O'Neill made 12 entries in the register for the surnames of Wilding, Mayston, Pate [?], Reeman, Middleditch, Mead, Rollinson, Gill and Betts. Fr James O'Neill was in residence at Coldham and on 26 July 1841 assisted at a marriage in Coldham Hall Chapel. This means that sometime after 1829 (Catholic emancipation) the third Chapel at Coldham Hall had been built. It remains, attached to the Hall, and still has small medallions of coloured glass let into the windows, depicting the 12 apostles.

In 1842 Rev Thomas Rimmer baptised Thomas Phillipson and in 1843 Rev R P Gates Baptised Lucy, the surname of whom is illegible. The rear of the register records other parish information. On 26 July 1841 Thomas Philipson and Charlotte Mary Stannard married with Pastor O'Neill officiating. An additional baptism is shown of Isaiah Moore in 1839. The deaths are recorded of Edmund Rolfe (1839); [?] Meakins (1840); Henry Mayston (1840). Fr Gates is further mentioned in 1855. It was around this time that a chapel was created in the priest's house at Coldham Cottage.

In 1856, during the time of Fr William Poole, a baptism was performed in 1856 by a Canon Formby. Fr Poole was an assertive character and in 1861 against the will of Sir Thomas Gage, he removed the school benches to his own house, dismissed the schoolmistress and decided to undertake the role of educating pupils himself. He was reputed to have made stilts for children so that they could walk through the mud to school. The chapel was transferred to the school building.

Records show that between 1863 to 1865 Fr Christopher Scott was responsible for Lawshall.

During 1865 to 1885 when Fr Patrick Rodgers was the priest another catastrophe overtook Coldham, and from being Coldham Hall the mission became Coldham Cottage named after the presbytery. After all these years of difficulty the estate was so heavily mortgaged that it was sold by Chancery in 1867.

Mass was said at Barfields (which also accommodated the school) again for a time, (and by 1870 the kitchen of the presbytery with a bedroom overhead, had been adapted by taking down the ceiling between them and extending to form the body of the present church. When the building was opened for Mass in the same year, the Church was dedicated to Our Lady Immaculate and St Joseph. At about the same time the school was moved to the half acre of ground which had been bought at the time of the sale of the estate and given to the diocese. Fr Rogers was made a canon in 1883 and two years later was appointed to Ipswich.

In 1885 there were two baptisms by Bury priests and then the name of Robert Tab appears as a sort of stopgap.

Around 1886 Rev George Heitman became in charge of the mission for a short time because the names on a subsequent conveyance are Rogers, Heitman, Wilkinson who were all described as successive occupants of the house.

Fr George Miles was also listed as being priest at Coldham from 1886 until 1890.

For 25 years Fr Augustine Alfred Wilkinson was shown as in charge of the mission from 1890 until 1925.

Fr Edmund Legros SJ is significant to the history of Lawshall because of the copious notes he made during his detailed research of the history of the times of Catholic suppression, Coldham Hall, Barfields, the schooling and the Church. From 1925 until 1936 he served the community.

From 1936 Fr Francis Ethelbert Sammons was Coldham's priest until 1949. During this time Mrs Parsons served as his housekeeper. On an occasion of being asked what he found attractive in Coldham, Fr Sammons replied, "400 years hard work," adding that his dream would be the celebration of four centuries in the year 1974.

In 1949 Fr Edgar Hardwick became responsible for Coldham Cottage. In 1955 the Catholic population of Lawshall was recorded as 80 of whom 47 had performed Easter duties. In that year there had been two weddings but no funerals or conversions. Fr Hardwick occupied the priest's house at Coldham Cottage with his telephone contact number being Hartest 236. The listing of his details that year indicated that he was contactable at Sudbury's Church which tends to suggest that during his time the parish of Sudbury administered Lawshall. The Catholic population of Lawshall slowly increased over this period and by 1968 there were 132 of whom 50 attended Mass, including the celebration of two baptisms and a wedding.

Before his death in 1971 Fr Hardwick gave to Fr Houghton a small case which contained interesting documents about Coldham Hall, Catholic history and the parish of Lawshall. Fr Houghton, in turn, passed the contents to local Catholic historian Joy Rowe who, in 2015 with the assistance of John Saunders lodged the contents at the Suffolk Records Office.

From 1972 Coldham Cottage reverted to being covered from Bury St Edmunds, this prevailing until 2000 when Fr Gerry Quigley took on the pastoral responsibilities and eventually moved into the priest's house. He was later joined by a retired priest, Fr Peter Marsh. Fr Quigley retired in 2018 and the continuance of services at Coldham Cottage was maintained by the priests of St Edmund's.

