

***PSEUDONUNS:***

**Anglican Sisterhoods and the Politics of  
Victorian Identity**

**by  
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**A thesis submitted to the Department of History  
in conformity with the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## Abstract

The establishment of Anglican sisterhoods during the mid-nineteenth century sent a shock wave through British society. Female monasticism, outlawed by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century, appeared chimerical to British Protestant culture and Victorian gender ideology which idealised home and family as the heart of woman's mission. Yet the women who joined sisterhoods did so by taking advantage of the same ideological principles which these communities threatened to subvert; they utilised the socially-sanctioned emphasis on female spiritual devotion and self-sacrifice in order not only to embrace philanthropic work on a full-time basis, but to do so from within the highly-controversial setting of monasticism. Thus, from its inception, the identity of Anglican sisterhoods, and that of Anglican sisters, was premised, by both the supporters and detractors of this lifestyle, on the paradoxes of Victorian identity. Throughout the nineteenth century, the tension between the form of the religious life - popularly imagined as ascetic, anachronistic, and decidedly un-Anglican - and its function within society - recognised as valid, valuable, and virtuous - enabled the identity of sisterhoods to be manipulated in practice by the sisters and discursively by a host of commentators. The nature of these manipulations, and the ways in which female monastic identities were imagined, performed, and reviled, powerfully demonstrates the potential of women's religiosity during this period as well as the extent to which Anglican sisterhoods threatened to destabilise the fragile foundation on which Victorian identity was based. While this thesis concentrates on the establishment and evolution of two

Communities, by charting the formation of sisterhoods at mid century, their rise to prominence by the 1880s, and their expansion overseas as part of the civilising mission of empire, it documents the broader cultural and social impact of these institutions throughout the nineteenth-century.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Making of Women Religious in the Church of England

#### What's in a Name?

Women religious fascinate me. I am intrigued by their discipline, their faith, their celibacy, their appearance, the regularity of their lives, their level of devotion. Perhaps more than any other type of woman, their identity appears primarily symbolic: it is what they represent rather than who they are that captures the popular imagination. For many of us in the West, they enter our world through the landscape of American popular culture: Sally Field as "The Flying Nun," Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music," Whoopi Goldberg on the run. These fictitious representations stand in sharp contrast to the stereotypical "Catholic school teacher nun" who is harsh, repressive, and mean-spirited. Unlike her Hollywood counterparts, she neither flies, sings, nor wreaks good-natured havoc on those around her. Such varied images speak to the way that the identity of women religious, because so little understood, can be so easily manipulated. Over the years, friends have showered me with an assortment of nun toys and gadgets: there is the snow dome nun, the bottle-opener nun, the boxing nun, and the wind-up nun who wields a knuckle-rapper and spits flames from her mouth (I own three of these). As symbolic figures, nuns are universally recognised, but their private lives are decidedly elusive. They are often spectacularly misunderstood: many think these women have missed out, have been sold out, or should be let out. As a researcher of nuns, I have been asked on several occasions if I personally have ever considered joining a religious order. I wonder why my friends who study beauty queens, concentration camp inmates, and depression-era mothers are not asked similar questions. Is the spiritual



universe of women religious so impenetrable that I must actually become, or wish to become, a nun in order to study these women?

It is precisely this malleable yet elusive quality surrounding nuns that attracts such attention to these women. What I find most interesting about women religious are the inherent contradictions in their lives: collectively, they own property worth millions but individually, they subscribe to a vow of poverty; by pledging a vow of obedience to God under the direction of a Mother Superior and Community Rule, they free themselves from patriarchal authority; they live according to monastic principles set down hundreds of years ago, but at the same time are committed to changing the world. Perhaps most provocatively, through their renunciation of sex, these women become unwitting sexual icons. For as novelist Mary Gordon points out, "the image...of a nun brings together three powerful elements: God, women, and sex...How could this combination not engender ripe fantasy?"<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, these contradictions - and the fantasies they engendered - were intensified, particularly for the women who joined the Anglican sisterhoods established at mid century in a Church with no tradition of monasticism, and in a society which defined women chiefly through domesticity.

Today Anglican sisterhoods occupy a limited but significant position in British society.<sup>2</sup> Many of the original communities still exist, yet their members are becoming "an endangered species."<sup>3</sup> While some orders cater to the growing spiritual needs of the middle class, offering workshops and religious retreats as an escape from "hectic lifestyles," others are devoted to

<sup>1</sup> Mary Gordon, "Women of God," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 2002, 66

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study I will refer to Anglican religious orders as sisterhoods, communities, institutions, and orders. While all of these terms were employed in the nineteenth century, these establishments were commonly referred to as sisterhoods.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, 58.

the homeless and the terminally ill. Vocations to the religious life in the Church of England have never been abundant. At the beginning of the twenty-first century sisterhoods must work harder than ever to attract new members. As pressures continue to grow on Britain's welfare state, the women who do join, however, find that the life can be extremely demanding yet rewarding. The existence of so many of the original sisterhoods, however, bears witness to the continued relevance of this way of life. For the historian, these institutions provide an invaluable opportunity to understand the historical roots of contemporary convent culture.<sup>4</sup>

