

**Jesuit News Networks and Catholic Identity: The Letters of John Thorpe, S.J., to the
English Carmelite Nuns at Lierre, 1769–89**

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Let us mutually help each other to obtain the same end; but he has need of more help
who is more entangled with the impediments to it.

John Thorpe to Mary Clare of Jesus Crucified, July 25, 1789¹

John Thorpe, S.J. (1726–92) is known to historians as a prolific letter writer whose correspondence covered a range of topics, from Church affairs to artistic and political matters of the time. Not yet recorded and analysed as part of his letter-writing *oeuvre* are his communications with several nuns at the English Carmelite convent in Lierre. In theory, the nuns were cut off from the outside world due to the strict rules of enclosure promulgated by the Council of Trent. However, a series of letters from Thorpe to the enclosed sisters survives, showing that he provided them with news of the wider world. In these letters Thorpe detailed then-current events, ranging from efforts to suppress the Society of Jesus to information about the dwindling Jacobite court in exile; from updates on the latest canonizations and miracles, to reports about goings-on in other communities of women religious. This essay will show Thorpe plugging his nun correspondents—and in turn the convent—into global news networks, with the Jesuit as the conductor of this intellectual exchange. The essay will open by contextualizing the letters and detailing the characters

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¹ Farnborough Abbey, John Thorpe in Rome to Mary Clare of Jesus Crucified Dalton in Lierre, July 25, 1789.

involved, before exploring the circular nature of the correspondence and the content of the nuns' letters to Thorpe. Three specific topics to which Thorpe regularly returned will then be examined: the English-related news he relayed to the convent; reports of goings-on in the wider Church; and, finally, his analysis of the Jesuit suppression and its aftermath.

Correspondents and Context

John Thorpe was born in Halifax, Yorkshire on October 21, 1726. From 1741 to 1747 he was educated at St. Omers College, the English Jesuit school founded in Saint-Omer in 1593. On September 7, 1747, he entered the English Jesuit novitiate at nearby Watten. After completing his two-year novitiate there, Thorpe travelled to the English Jesuit house of studies at Liège for three years of philosophy. Before undertaking his theology studies, he spent several years teaching at his *alma mater*, St. Omers College, 1752–55, a common practice amongst English Jesuit scholastics at the time. In the period November 1756–c.1760, Thorpe worked on his theology at the English College in Rome, which, though not expressly a Jesuit institution, was under the Society's administration at the time. Thorpe was ordained a priest towards the end of this period at the college, but rather than entering the English mission he was destined to remain in the Eternal City for the rest of his life, first as a member of staff at the English College, then, from 1765, as the English language confessor at the College of the Penitentiaries at St. Peter's. Thorpe died in Rome aged sixty-five on April 12, 1792.² During his time in Rome, Thorpe often sought to acquire works of art for English

² Geoffrey Holt, S.J., *The English Jesuits, 1650–1829: A Biographical Dictionary*, CRS, 70 (London: CRS, 1984), 246; Holt, "The Letters from Rome of John Thorpe, S.J. to Charles Plowden, S.J., 1784–9," *Recusant History* 28 (2007): 434–57, esp. 436–43; Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., "'Lost in the Title': John Thorpe's Eyewitness Account of the Suppression," in *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context: Causes, Events, and*

Catholic patrons, arranging for the transfer of these material objects from the center to the peripheries of Catholic Europe. His artistic assistance was not confined to co-religionists though, and he seemed happy to act for non-Catholics as well.³ However, of particular attention for this essay is Thorpe's role as a dedicated news gatherer for the English Jesuits. Geoffrey Holt describes him as a "prolific letter-writer," sending to his friends in England "frequent bulletins of news, Roman, Jesuit and Jacobite," while Thomas McCoog labels him a "news correspondent."⁴ As the letters to the Lierre Carmelites attest, Thorpe found the habit difficult to break; following the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773, he was a member of the "Ex-Jesuit International," a form of union through the exchange of information as an adaptation of the Jesuit annual letters.⁵

The receiving and writing of letters was strictly controlled in convents after the Council of Trent. The English convents, which were particularly committed to observance of the rules of enclosure and separation from the world, viewed letters as a potential infringement of their rule and breach of the enclosure.⁶ Having shunned all worldly distractions, letters represented a potential invasion of the temporal into the nuns' sanctified cloister. Claire Walker has

Consequences, ed. Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 161–80, at 161.

³ *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701–1800*, ed. John Ingamells (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 939–42.

⁴ Geoffrey Holt, S.J., *The English Jesuits in the Age of Reason* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1993), 39, 70; McCoog, "'Lost in the Title,'" 161.

⁵ Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., "'Est et Non Est': Jesuit Corporate Survival in England after the Suppression," in *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*, ed. Robert A. Maryks and Jonathan Wright (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 162–77, at 169, n. 29.

⁶ For English convents and the rule of enclosure, see James E. Kelly, *National and Religious Identity in the English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800* (forthcoming).

judged that, because of their exilic nature, letter-writing posed more of a threat to the enclosure of English convents than actual physical violation by the local townspeople.⁷ This was borne out in the rule and constitutions of the Lierre Carmel, which stipulated that the nun in charge of the turn, at which objects could be passed in to the convent area, should “giue letters to noe body but to ye Pryoresse, who shall first redde them.” Indeed, it was considered a “Griuous Fault” to send or receive letters without the prioress’s permission. So seriously was the threat viewed that a suggested means of testing a nun’s vowed obedience was to show or give her a letter but not allow her to read it, or to encourage her to write a letter but destroy it on the excuse of some fault within the text.⁸ Other English convents placed similar restrictions on letters. Clare Conyers of the Aire Poor Clare community informed her cousin in 1788 that the nuns’ letters “are first taken to a Superior & read by her before” they could be passed to the post master.⁹ A confessor at the Louvain Augustinians even recommended that only one letter a year be allowed for each nun, though two should be permitted for the prioress.¹⁰

Nevertheless, English women religious did send and receive letters throughout the period of the convents’ existence in mainland Europe. Naturally, other Jesuits had written contact with the English convents but the high survival rate for the Thorpe letters is marked. For

⁷ Claire Walker, “‘Doe not supose me a well mortified Nun, dead to the world’: Letter-Writing in Early Modern English Convents,” in *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 159–76, at 161–62.

⁸ Nicky Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 252, 257, 261–62.

⁹ Clare Conyers to Isaac Young, December 19, 1788, printed in “Poor Clares of Aire: Correspondence of the Conyers Family,” ed. Victoria Van Hyning, in Nicky Hallett, “Life Writing I,” *English Convents in Exile*, 3:281.