Schooling and Barfields

Sometime during the late 1600s or early 1700s another place was used for Mass, buried in the woods and surrounded by a moat, the attic chapel being either abandoned or used for the family. This second chapel, called Barfields or Barfords still stands as a fine country house accessed via Donkey Lane, Lawshall. The original chapel can be discerned with evidence of fine timbers and stained glass. The premises also comprised a school.

A directory for 1816 mentions a boarding school for girls at Lawshall run by Madame de Roquiguy. Fr Marie was the priest at the time and it seems likely that she too came from France. This establishment was taken over in 1823 (when Fr Marie died) by a parishioner, Miss Mayston, and was moved to Barfields, being altered to a small school for all Catholic children. Miss Mayston lived in a house attached to the Chapel and held the school in her best room. There were only a few benches and the children used slates, although ink was allowed occasionally. Teaching staff included Miss Tricker, Miss Woolfred and Mrs Downes.

In 1867 the Coldham estate was sold and Barfields was again used as a chapel.

In 1868 the school was moved to the site of Coldham Cottage and Miss Morley (later to become Mrs Cornish) was the teacher. The school was held in the building which was being adapted to form the church. A former parishioner, now deceased, recalled going upstairs to school, and a small stage being used up there for theatricals; but by 1870 the oak framed and tarred building classed as the junior room was in use. Other teachers included Miss Gaffney, Miss Laffen, Miss Fisher, Miss Farnden and then Mrs Cornish again. During the time of Fr Wilkinson, Mrs Read taught and when she left in 1925 Fr Legros took over the teaching himself, with the occasional help of former pupils. He built the extension classed as the senior room, in 1933.

Upon the death of Fr Legros in 1938 the school was closed for a term, most of the children going to their local village schools. However, Fr Sammons happened to have a former teacher as his housekeeper and between them they managed to keep the school open until the late 1940s. What the Rookwood and Gage families had formerly been to the old parish of Coldham, the education of Catholic children was also the link that kept a scattered Catholic community together.

Architecture of Coldham Hall and Coldham Cottage

During the time that Coldham Hall was used as a Mass centre, there was a need for secrecy. The attic was just off the long gallery extending the length of the Hall from wing to wing, north and south along the width of the Hall. A stairway at both ends of the gallery led to the floors below. The thickness of the wall of a chimney stack concealed a doorway. A priest's hiding place was built over the entrance porch of the Hall.

As depicted below, the old chapel in the attic was later converted to a bedroom. Escape is to the right in the alcove between the lamp and the tallboy.



Image taken from Diocese of Northampton Centenary Souvenir 1850 – 1950

The structure of the presbytery and Church was painstakingly recorded by Fr Legros within papers now held at Suffolk Archives. Conceding that this may not be of interest to everyone, details are shown here in the event that they may prove of future architectural value.

'Just before 1870 there was only the priest's house viz lower or ground floor, small sitting room, a passage from front to back door, dining room with very thick wall allowing for small storage room in its thickness and then kitchen and passage - present one more or less gave access to different rooms (not large, small? window play the kitchen door, which may have been behind present Lady altar).

Second floor - rooms correspond with one small room over lower passage - servant sleeping room? (now bath room but obviously cut off from large bedroom JES). There was come out of course, the stairs and passage. Room over kitchen was school room and also used for entertainments by children. Mrs Cornish remembers dressing in the small room and from here going on to what was the stage in the room above the kitchen ie the schoolroom (? would this small room be the priest's present clothes cupboard corresponding to store cupboard in the dining room?). Flight of stairs led to this schoolroom but no trace left. (Suggestion the opposite side of the dining room fireplace to the store cupboard? there must be a lot of space in that wall! JES). Bert Reeman (died at 84) could not exactly say that he remembered going upstairs from the outside.

Kitchen and room above made into present Chapel, walls being taken forward to present limit. Floor between kitchen and schoolroom taken away. Fireplaces and chimney space made recess from altar (n b crucifix given by father of Fr Wilkinson. Present kitchen, scullery, larder, small passage and sacristy added. No change since in chape.)

Whole structure is lath and plaster. In 1925 1/3 of plaster renovated, to make shell safe, therefore some laths rotten and in places inside open to weather. Dreams made to work. Only one socket drain pipe to drain of kitchen sink - rest were ordinary pipes quite blocked up. Inspection chambers from scullery to ditch wall indicated line of piping. Old and old-fashioned drain in playground was caving in, and danger to children (playground then was by pear tree) made of red brick, which was made on estate - maybe century old, probably more. Bricks around drain some 2' high by 18" wide, a new socket-type line of drainpipes laid down from pear tree to ditch. Old pipes re-laid from N W corner of Chapel to meet other drain at inspection chamber (socket pipes impractical- not enough depth - authority - Mr Crosby) from roots of pear tree, French train to meet the pipes (socket) leading water from her tray to inspection chamber. Before this always standing water round tree except in summer.