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### **Identity in Crisis: The Origins of Sisterhood Life**

*pseudo* - 1. false; not genuine. 2. resembling or imitating  
*nun* - member of a religious community living under certain vows<sup>5</sup>

The first Anglican order, the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, originated in 1845 in an unpretentious house at 17 Park Village West, London.<sup>6</sup> With little fanfare, three women, under the spiritual guidance of High-Church theologian the Reverend Edward Bouverie Pusey, and governed by a committee of fourteen lay and clerical supporters, Lord John Manners and William Gladstone among them, established female monasticism in the

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<sup>4</sup> One of the most provocative accounts of this culture is Mary Loudon's Unveiled: Nuns Talking (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), an oral history of Anglican and Roman Catholic sisters in Britain today.

<sup>5</sup> Oxford English Dictionary of Current English, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> For details, refer to Thomas J. Williams & Alan W. Campbell, The Park Village Sisterhood (London: S.P.C.K., 1965); Peter F. Anson, The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion revised and edited by A. W. Campbell. (London: S.P.C.K., 1964). The Community was established as a memorial to poet laureate Robert Southey, who had died two years earlier. Southey's appeal for sisterhoods was published as, Sir Thomas More: or. Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society, Vol 1 (London: John Murray, 1829).

Church of England.<sup>7</sup> Within five years, however, the Community maintained thirty members, two houses and a reputation as the infamous "Puseyite Nunnery." Although the sisters established a Ragged School, cared for victims of the Irish famine, and ministered to the poor, they were generally unwelcome in this north-west district of London. Dressed entirely in black, the sisters were scorned by their neighbours for resembling Roman Catholic nuns and almost lost the support of their local priest, Rev. William Dodsworth, by refusing to cloak themselves in brightly coloured shawls.<sup>8</sup> Bishop Blomfield of London was initially non-committal toward the sisterhood but by 1848 one of the sisters described his attitude as a "negative sanction."<sup>9</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross was amalgamated into the Society of the Most Holy Trinity, founded in 1848 under the leadership of its Mother Superior, the charismatic and powerful Priscilla Lydia Sellon.<sup>10</sup>

The controversy surrounding the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross speaks to the ways in which questions of identity stood at the heart of the monastic revival. Why did these women, contemporaries queried, need to dress up

<sup>7</sup> The three women were Jane Ellacombe, Mary Bruce, and Sarah Anne Terrot, the daughter of the Bishop of Edinburgh. For her contribution in nursing in the Crimea, Terrot was awarded the Royal Red Cross by Queen Victoria in 1897. See Anson, 268. William Gladstone composed the first circular to promote the proposed institution in 1844, served as Secretary on the committee, and later assumed financial responsibility for the lease at 17 Park Village. [William Ewart Gladstone] "Sisters of Mercy, Circular Letter Issued by the Promoters of the First Sisterhood," (Confidential) c. 1848. Cited in Henry Liddon, Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey, 4 Vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1893- 1897), 19-20; and Thomas J. Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon: The Restorer After Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church. (London: S.P.C.K., 1865), 288. See also Thomas J. Williams, "The Beginnings of Anglican Sisterhoods" Historical Magazine of the Protestant Church 16 (1947), 350-372; and Anson, 226, 351. On Gladstone's involvement, see P. Butler, Gladstone: Church, State, and Tractarianism: A Study of his religious ideas and attitudes, 1809-1859 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Dodsworth was perhaps transferring his religious insecurities onto the sisters as by 1850 he had converted to Catholicism.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Ellacombe to her sister, quoted in Williams and Campbell, 61. Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London, (1828-56) was a moderate in the Church of England.

<sup>10</sup> See Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon.

like nuns, pledge silly vows, and live in convents in order to do good work? As novel institutions on the English landscape, these communities challenged both the integrity of the Church of England as well as that of Victorian gender ideals. How were Anglican sisterhoods differentiated from Roman Catholic orders, and how did Anglican sisters set themselves apart not only from Roman Catholic nuns but also from other Victorian women? How were their identities constructed and defined?

This thesis analyses the relationship between Anglican sisterhoods and Victorian identity politics. Specifically, it examines how the identity of these institutions, and that of their members, was constructed both discursively and in practice. These constructions, often framed ambiguously, reveal the extent to which, rather than being constrained by gender ideology, monastic women appropriated and subverted its dictates in order to exert social, spiritual, and material power. Ambiguity stood at the heart of nineteenth-century identity in Britain: it pervaded discursive constructions of womanhood, and it characterised the experiences of those who lived in this age. The fluid nature of identity during this period enabled a select group of women to assume identities and practice a lifestyle radically at odds with their contemporary culture, yet dependent upon it in order to succeed. These women drew upon the socially-sanctioned emphasis on female spirituality, self-sacrifice, and active devotion to others as prescribed by Victorian gender ideology in order to fashion innovative identities as Anglican sisters. In so doing, they challenged many of the tenets which defined this ideology.<sup>11</sup> Their communal lives, beyond the family, shaped by poverty, chastity, and obedience, defied Victorian culture and its recipe for female behaviour. By