¹⁰ Walker, “‘Doe not supose me’,” 161–62. This recommendation appears to have been adhered to: “Thimelby-Aston Literary Exchanges: ‘It imports not wher, but how wee live’,” in Hallett, “Life Writing I,” 263.

example, Lewis Sabran, S.J. (1652–1732), rector of St. Omers College, was in regular correspondence with members of the Bruges Augustinian community but only one letter is currently known to survive.¹¹ Walker has identified three broad areas of letter-writing amongst the convents: monastic business, family news, and patronage matters, including chasing dowries.¹² Naturally, these broad areas could overlap: for example, Catherine Windoe ascribed the source of her vocation as a Carmelite in Antwerp to letters received as a child from an older biological sister who had professed as a nun.¹³

The exilic English conventual movement was unique in its scale. Following the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII and England's final shift to a position of official state Protestantism at the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, all institutional expressions of Catholicism were banned in the country. During Elizabeth's reign, several male colleges were established—such as that at Douai in 1568 and the transformation of the English hospice in Rome into a college in 1579—devoted towards training Catholic clergy to covertly serve their co-religionists back in England. It was not until Elizabeth's final years that expressly English outlets for female professed religious observance were founded. Previously, English women wishing to become nuns entered local convents, such as St. Ursula's in Louvain. However, in 1598 a Benedictine convent was established at Brussels specifically for women of the English nation. It was followed by a further twenty foundations

¹¹ English Convent, Bruges, MS M.I.2.3; for his recorded correspondence with the community, see Geoffrey Holt, S.J., *The Letter Book of Lewis Sabran, S.J. (Rector of St. Omers College), October 1713–1715*, CRS 62 (London: CRS, 1971), 29, 49, 114, 121–22, 129, 131, 136, 147, 159, 186, 228, 237, 270–72, 313–14. For other examples of nun correspondence, see Hallett, “Life Writing I,” 263–317; Carmen M. Mangion, “The Convents and the Outside World,” *English Convents in Exile*, 6:143–54, 383–99.

¹² Walker, “‘Doe not supose me’,” 160. See also Hallett, “Life Writing I,” xix–xx.

¹³ Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 67–68. The sister is not listed in WWTN, suggesting she may have joined a local convent rather than one expressly for English nationals.

in the seventeenth century, as well as a series of houses run by the anomalous, unenclosed Mary Ward sisters, and the Bridgettine community of Our Lady of Syon, which survived the tumults of the Reformation to eventually settle in Lisbon. The first English Carmelite community was founded in Antwerp in 1619. Although a number of Carmels were founded from this house, Lierre in 1648 was the first explicitly English offshoot and was to be followed by another English house at Hoogstraten in 1678. The Lierre community is the main focus of this chapter and it remained in situ, located in Habsburg territory, until the French Revolution unleashed a new wave of wars across Europe, forcing the nuns to flee in July 1794. Ironically arriving as refugees in a homeland from which they had initially escaped for reasons of anti-Catholic sentiment, the community first rented a property from Sir John Lawson (1744–1811), fifth baronet of Brough, at St. Helen's Hall, St Helen's Auckland in County Durham. In 1804 they moved to Cocken Hall, a property belonging to the Carr family near the site of the ruined Benedictine Finchale Abbey, Co. Durham. Due to the opening of a coalmine nearby, the sisters left Cocken Hall in 1830 and found a permanent residence in Darlington, Co. Durham. The community remained in Darlington until its dispersal in 2010.

There were three main recipients of Thorpe's letters to the English Carmelite convent at Lierre. The first was his cousin, Catherine Thorpe (d.1787), who professed aged eighteen as Catherine Stanislaus of the Mother of God on September 21, 1728, only two years after Thorpe's birth. This means that if he ever actually met his cousin, then it is likely that he had only done so through the convent grille. Interestingly, there are no surviving letters in the convent collection from Thorpe to another cousin at the convent, Catherine's sister Mary (1712–76). She had also professed aged eighteen, taking the name Mary Aloysia Joseph of the Annunciation on March 25, 1730. She died on January 5, 1776; only three letters in the Lierre collection are dated from before this date, so she may have been too infirm to correspond with her Jesuit cousin, hence Thorpe writing to Catherine instead. Although

Catherine did not die until July 7, 1787, Thorpe's last surviving letter to her is from 1784, he referring in his later letters to her being ill.¹⁴

The other major recipient of Thorpe's letters was Jane Dalton (1757–1823). Hailing from Thurnham Hall in Lancashire, Dalton professed at the English Carmelite house in Lierre aged twenty-five on January 1, 1783 as Mary Clare of Jesus Crucified, having been clothed as far back as November 21, 1774. Thorpe evidently had some sort of connection with Dalton; it seems to be her he referred to in September 1781 when discussing efforts to encourage the Holy Roman Emperor to allow a young lady at the Lierre Carmel to make her profession before the age of twenty-five as she had already been clothed for more than four years.¹⁵ Following Catherine Thorpe's illness and eventual death, Dalton became the convent's main correspondent with Thorpe. Dalton would outlive Thorpe, experiencing the full tumult of the French revolutionary wars, escaping with her community back to England and dying on March 4, 1823 at their temporary home at Cocken Hall.¹⁶ The final recipient of Thorpe's correspondence, of which only two letters survive, was Ann Housman (d.1827). Born in London and professing as Mary Ann Bernard of St. Teresa on August 20, 1756, Housman was prioress of the Carmel 1772–1810, so for much of the period covered by Thorpe's letters. She died on March 26, 1827 having also made the journey to Cocken Hall.¹⁷

In total, there are eighteen surviving letters from Thorpe in the convent collection, as well as a couple of fragments and additional materials. Having been kept at Lierre, the letters

¹⁴ WWTN, LC079, LC080.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Holt, S.J., "Letters from Rome of John Thorpe, S.J. to Charles Plowden, S.J.: March 1781–March 1784," in *"Promising Hope": Essays on the Suppression and Restoration of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, ed. Thomas M. McCoog, S.J. (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2003), 73–110, at 78.

¹⁶ WWTN, LC022.