Main line of pipe was laid inside the brick one and the space filled come at this making playground safe.

Tits noticed drilling holes through plaster of walls. Many parts needed renewing and this led to renovating the whole place. Walls were very patchy 'so much for housing the Lord!'

Old plaster stripped off leaving only the old laths (all of oak) except where they had rotted. Over these expanded steel was nailed then one coat (not too thick) of lime mortar - - finally one coat (also not too thick) of rough cast mixture of cement, Alston grit and lime thrown on.

This is meant as an experiment. Cement has no cross grain - but only as long as the steel does not rust. The laths were left on purposely to try to squeeze the lime mortar through and thus protect the steel on both sides. This expanded steel is in its experimental stage. The new school room has cement put on from the outside and is exposed to damp. The house and church have the method described above. The date of the work is firmly marked in cement - 1934 - so that the lime can be calculated with certainty and conclusions deduced.

NB the colour used to be Vermilion which was kept on repainting 1924. Now 1934, it is drab yellow.

1926 ECs and oil shed built.

1930-31 Carpenter's shop

1932 Garden shed for tools, cement same time

1933 New school room

1934 Exterior renovation and also plinth round chapel. Oak beam in study uncovered and as it was parting from its support, another was placed and secured to hold it. Never hide such beams! Trouble comes behind the games (?).

Hengrave Hall and the Gage Family



It is not intended in this chronicle to detail the full history of Hengrave Hall or its occupants but the building and members of the Gage family have great significance to Catholicism and the following summary may inspire an enquirer to greater research.

In 1538 Sir Thomas Kytson completed the building of the present Hengrave Hall using materials from the former priories of Burwell, Ixworth and Thetford.

His offspring included Thomas Kytson (junior) who in turn had two daughters, one of whom, Mary Kytson, inherited Hengrave Hall upon his death in 1540. In 1583 she married Thomas Darcy 1st Earl Rivers from Essex and their second daughter Penelope Darcy was born in 1593.

Penelope Darcy was simultaneously courted by Sir George Trenchard, Sir John Gage (the 1st Baronet of the Gage family of Firle, Sussex) and Sir William Hervey (of Ickworth). Whether in jest or by desire she told them that they would each have to wait their turn, a pronouncement that came true as she married each, one after the other! Her marriage to Sir John Gage produced nine children before he died in 1633. She became regarded as the female head of the families at Hengrave in which she resided from 1640 and the domain at Firle, Sussex.

Through her family and social connections Penelope Darcy maintained her connections across the upper echelon of society, including her son-in-law Sir Francis Petre 1st Baronet of Cranham, Essex who had married Elizabeth Gage and was the founder in 1633 of the Jesuit College of the Holy Apostles at Norwich. It is apparent that members of the Petre family were granted refuge at Hengrave at intervals between 1640 and 1650.

In 1643 the county's High Sheriff and 30 officers, on the orders of the State, conducted a search at Hengrave Hall and seized a cache of weapons. Penelope denied any criminal intent and contended that some guns were antique, but it was believed that some of the recusants were in possession of arms. Attempts were made to sequester Hengrave Hall from Penelope Gage who was a convicted recusant but as the house was owned by her mother Mary, Countess Rivers, it was not achievable in law.

Amongst the offspring of Penelope Darcy and Sir John Gage was Thomas Gage who inherited the Baronetcy of Firle, Sussex. Penelope died in 1644 whereupon Edward Gage, her grandson, took on the running of Hengrave Hall, later becoming 1st Baronet of Hengrave in 1662.

Edward Gage was active in the arena of marriage, acquiring five wives and producing 12 children. His wives included key Protestants – Mary Hervey of Ickworth (the daughter of Penelope Darcy's third husband Sir William Hervey), Frances Aston of Staffordshire and one of the Feildings of Warwickshire. The wealth and standing of Edward Gage increased to the extent that he was the richest Suffolk Catholic with properties and land scattered across the west of Suffolk and premises in London, a house in Southampton Square, London (now known as Bloomsbury Square), St Saviours Hospital in Fornham Road and places that had formerly been part of the Abbey, as well as a large house in Northgate Street in Bury St Edmunds which has since been sub-divided and serves as the Farmers' Club. However, this was not without personal issues – his chaplain was arrested, Lord Aston (his father-in-law) was incarcerated in the Tower of London and his son was forced to leave the Country. He appeared at the Quarter Sessions at Bury St Edmunds in 1674 as an alleged recusant, a situation that was to again be publicised in 1681 when he and his brothers Henry Gage and John Gage were listed as reputed Suffolk Papists. He adopted a lower profile and in 1690 he disposed of his wealth to his son and took on religious study and writing using them to persuade people to convert. He died in 1707 by which time the Catholic mission was very much being steered from the Rookwoods' home at Coldham Hall.