¹⁷ WWTN, LC046.

formed part of the archive at the Carmel once it had settled in Darlington and it was here that the author originally consulted them. In 2010 the sisters left the convent in Darlington and the community's archive moved to Farnborough Abbey, where it remains at the time of writing. Holt was evidently unaware of these letters as he claimed there was a gap in Thorpe's correspondence from early 1767 to January 1773, yet there are two letters from this period in the Lierre collection.¹⁸

Porous Enclosure and Exchange with the Outside World

Despite the apparent rigidity of Tridentine decrees surrounding enclosure, the sending and receiving of letters underlines the porous nature of clausura. As well as news coming into the conventual space via Thorpe's letters, news also emanated from the convent. Although no letters sent by the Lierre Carmelites to Thorpe are known to survive, it is possible from Thorpe's own correspondence to deduce what the nuns were telling him from within the convent's confines. Inevitably, health issues featured prominently, whether that was the illness of the convent's prioress or, more poignantly, that of his two cousins, Thorpe at one point worrying about the "infirm state" of Mary. He clearly cared for his relatives, urging Catherine to preserve her own health so that she could "assist your suffering companions": "I hope that you will soon tell me that they are all recovered."¹⁹ Once Catherine was too infirm to maintain correspondence, Thorpe thanked Jane Dalton for looking after her, commenting, "your great charity to poor Sister Stanny is comfortable and edifying."²⁰ An undated letter, but which must be from after July 7, 1787 when Catherine Thorpe died, confirms that Thorpe

¹⁸ Holt, *Age of Reason*, 75.

¹⁹ Farnborough Abbey, John Thorpe in Rome to Catherine Stanislaus of the Mother of God Thorpe in Lierre, February 10, 1769; October 5, 1769.

²⁰ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, November 6, 1786.

had been informed of her death, he thanking Ann Housman for letting him know.²¹ Happier news was also passed to Thorpe, particularly the arrival of new postulants or professions at the convent, including that of another Ann Houseman, niece of the prioress, who took the name Mary Aloysia Frances of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1789.²² Additionally, Thorpe was kept abreast of appointments in the convent, passing on his congratulations to Jane Dalton for her election as “depositaire” in May 1788.²³

Evidently a trusted correspondent, Thorpe was regularly asked to secure items and send them to the convent. Sometimes these items could be of practical use, such as the medicinal “Rom. Treacle” requested by his cousin Catherine.²⁴ More often, Thorpe acted as a conductor between the Roman center and the nuns, the Jesuit obtaining or clarifying various ecclesiastical decrees for them. For example, in 1769, he secured indulgences for the three English Carmelite houses.²⁵ In 1783 he clarified for Catherine that she did not need to renew the rescript of indulgences attached to the anniversary of her profession as the grant lasted forever.²⁶ Previously, in 1775, Thorpe had sent his cousins two large medals blessed by the

²¹ Farnborough Abbey, John Thorpe in Rome to Mary Ann Bernard of St Teresa Housman in Lierre, undated. Underlining the speed with which such news could travel, Thorpe learnt of the death of the convent’s confessor, Michael William Singleton (1741–83), in under a month: Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783; Godfrey Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests, Volume 4: 1716–1800* (Great Woking: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1977), 246.

²² Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, July 25, 1789; WWTN, LC047. See also Thorpe to Housman, February 11, 1789.

²³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, May 2, 1788

²⁴ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

²⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

²⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783, November 20, 1783.

pope, with indulgences for the owners attached.²⁷ In May 1788, at the Lierre community's request, Thorpe acquired a grant of indulgence that covered the nuns and the public who frequented their church. It was attached to the feast of the Sacred Heart, Thorpe explaining that he had hastened to send it before the festal date.²⁸ The community had clearly developed devotion towards the Sacred Heart; in October of that same year, Thorpe wrote to the prioress, Ann Houseman, urging her to be patient in awaiting a response to her request to extend the feast of the Sacred Heart to a full octave. He explained that the delay was due to changes in Vatican policy and the Congregation of Rites now having sole preserve for granting such privileges. A few months later he wrote to inform her that the request would almost certainly not be granted.²⁹ Nevertheless, Jane Dalton asked him for information about how devotion to the Sacred Heart was practised in Rome and he duly responded.³⁰

On other occasions, Thorpe took it upon himself to source objects. Based as he was in Rome, Thorpe was evidently a distributor of relics from the center of Catholic Europe. In October 1769, he sent a bumper pack of relics to his cousins via John Alloway, S.J. (1743–1808). Seven relics were sent, along with their authentications: they were of the former bishop of Geneva and Catholic Reformation writer, Francis de Sales (1567–1622); the early Christian martyr, Sebastian; the Benedictine founder, Benedict; the Jesuit founder, Ignatius of Loyola (c.1491–1556); founder of the Vallumbrosan order, John Gualbert (d.1073); the

²⁷ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775.

²⁸ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, May 2, 1788; Thorpe to Housman, undated, after July 7, 1787.

²⁹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Housman, May 25, 1788; February 11, 1789. Houseman had obviously pointed to the fact that the Liège Sepulchrines and the Ypres Benedictines had secured such permissions already, Thorpe explaining that they must have done so before the bureaucratic changes.

³⁰ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, July 25, 1789. In the same letter, Thorpe refers to the profession of Mary Aloysia Frances of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the name in religion once again indicating the devotional trend gripping the community at the time.

Piarists' founder, Joseph Calasanz (1557–1648); and founder of the Congregation of the Visitation, Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal (1572–1641). Thorpe informed his cousin Catherine that Clement XIII (1693–1769) had recently canonized Calasanz and de Chantal, the latter at the request of the Cardinal Duke of York (1725–1807). Besides these relics, Thorpe also included six rings that had touched the preserved arm of Francis Xavier (1506–52). He asked his cousin to let him know if any of the relics were duplicates of those already possessed by the convent: if they were, he requested she keep them for his distribution whilst he sought to secure others that the convent did not already own.³¹ In the convent benefactors' book, it was recorded that he sent his cousin Catherine a total of thirty-one relics, not to mention a guinea on her and her sister's jubilee.³² In addition, with an undated and unaddressed letter seemingly from after 1789, Thorpe also sent several Agnus Dei which had been requested by the community, as well as a new relic. He reported to the unidentified recipient that in Onani, Sardinia, a statue of the Sacred Heart had “thrice copiously emitted a dewy moisture in the manner of sweat,” which had been “devoutly wiped off with a piece of fine Linen” by the church curate. Small portions of the linen were being distributed and miracles associated with them already being reported; he enclosed a small piece of the linen

³¹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, October 5, 1769; CRS 70, 18. After July 7, 1787, Thorpe responded to an evident request from Ann Houseman for more rings which had been in contact with Francis Xavier's remains: Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Housman, undated.

³² It was also recorded that Thorpe “said for our intentions 311 Masses, he has promiss'd to say 70 more for this present year of our Lord 1772”: Farnborough Abbey, Lierre Carmelites' Receipts and Benefactors Book, 57–58.

with the relevant certificate.³³ Thorpe also distributed religious images to the enclosed convents, including depictions of St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–91).³⁴

News of English Interest

Thorpe provided his Carmelite correspondents with three different types of “English” news: information about other English women religious; details of English travelers in Rome; and reports of the Jacobite court in exile. Notably, he mentioned nothing relating to actual events in England, his news always being Euro-centric and, more often than not, dominated by Catholic concerns.

It is clear from his letters that Thorpe was in touch with several communities of women religious. In November 1786, he asked Jane Dalton to forward some papers to the English Carmelite convent at Hoogstraten, from where they were destined for “our brethren in Maryland.”³⁵ Several professed members of the Hoogstraten Carmel hailed from Maryland, a formerly strong Jesuit province, so routes of communication existed between the convent and America. Thorpe took a keen interest in any proposed trans-Atlantic developments, commenting to Ann Housman two years later, “God grant the proposal for founding a Convent of Theresians in Maryland may succeed. My own high esteem and veneration of

³³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to unknown, undated, after 1789.

³⁴ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775; November 20, 1783. Thorpe also sent a variety of images to his male correspondents in England: Geoffrey Holt, S.J., “Letters from Rome of John Thorpe, S.J. to John Jenison, S.J.: 1756–1767,” in *Promising Hope*, ed. McCoog, 55–71, at 59.

³⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, November 6, 1786. For the Maryland Jesuits, see Daniel Schlafly, “The ‘Russian’ Society and the American Jesuits: Giovanni Grassi’s Crucial Role,” in *Jesuit Survival and Restoration*, ed. Maryks and Wright, 353–67; Catherine O’Donnell, “John Carroll, the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus in Early Republican America,” in *Jesuit Survival and Restoration*, ed. Maryks and Wright, 368–85.

your holy Order constantly suggests ardent wishes of its being extended for the universal edification of the world.”³⁶ Thorpe himself was able to use Jesuit networks to convey news from Maryland: at the request of the prioress at Hoogstraten, he provided Jane Dalton with an account of the ex-Jesuits there after the suppression, as well as the situation of the prioress’s brother.³⁷

Thorpe also had contact with the followers of Mary Ward. In 1769, having been informed by his cousin that a “Mrs Stanfield” had decided not to bother writing to him again as her last letter had gone missing, the Jesuit drily noted, “Yorkshire ladies are not accustomed to throw aside their good purposes so soon, and for only little disappointment.” Thorpe asked his cousin to pass on this verdict, plus to discover where Stanfield wanted a silver medal sent which had been used in prayer by the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart (1720–88).³⁸ This dangled bauble apparently worked, for eight months later Thorpe was informing his cousin that he had received two grateful letters from “Mrs Stanfield and Mrs Aspinall the Superioress of our friends at York”. From this, it is possible to identify Elizabeth Stanfield (c.1710–77) and Ann Aspinall (d.1789) of the York Bar Convent. Apart from the Ignatian link between Thorpe and the York community, there may also have been a

³⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Housman, October 25, 1788. The plan became a reality in 1790 with the founding, from Hoogstraten, of the first English speaking convent in America, at Port Tobacco. For further evidence of Thorpe’s interest in the development of the Carmel in America, see Holt, “Thorpe to Plowden, 1784–92,” 454.

³⁷ This letter records no year of creation, only “26th March”; it is possible, from the details given, to date the letter to 1786. The prioress of Hoogstraten at the time was Ann Matthews, who had been born in Maryland. Her brother was the ex-Jesuit, Ignatius Matthews (1730–90): Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, March 26; WWTN, HC045; Holt, CRS 70, 161.

³⁸ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

kinship one, the mother of his two Carmelite cousins having been a Stanfield.³⁹ In addition, Thorpe evidently had contact with two members of the Bruges Augustinians—Barbara Clavering (d.1794) and Elizabeth More (d.1807)—as well as the Liège Sepulchrines.⁴⁰

More gossip was Thorpe's information about which English visitors had been in Rome. In 1769, he informed his cousin that there were "a great deal of English nobility & Gentry in town" and that "our country man" (by which Thorpe meant also hailing from Yorkshire), Sir Thomas Tancred (d.1784), was yet to return from Naples, where he had gone before Christmas.⁴¹ John Baptist Caryll, third baron Caryll of Duford (1713–88) and his wife Mary, née Scarisbrick (d.1783), were resident in 1775 but flirting with the idea of moving to Dunkirk, and in March–April 1786, Thorpe was looking after Mr Blundell of Ince Blundell, Lancashire, during his time in Rome.⁴² These visitors were likely to have been undertaking the Grand Tour but, in the case of the Carylls, there had also been the draw of the Jacobite Court in Italy. This being so, Thorpe passed details about the Jacobites to the enclosed

³⁹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, October 5, 1769; WWTN, MW004, MW142.

⁴⁰ Thorpe was not above asking for intelligence, wanting to know why the Bruges Augustinian chaplain had suddenly relinquished his position. One wonders if he received the honest answer—that it was because of drunkenness: Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783; Thorpe to Dalton, November 6, 1786; WWTN, BA057, BA145; English Convent, Bruges, MS CX, "Annals, Vol. 2: 1729–93," 265–67; Archive of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, Colchester, Essex. My thanks to Hannah Thomas for bringing the latter to my attention.

⁴¹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

⁴² Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775; Thorpe to Dalton, November 6, 1786. This was Henry Blundell (1724–1810), a friend of Thorpe's from their days as youngsters at St. Omers College: *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers*, ed. Ingamells, 101–2; my thanks to Maurice Whitehead for this reference. Thorpe regularly wrote to fellow Jesuits in England with news of the English abroad or on the Grand Tour: Holt, *Age of Reason*, 124–25.

Carmelites in Lierre. In 1769 he relayed the story of a miracle worked by the king's touch given by the Young Pretender.⁴³ Underlining his Jacobite sympathies, which he assumed were shared by the nuns, Thorpe updated his correspondents on the movements of the Jacobite court.⁴⁴ With palpable disappointment following Pope Clement XIII's refusal to recognize Charles Edward as king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Thorpe chronicled the declining fortunes of the Jacobite court and its move to Florence. Nevertheless, he still related news of the Cardinal Duke of York, who he confidently assured his cousin "there never was any danger" of being pope at the conclave which elected Pius VI (1717–99).⁴⁵

As a coda to this section, it is worth noting that although Thorpe and the nuns may have been living abroad, they had not abandoned the particularly English trait of discussing the weather. In 1789, responding to Ann Houseman's reports of particularly harsh winter conditions, Thorpe said that he had heard similar from all over Europe, with especially hard snowfall and frosts affecting food supplies.⁴⁶