Links with the continent were established and the French mother-in-law of Edward William Gage was permitted to live at Hengrave Hall between 1675 and 1696 when she died.

In 1716 the 2nd Baronet Sir William Gage was affected by the laws that provided hardship for Catholics, obliging him to mortgage Hengrave and entrusting the management of his land to Edmund Howard.

In 1718 John Gage married Elizabeth Rookwood, this being recorded by Fr Hugh Owen on a marriage certificate, the ceremony being amongst the earliest known to have taken place at the Bury mission. This brought together the two richest and most prominent Catholic families in the area, particularly as Elizabeth was the heiress of the Rookwoods of Stanningfield and she also inherited the estate of her mother Tamworth Martin of Long Melford. By this time the family adopted the surname of Rookwood-Gage.

Catholic worship in the area of Bury St Edmunds was supported around 1730 by two Benedictine monks Dom Francis Howard and Dom Alexius Jones, who worked in conjunction with a secular priest, Fr Hugh Owen (who is likely to have been the same priest, mentioned in the previous section, who served the Short family). The Gage family was instrumental in the survival of this which lasted until the monks died.

The first greengage is reputed to have been produced at Hengrave Hall. Historians and botanists have never come to a reliable conclusion on this but give the credit to Sir William Gage for growing the fruit. Some schools of thought consider that around 1724, John Gage sent plum trees from France to his brother at Hengrave and that because the labels on them had detached, they were named as greengages. Others contend that the plants were imported to the Gage family at Firlie and were therefore unconnected with Hengrave. The different Baronetcies of the name Gage make it hard to establish fact, Sir William Gage 7th Baronet of Firlie lived between 1695 and 1744; Sir William Gage 2nd Baronet of the Rookwood-Gage Baronetcy lived from 1651 to 1727; Sir William Gage 4th Baronet of the Rookwood-Gage Baronetcy lived from 1712 to 1767. Therefore, any one of these having the forename of William might lay claim to the discovery and naming of the greengage, as could any of the brothers of Fr John Gage. However, the likelihood of the fruit being sourced by Fr John Gage does suggest that Hengrave was the most likely place of planting the greengage.



Fr John Gage, born in 1720, son of John Gage and Elizabeth Rookwood, studied at St Omer for the priesthood and came to Bury St Edmunds to take over from the Benedictine Mission. He celebrated Mass in private in a Chapel at a house at 43 Southgate Street. These premises had seemingly been in the ownership of the Gage family before passing to Madam White, a Protestant. The enforcement of anti-Catholic legislation was lax in the town, as is mentioned in the diaries of the visiting Frenchman Le Roche Foucauld and Mrs White had no problems in acquiring it. The house was mentioned in Pickwick Papers as the site

of the boarding school that Mr Pickwick foolishly climbed into one night to rescue a young heiress. The book describes the house well but mistakenly places it in Westgate Street.

Not only did Fr John Gage serve the townspeople but he also ministered in other parts of the County. His mission register documented those who were baptised, married and deceased. In a decade commencing 1756, Fr John Gage baptised 81 children, one of whom appears to have come to Bury St Edmunds as part of the slave trade with which the Gages had connections.

Fr John Gage was financially supported by his mother Elizabeth Rookwood, who owned the manor of Fresels at Westley, his brother Thomas Rookwood-Gage and the Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr James Dennett. By 1761 sufficient money totalling £2,000 had been amassed for Fr John Gage to purchase and build the new mission house and Chapel in Westgate Street, Bury St Edmunds. In 1791 Fr John Gage died but his legacy continued and the Church of St Edmund King and Martyr was built alongside the Chapel in 1837. He is buried in the family vault in Stanningfield.

By 1767 the direct Gage dynasty ceased and the estate was inherited by Sir Thomas Rookwood-Gage, another of the sons of John Gage and Elizabeth Rookwood. This combined two of the most prominent

Suffolk Catholic families, a situation that continued until 1874. The relationship between the Rookwood-Gages and the non-Catholic community around the 1800s features in the renowned diaries of James Oakes, *'The Oakeses were always on the friendliest terms with the Roman Catholic Gage family'*.