⁴³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

⁴⁴ For example, Farnborough Abbey Thorpe to Thorpe, October 5, 1769. See Edward Corp, *The Stuarts in Italy, 1719–1766: A Royal Court in Permanent Exile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775. Interestingly, the news passed on to the nuns was not white-washed: in 1783, evidently believing that she knew all about it, Thorpe mentioned to his sister that Charles Edward's wife, Louise of Stolberg Geder, was still in Rome following her "elopement." Louise had fled her marriage in 1780 claiming physical violence and pleaded the aid of her brother-in-law, the Cardinal Duke of York, which was provided. Unknown to him, she was actually having an affair with the poet, Count Vittorio Alfieri. The Cardinal Duke of York only discovered this when he visited the seriously ill Charles in 1783, the meeting referred to by Thorpe. The Jesuit may have been more forgiving of Louise because it had been rumored that Charles Edward wanted Thorpe to teach her English: Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783; Rosalind K. Marshall, "Henry Benedict (1725–1807)," *ODNB*; Holt, *Age of Reason*, 77. For Thorpe and the English Jesuits' Jacobite sympathies, see Holt, *Age of Reason*, 70–77.

⁴⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Housman, February 11, 1789.

Wider Church News

A far greater proportion of each of Thorpe's letters is devoted to relaying news of the wider Church to his Carmelite correspondents. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that this subject was the one in which Thorpe thought the nuns had most interest, underlining the Catholic identity at the heart of this English convent. As such, he ensured they were kept up to date with major Catholic happenings, such as adding a hasty addendum to a letter in 1769 informing his cousin that Pope Clement XIII had died and the date for the conclave to elect his successor had been set.⁴⁷

Thorpe seemingly discerned that stories about miracles and new saints were eagerly received in the convent, and was presumably responding to encouraging responses when he conveyed such information. This is evident, for example, in his provision of details in 1769 regarding a miracle linked to the Jesuit saint, Aloysius Gonzaga. He wrote that through the intercession of St. Aloysius, poor families in desperate need had received food, a miracle "concerning which you desire some information." Thorpe explained that accounts had been received in Rome "of several supernatural augmentations of corn and other necessities of life." A "surprising number" of these miraculous provisions was being kept in one of the chapels linked to St. Aloysius's shrine in the church of Sant'Ignazio. This multiplied food and oil, Thorpe explained, was greatly sought after for its own miraculous properties, such as curing the sick.⁴⁸ In a letter to Jane Dalton in 1789, Thorpe noted that he included with it a relation of a particular miracle associated with St. Aloysius. This seems to survive as an undated fragment retelling the story of a community of "Blue Nuns" who lived near St. Mary Major in Rome. In April 1788, their wine supply was running dangerously low. A lay sister

⁴⁷ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

⁴⁸ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

placed an image of St. Aloysius on top of the barrel and poured a little of the miraculous flour mentioned above into the remaining wine, continuously praying for the saint's intercession. Miraculously, the wine kept flowing through the early summer and did not spoil in the heat. Thorpe maintained that "like benefits through the intercession of St Aloysius are so frequent the juridical certificates are no longer made or required in them."⁴⁹ Thorpe enclosed in the letter "some of the multiplied Flour that you desire," mentioning that, despite the Society's suppression, the feast of St. Aloysius had been kept in June 1789 in Rome in more than twenty places to satisfy the growing devotion of the people.⁵⁰ This was not an isolated example of interest in and devotion to Jesuit saints remaining strong in the convent after the Society's official suppression. In 1783, Thorpe wrote to his cousin that he had supplied a religious sister of hers in a convent at St. Denis with requested paintings of Ss. Aloysius, Stanislaus Kostka (1550–68) and the then Venerable John Berchmans (1599–1621). He added that a novena of Masses was being said at the saint's shrine in Rome at her bidding.⁵¹ Thorpe also sent prints of Ss. Aloysius and Francis Xavier—the latter at the request of the prioress, Ann Housman—to the Lierre convent.⁵²

It was not only news of Jesuit saints about which Thorpe kept the Lierre Carmelites informed. He wrote frequently about the then recently deceased French Franciscan tertiary, Benedict Joseph Labre (1748–83). Labre's reputation quickly grew, especially after his confessor attributed over 130 cures to the holy man's intercession within three months of his death. Thorpe, perhaps reflecting Roman interest, was evidently swept up in the general

⁴⁹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to unknown, undated partial fragment.

⁵⁰ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, July 25, 1789.

⁵¹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783.

⁵² Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, November 29, 1783; Thorpe to Dalton, May 2, 1788; October 15, 1788; Thorpe to Housman, October 25, 1788.

enthusiasm, going into great detail about the campaign to open the cause for Labre's beatification and eventual canonization. He even ensured that the nuns had copies of books about Labre.⁵³ Recognizing the interest that the beatification of a sister Carmelite would arouse, Thorpe wrote at length to Jane Dalton in 1788 about the planned beatification of the French-born Marie of the Incarnation (1566–1618). Born Barbara Avrillot and known as Madam Acarie, she was perceived as the foundress of the discalced Carmelites in France and became a lay sister before her death in 1618. In great excitement, Thorpe breathlessly informed Dalton that the pope had given approval for the nun's beatification. He put this down to the mediation "of your late royal Sister at St Denis", Louis XV's daughter, Princess Louise (1737–87), who had recently died. Thorpe mentioned that the miracles now had to be verified but he thought this a foregone conclusion.⁵⁴ In 1783, he wrote to his cousin about the opening of the cause of Anna Maria Redi (1747–70), who had lived as Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart. Thorpe reported that the Florence-based Carmelite's body had remained incorrupt and a local cult devoted to her had already emerged. A few months later, Thorpe supplied his cousin with a print of "your ven^{ble} Carmelite Sister."⁵⁵ In 1789, Thorpe was relaying news about the raising to the heavenly altars of another female Carmelite. He informed Jane Dalton that the pope had visited the order's chief house in Rome and declared

⁵³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, March 27, 1784. Testament to the interest in this holy man, that same year the English Augustinian convent at Bruges was in possession of a book about Labre and looked to his intercession: Bruges Annals, 275–79, 286, 288. My thanks to Caroline Bowden for this reference. As Thorpe was in correspondence with the Bruges convent, it is possible that he may have also been responsible for sending them the book.

⁵⁴ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, October 15, 1788. She was beatified three years later, in April 1791.

⁵⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, November 20, 1783; March 27, 1784. She was not canonized until 1934.

“The heroic degree of the Theological & Cardinal virtues” of the French Carmelite nun, Magdalen du Bois de Fontaines (1578–1637), known in religion as Magdalen of St. Joseph.⁵⁶

The nuns’ enthusiasm towards new devotions such as the Sacred Heart has already been noted; similarly, they appear to have borne an active interest in new expressions of female religious life. In 1779, Thorpe informed an unidentified recipient about the arrival of some Swiss nuns in Rome who practised perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. He noted that the Romans greatly admired the sisters but “do not understand” their practice. Thorpe then explained what was meant by perpetual adoration, thus underlining that it was a new phenomenon for the Carmelites in Lierre.⁵⁷ The “Blue Nuns” who had received the miracle of the wine from St. Aloysius were described by Thorpe as “a particular Institute formed upon the system of the Jesuits Noviceship, as much as that can be adapted to women.” He praised their practice of enclosure and commented that, if he had been correctly informed, “there is only one other House that professes this Institute.”⁵⁸

Not all Church-related news was so cheery. In 1783, Thorpe updated Catherine about the Calabrian earthquakes which had hit the kingdom of Naples. In particular, he focused on the order of St. Francis de Paola, which had lost twenty-three convents in the disaster, as well as the death of Princess Grace Grimaldi.⁵⁹ Developments in the secular world were also more menacing. Thorpe regularly returned to the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II’s (1741–90) closure of all enclosed religious houses. In 1784, he recommended to his cousin a book about

⁵⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Dalton, July 25, 1789.

⁵⁷ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to unknown, February 13, 1779. He was most likely referring to the Order of Religious of St. Norbert, founded at Coire in Switzerland in 1767. The nuns were known for perpetual adoration and singing German hymns, the latter factor being alluded to by Thorpe.

⁵⁸ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to unknown, undated partial fragment.

⁵⁹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783.

the fate of the Carmelite houses in the Low Countries, whilst four years later he disparaged those who “falsely represented” Carmelite convents “as useless to the world.”⁶⁰ Thorpe made his only mention of the French Revolution amongst the Lierre papers in an undated letter to an unidentified recipient. In it, he commented that there was joy in Rome because it appeared that the French king, Louis XVI (1743–93), had escaped “from the hands of the National Assembly.” Thorpe shared the Romans’ unwarranted optimism that this represented the first step towards “the re-establishment and due order of Religion in that kingdom.”⁶¹

The Suppression

The Jesuits were officially suppressed in July 1773 by Pope Clement XIV’s (1705–74) brief *Dominus ac Redemptor*. Thorpe was in Rome at this time so was an eyewitness to the closing down of the order to which he belonged.⁶² Only two of the surviving letters from the Lierre Carmel predate the brief. Both bear witness to the growing campaign against the order. In February 1769, Thorpe wrote to Catherine with a wary percipience: “The persecution carried on against the Society is become more violent than ever; nothing less than a total extinction of it will satisfy its adversaries. This is what they now vigorously aim at.”⁶³ Thorpe sensed God’s succor eight months later, writing that the Jesuits were able to “begin to breathe in some peace and quietness, without any alarms of destruction; the very enemies of the Society for the most part agree that there is no appearance of its being totally destroyed.” However,

⁶⁰ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, January 24, 1784; March 27, 1784; Thorpe to Dalton, October 15, 1788.

⁶¹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to unknown, undated but after 1789.

⁶² For his reports on the lead-up to the suppression of the Society, see Holt, *Age of Reason*, 160–78; McCoog, “‘Lost in the Title’,” 161–80.

⁶³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, February 10, 1769.

all around Thorpe were signs of his misplaced optimism. With members of the Society having already been expelled from the Portuguese and Spanish empires, France, the two Sicilies, Malta, and Parma, he noted that in Rome “the poor exiles everywhere wait with patience.” He was particularly conscious of the plight of the Portuguese Jesuits, who received no allowance from their own king and were reliant on alms from the recently elected Pope Clement XIV, their situation being “very wretched and distressed.”⁶⁴

By the time of Thorpe’s next surviving letter, the Jesuit order has been officially suppressed and Giovanni Angelo Braschi had just been elected as Pope Pius VI. Writing to his cousin four months after the conclave, Thorpe reported that nothing had changed as regarded the Jesuits but hopes were increasing. General opinion held that the new pope was favorable towards the Society and would have enacted some unspecified good if it was not for “a party of men, who will never be appeased until they see the last drop of every Jesuit’s blood, crushed out at their feet, had not perpetually found the way of throwing in new obstacles, and embarrassing the good will of his Holiness.” Despite faculties not yet having been granted to any ex-Jesuit in Rome, Thorpe reported that they had been given to individuals resident elsewhere in the Papal States. He added that ex-members of the Society were living in community at the Gesù and permission was being sought for another house to operate similarly. However, several ex-Jesuits remained imprisoned in the Castel Sant’Angelo, including the superior general, Lorenzo Ricci (1703–75), who was suffering problems with his legs.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, October 5, 1769. For the Portuguese Jesuits and their plight, see Emanuele Colombo and Niccolò Guasti, “The Expulsion and Suppression in Portugal and Spain: An Overview,” in *The Jesuit Suppression*, ed. Burson and Wright, 117–38, at 118–22.

⁶⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775. Thorpe himself was imprisoned and questioned for ten days after the suppression of the Jesuits: Holt, *Age of Reason*, 178.

Thorpe was keen to keep his enclosed relative at Lierre abreast of the latest developments regarding the Society in diverse parts of Europe. He expected “no good” to come from the queen of Hungary, Maria Theresa (1717–80) who had “determined the destruction of the Society, when she might have saved it from that ruin, she will scarce concur in its re-establishment.” However, there were hopeful signs elsewhere: “The Jesuits in all the dominions of the Russia [sic], the King of Prussia, and in divers part of the Empire now go on as usual with the approbation of the present Pope.”⁶⁶ The situation in Russia captured Thorpe’s attention and was a subject to which he would return. In April 1783, he reported that an envoy from the tsarina had arrived in Rome to treat with the pope on matters concerning religion and the Society in Russia. He revealed that the envoy was a Jesuit who was set to be consecrated as coadjutor to the archbishop of Mogilev and metropolitan of all Catholics in the dominions of the empress. Thorpe maintained that the pope approved and confirmed “all that has been done for the existence and succession of the Jesuits” in Russia. Recognizing the situation in Rome, Thorpe conceded that the confirmation of the appointment and the elevation of Mogilev to an archdiocese by Catherine the Great (1729–96), would most likely only be publicized in St. Petersburg, where the vicar general of the Society resided and “continues to receive every token of benevolence from the Sovereign and her Ministers.”⁶⁷ Later that year, Thorpe asserted that “good news and consolation” still

⁶⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775.