Whilst some may regard the lineage of the Gages as being somewhat incidental to Catholicism in Bury St Edmunds and the surrounding area, the evidence shows that not only were they amongst the Country's wealthy gentry but they also established networks across counties with like-minded Catholics whilst also maintaining Protestant associations and preserving a degree of tolerance of their beliefs. This assisted those in religious orders by providing venues for the celebration of Mass and giving them sanctuary. Several of the Gages over time became priests and nuns. They were prepared to accept the label of recusants and to undergo the pecuniary penalties that this incurred. The building of the Chapel and Church in Bury St Edmunds ensured the endurance and future growth of Catholicism in the town and surrounding area.

Between 1794 and 1802 the Hall was occupied by the Augustinian nuns of Bruges whose chaplain was the secular priest, Andrew Oliver. After their departure it would seem that there were no resident chaplains but the Jesuits of Bury St Edmunds may have supplied.

Following the departure of the Gages, the estate then passed through various owners and had a range of uses. During the First World War the Hall's annexe was used as a field hospital.

Between 1952 and 1974 the Sisters of the Assumption occupied Hengrave Hall using it as a school, a retreat and conference centre and as their convent.

The estate passed into private ownership in 2006 resulting in its sympathetic renovation and refurbishment. Its Church remains a place of beauty and historic relevance with its tombs and characteristics reminding us of its significant prominence in local Catholicism.

Moreton Hall, Bury St Edmunds

Sometimes overlooked in the rich history of Catholicism in Bury St Edmunds is Moreton Hall which between 1962 and 2020 was an independent co-educational school founded by Lady Miriam Fitzalan-Howard, daughter of 3rd Baron Howard of Glossop. Known by her married surname of Hubbard she held the office of Deputy Lieutenant for the County but was perhaps best known for her charity work and as chair of the fund that established St Nicholas Hospice in 1984 at Turret Close in Westgate Street, Bury St Edmunds and subsequently moved to its site at West Suffolk Hospital. The choice of the Saint's name for the Hospice derived from the former chapel in Hollow Road/Barton Road, Bury St Edmunds dedicated to Saint Nicholas. Her husband Lieutenant Commander Theodore Bernard Peregrine **Hubbard was co-founder of the School and he** and Geoffrey de Guingand served jointly as the first headmasters. In 2009 Moreton Hall Trust acquired the freehold to the building and parklands.



Originally known as St Edmund's Hill, Moreton Hall was designed by Robert Adam, famed for his national and local architecture which included the construction of the Market Cross in Bury St Edmunds. Its foundation stone was laid on 12 April 1773 to provide a home for Dr John Symonds (1730 – 1807), Professor of Modern History and Languages of the University of Cambridge.

The Bury Post of 19 October 1785 records the occasion of the first hot air balloon to take off from Bury St Edmunds and within a painting in 1789 to commemorate this event, Moreton Hall can be seen in the background.

In 1844 Henry Francklyn took ownership of Moreton Hall. He was succeeded in 1884 when the house was sold by auction to Ferdinand Eyre (1854 - 1928) and renamed Mount House. Eyre was a person of local notoriety having become Deputy Lieutenant for the county; Sheriff of Suffolk in 1893; mayor of Bury St. Edmunds in 1898. He was married to Mary Gabrielle Paston-Bedingfeld whose family lived at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk. The Eyres were devout Catholics, local philanthropists and benefactors to the Church. They maintained a chapel within their premises (in later years this became the School sick-bay when the chapel moved to the ground floor), the reredos from which was subsequently relocated to Dersingham Church. It is believed that it was the Eyres who changed the name to Moreton Hall.

On 18 June 2017 the parish held the Corpus Christi procession and Sunday morning Mass at Moreton Hall School.

Montana, Great Barton

Montana is a 'House of Hospitality' run by the Benedictine Sisters of Grace and Compassion in Great Barton just six miles from Bury St Edmunds.

In the early 1960s the late Mrs Cynthia Oakes started the project of a retirement home built next to her home which was named Montana after her love for that State in the United States of America and the sisters came to look after the first nine residents.



The Chapel is large and delightful and the whole was officially opened on 11 March 1969 by Bishop Charles Grant the then Bishop of Northampton.

Mrs Oakes died in 1970 and many further extensions and developments

took place. The care home and self-contained flats provide accommodation for residents, staff and a resident retired priest.

On 30 August 2014 Bishop Alan Hopes attended Montana, Great Barton to bless the Chapel and its new stained-glass window.