⁶⁷ Catherine II of Russia had refused to allow the brief of suppression to be promulgated in her domains, plus was a great defender and patron of the Society following its dissolution. In January 1782 Catharine had established the Archdiocese of Mogilev and appointed her own archbishop, as well as a coadjutor, the former Jesuit Jan Benisławski (1735–1812). After some negotiations, the pope recognized the new archdiocese by the Bull *Onerosa pastoralis officii* of April 15, 1783 following Benisławski’s mission to Rome (he arrived at the start of March 1783), where he was consecrated by the pope and received the pallium to carry back for the new archbishop. The only demand he failed to secure was official recognition of the Jesuits’ actions in Russia,

flowed from Russia and that ex-members of the Society in Rome had “high hopes of its being extended.”⁶⁸ In March 1784, he continued the upbeat message, informing his cousin that “all our intelligence from Russia concerning the Jesuits there, is very consolatory, and contains manifest marks of a very special providence constantly protecting the Society in that country.” He added that several Jesuits from other provinces had travelled to Russia “to share in that happiness among their brethren of the North.”⁶⁹ To all appearances, Thorpe seemed justified in his proclamation in January 1784 that “the Society seems to be so firmly established in that part of the North as not to be in any danger from its enemies either here or elsewhere.”⁷⁰

News from central Europe was also initially promising. As in Russia, Thorpe reported that in all dominions of the king of Prussia, Frederick II (1712–86), and in many parts of the

Thorpe himself noting that only verbal approbation was offered. The vicar general was Stanisław Czerniewicz (1728–1785), former Jesuit provincial who in 1782 had been elected with the powers of a superior general until a new one was elected whenever the Society was restored: Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, April 5, 1783; Paul Shore, “Ex-Jesuits in the East Habsburg Lands, Sileasia and Poland,” in *The Jesuit Suppression*, ed. Burson and Wright, 229–47, at 242–44; James J. Zatko, “The Organization of the Catholic Church in Russia, 1772–1784,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 43.101 (1965): 303–13, at 309–10; Daniel L. Schlafly Jr., “General Suppression, Russian Survival, American Success: The ‘Russian’ Society of Jesus and the Jesuits in the United States,” in *The Jesuit Suppression*, ed. Burson and Wright, 201–15, at 202–3; Marek Inglot, “The Society of Jesus in the Russian Empire (1772–1820) and the Restoration of the Order,” in *Jesuit Survival and Restoration*, ed. Maryks and Wright, 67–82, at 67–75.

⁶⁸ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, November 20, 1783.

⁶⁹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, March 27, 1784. Daniel Schlafly comments that since the 1770s, former Jesuits had been flocking from all over Europe to Russia, plus that the Society’s survival in Russia gave hope to Jesuits everywhere: Schlafly Jr., “General Suppression,” 202.

⁷⁰ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, January 24, 1784; see also Thorpe to Thorpe, March 27, 1784

Holy Roman Empire, Jesuits were behaving as normal with the pope's full approbation.⁷¹ In January 1784, Thorpe reported to his cousin that Emperor Joseph II had been in Rome and expressed his "sentiments with great energy on the oppression of the Society, for which he very sharply taxed and upbraided this court." Thorpe informed Catherine that the discourse had been in public during a gathering at the "Palace of Prince Doria" in a conversation with four cardinals. The emperor informed the cardinals that the loss of the Jesuits had been keenly felt and repeated the words of the Russian tsarina that she would "never withdraw her favours and protection from an Order of men, whom she had experienced to be most serviceable in cultivating her subjects and in doing good to all." The Neapolitan ambassador, recently returned from St. Petersburg, confirmed those were the tsarina's words.⁷² Two months later, Thorpe embellished the tale of the emperor's sojourn in Rome, saying he had spoken favorably of the Society in "almost every great town of Italy". One suspects that this was Joseph II playing to the audience in an effort to antagonize the papacy; certainly, Thorpe was justifiably confused by this praise of the Jesuits when "his manner of treating them in his dominions is so little conformable to such commendations."⁷³

Vaguer hopes came from Spain where, Thorpe informed his cousin in January 1784, a law had recently been overturned so Jesuits could again legally inherit by right of birth or

⁷¹ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, June 10, 1775. The Society survived in Prussia until 1780: Richard Buttwerwick-Pawlikowski, "Before and After Suppression: Jesuits and Former Jesuits in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, c. 1750–1795," in *Jesuit Survival and Restoration*, ed. Maryks and Wright, 51–66, at 59.

⁷² Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, January 24, 1784.

⁷³ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, March 27, 1784. Derek Beales has described Joseph II as "only a lukewarm enemy" of the Jesuits, with even Catherine the Great of Russia surprised at how warmly he praised them. As Paul Shore notes, the emperor's treatment of the Society was at least partly because of his views about how his kingdom should be run: Derek Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 220–21; Shore, "Ex-Jesuits in the East Habsburg Lands," 230.

legacy. He added wistfully, “something more is also expected to be issued in their favour.”⁷⁴ Such expectations had not abated by 1789, when Thorpe told Ann Housman that due to the “late change of government in Spain, the patriotic dispositions of the present King, and the piety of his Consort,” there was talk that the exiled Jesuits in Rome may soon be able to return to their homeland and even publicly profess their Jesuit status.⁷⁵ Thorpe’s forced optimism even spread to welcoming the words of the king of Sweden, Gustav III (1746–92), when he spoke with several ex-Jesuits in Florence, and expressed his esteem of them and the honor that they accrued from being members of the order.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Particularly odd is that Thorpe conveyed to the nuns no news of the situation of the English Jesuits, even though he was involved in preliminary provincial discussions about what to do if the Society was suppressed and in making the subsequent arrangements for survival.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, January 24, 1784.

⁷⁵ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Housman, February 11, 1789. Though Thorpe was a little too optimistic, there was a measured rapprochement between the Spanish government and the former Jesuits due to specific cultural and political necessities: Niccolò Guasti, “The Exile of the Spanish Jesuits in Italy (1767–1815),” in *The Jesuit Suppression*, ed. Burson and Wright, 248–61, esp 256–61.

⁷⁶ Farnborough Abbey, Thorpe to Thorpe, March 27, 1784. Thorpe did have grounds for optimism with his next statement: that Gustav III’s “sentiments are not averse to giving liberty to Catholics living within his dominions, where it is hoped that Religion will soon encrease and flourish.”

⁷⁷ McCoog, “‘Est et Non Est’,” 162–64. See also Thomas M. McCoog, SJ, “‘*Libera nos Domine?*’ The Vicars Apostolic and the Suppressed/Restored English Province of the Society of Jesus,” in *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation*, ed. James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 81–101. For the experience of English Jesuit exile institutions during the period, see Maurice Whitehead, *English Jesuit Education: Expulsion, Suppression, Survival and Restoration, 1762–1803* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Indeed, he was behind a publication retelling scurrilous stories about the order's suppressor, Clement XIV.⁷⁸ Equally, during his upbeat reports about Russia, he never mentioned to the Carmelites that in 1783 the English ex-Jesuits sought affiliation with their confreres there.⁷⁹ It is as if he could not believe that England was part of the suppression: he even, curiously, failed to mention the actions of the Cardinal Duke of York against the Society in his Frascati diocese in the run-up to the 1773 suppression.⁸⁰ Nor does Thorpe provide details of events in England more generally—including English Catholic news⁸¹—only providing points of English interest happening in mainland Europe. Thorpe's news provision was tailored to match the nuns' identity: English nationals as very much part of notionally still Catholic Europe. Perhaps this is indicative of the identity the convent self-consciously developed. As the quotation at the start of the essay attests, Thorpe and the nuns were joined by their shared Catholicism first, as well as the interests that went with it. As such, this was a news network that involved the transfer of objects and dissemination of ideas from the Roman center and may represent something of a more everyday Catholic contribution to the Republic of Letters, currently the subject of renewed scholarly attention.⁸²

⁷⁸ *A Candid and Impartial Sketch of the Life and Government of Pope Clement XIV*, 3 vols (Dublin: Seymour I, 1785–86). See Joseph Gillow, *A Literary and Biographical History, or Bibliographical Dictionary, of the English Catholics*, 5 vols. (London: Burns & Oates, 1885) 1:567.

⁷⁹ McCoog, “‘Est et Non Est’,” 172.

⁸⁰ Holt, *Age of Reason*, 80.

⁸¹ It was not that such news was of little interest to him; he discussed similar with John Jenison, S.J. in the 1760s and Charles Plowden, S.J. during the 1780s: Holt, “Letters from Thorpe to Jenison,” 59–60; Holt, “Thorpe to Plowden, 1781–1784,” 73–110.

⁸² See, for example, the “Mapping the Republic of Letters” project at Stanford University (<http://republicofletters.stanford.edu>; accessed June 26, 2016). The project describes the Republic of letters as facilitating “the dissemination and the criticism of ideas, the spread of political news, as well as the circulation

From the point of view of the nuns, what was the correspondence with Thorpe about? As Walker has pointed out, letter-writing “irrefutably breached clausura,” though the letters do prove the nuns had a “keen perception of religious and political affairs.”⁸³ This latter point seems to be vital: yes, Thorpe often acted on their behalf but, primarily, he provided them with news. Walker has stated that the nuns viewed themselves as part of the English Catholic community and were eager for news which showed them part of that community’s struggle, keeping the English monastic flame alive until it could be resettled in England.⁸⁴ This seems to be the case with the Thorpe correspondence but with one caveat: Walker is generally dealing with letters to and from England, whilst Thorpe was resident abroad for the overwhelming majority of his life. Instead, it could be argued that this thirst for news, and the type being supplied by Thorpe, is indicative of the nuns placing themselves, and understanding their role, not just in relation to England or a biological family but to the global Church Militant. It underlines their Catholic identity more than their national one. As such, Thorpe’s letters to the nuns contain more international Catholic news than his letters to, for example, his friend, Charles Plowden, S.J., in which the focus is worldlier.⁸⁵

of people and objects.” See also John T. McGreevy’s view that the Jesuits were part of the “Catholic variant on the Republic of Letters”: “Restored Jesuits: Notes Towards a Global History,” in *The Jesuits and Globalization: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 131–46, at 131; and more generally *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters*, ed. Mordechai Feingold (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁸³ Walker, “‘Doe not suppose me’,” 168, 173.

⁸⁴ Walker, “‘Doe not suppose me’,” 162–63. Nicky Hallett has suggested similar, writing of “the important role of letters in endorsing shared faith during a beleaguered period of Protestant persecution”: Hallett, “Life Writing I,” xix.

⁸⁵ Holt, “Thorpe to Plowden, 1784–92,” 434–57.

From the perspective of Jesuit studies, the Society had been committed from its earliest days to creating a scribal network that connected the Roman center with the peripheries, and also linked together Jesuits across the globe through a flow of information, in particular via its news sheets and reports.⁸⁶ As it was explained in the Society's *Constitutions*, the regular exchange of letters facilitated "the union of souls" and provided "mutual consolation and edification." Letters united the disparate parts of the Jesuit corporate body both with one another and with the Roman "head."⁸⁷ Thorpe's correspondence with the nuns fits this understanding of a news network. Naturally, Thorpe was not the only member of the Society to stay in contact with relatives, though in such examples it was more frequently missionaries who maintained the connection to remain part of a family network, including sending gifts or curiosities.⁸⁸ Thorpe's activities were similar but with a twist: even after his cousin's death, he maintained the correspondence. Bound by a shared faith and with Thorpe having been educated in it, the English Catholic diaspora was his family. Thorpe supplied members of this diaspora with news from the Catholic center and, to some extent, his letters are examples of

⁸⁶ See, for example, Markus Friedrich, "Government and Information-Management in Early Modern Europe: The Case of the Society of Jesus (1540–1773)," *Journal of Early Modern History* 12 (2008): 539–563; Friedrich, "Circulating and Compiling the *Litterae Annuae*: Towards a History of the Jesuit System of Communication," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 77 (2008): 3–40; Paul Nelles, "*Cosas y Cartas*: Scribal Production and Material Pathways in Jesuit Global Communication (1547–1573)," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015): 421–50.

⁸⁷ *Constitutiones Societatis Iesu*, 4 vols. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1934–48), 2:618–20.

⁸⁸ For example, Raymond Harris Thompson, "Letters from Eighteenth-Century Sonora: Father Segesser Writes to his Family in Switzerland," *Journal of the Southwest* 53 (2011): 225–37.

early modern globalization through knowledge networks.⁸⁹ Equally, in this transnational news network he was effectively fulfilling the role of an unofficial diplomat, “relaying news, both to home and to communities in exile.”⁹⁰ The distance may not have been as far but, for a community of fully enclosed nuns hailing from the missionary territory of the officially Protestant peripheries of Europe, Thorpe’s location might as well have been the Chinese mission for their reliance on him for wider, “global” Catholic news.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Benjamin Breen, “No Man is an Island: Early Modern Globalization, Knowledge Networks, and George Psalmanazar’s Formosa,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 17 (2013): 391–417, which also exposes the risks inherent in such epistolary networks.

⁹⁰ Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham, “News Networks in Early Modern Europe,” in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–16, esp. 8–9.