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<sup>11</sup> On the instability of gender ideology, and its contested nature, see Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological work of gender in mid-Victorian England (London: Virago, 1988).

practising monasticism, these women also defied the Church of England, which had outlawed the conventual life during the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and which remained reluctant to endorse the religious life throughout the nineteenth. Thus, the ambiguities of Anglican sisters' identities were also manifest religiously: as defiant yet loyal members of the Church of England, sisters created novel monastic identities in which the form of their lifestyle was sublimated beneath its social function. As *pseudonuns*, the ambiguous nature of their identity - religiously and culturally marginal - created powerful challenges for these women and controversial debates about the validity of their lifestyles. The inner crises these women faced as they invented a unique monastic culture, together with the external polemic they generated, reveals provocative insights into the character of Victorian women and the nature of the Victorian psyche.

Central to this study is an examination of the relationship between the lived experiences of Anglican sisters and the construction of their identity. Identity was fashioned on two fronts: experientially, through the sisters' daily practices of work and prayer, and discursively, by those who supported monasticism and those who did not. The "identity crisis" which often characterised sisters' experiences was manifest both institutionally and personally. While members of English society commonly perceived sisterhoods as merely "Popish" nunneries in disguise, sisters too, often felt that without the support of the Anglican hierarchy, their families, wider society, and even the local clergy, a more welcoming home could be found in the Roman Catholic Church. The original Holy Cross Superior took this route, as did both of the original sisters at the Community of St. Mary the

Virgin, the second sisterhood to be founded in the Anglican Church.<sup>12</sup> Many others followed suit. Issues of personal identity also had to be negotiated in opposition to other Victorian middle-class women, often controversially. During the formative period at the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, Dodsworth voiced his concern to Pusey: "that they *think* of themselves 'very much as nuns' I never doubted; this is what I rather regret to see. I wish they could think less of what they *seem* to be, and let this gradually grow out of the reality."<sup>13</sup> For her part Sellon, arguably the most outspoken Superior during the nineteenth century, patently expressed the belief that Anglican sisters were not simply different from Roman Catholic nuns, but from other Victorian women. Addressing the vicar in whose district her fledgling band of sisters was employed, she exclaimed: "You must not look upon us as mere ladies...but as Sisters of Mercy;...if you refuse our aid, we must offer it elsewhere."<sup>14</sup> Sellon's assertion that sisters were not "mere ladies" hints at both the appeal of Anglican sisterhoods to their members as well as the threat these groups posed to Victorian gender ideology and the Church. Her reply to the vicar demonstrates how, from their inception, these communities could wield significant power over the clergy in whose parish they worked. Despite these tentative beginnings, between 1845 and 1855, ten additional religious orders were established, all but two located in the southern part of England. By the end of the century, forty such communities existed.<sup>15</sup> While not all faced the same degree of opposition as the original sisters at Park Village, each

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<sup>12</sup> See Anson, "The First Sisterhoods" in Call of the Cloister, 220 -297. Emma Langston, Mother Superior of the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, converted to Catholicism in 1856. The Community of St. Mary the Virgin was founded in 1848 at Wantage, Berkshire.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon, 24. Italics in original.

<sup>14</sup> Liddon, 200.

<sup>15</sup> See Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian England" D. Phil. (University of Sussex, 1993). Mumm's thesis contains statistics concerning the number of Anglican sisters by this date and their geographical distribution.

faced a series of internal and external challenges to their integrity.

By joining an Anglican sisterhood Victorian women embraced an entirely foreign lifestyle, physically, spiritually and psychologically. The orders established during the mid 1800s were unique organisations. Theologically, they were affiliated with the Established Church, but they operated as independent societies. The character of the order was determined by its founders, most notably the Mother Superior, a woman who exercised considerable authority, and who acted in conjunction with clerical advisors. Sisters' lives were governed by the Community Rule, a set of guidelines created by the members of the order. Most Anglican sisters pledged lifelong monastic vows, and through these vows committed themselves to serve God through prayer and work, and their time was divided accordingly between these pursuits.<sup>16</sup> At the convent, often initially a small cottage, the sisters created a distinctive, woman-centred environment, unencumbered by the bric-a-brac common to most middle-class Victorian homes. Sisterhoods performed important functions within the wider community in which they lived and worked. Their members engaged with lay society through an active ministry to the poor and those deemed in need of Christian compassion.

Anglican sisters fashioned monastic identities through their dress, the religious symbols they utilised, the names and titles they adopted, and their status within the Community as choir or lay sisters.<sup>17</sup> In their daily lives, sisters' individual and collective identities were shaped diversely: vocationally, by their relationships with one another, with the clergy, and with God; occupationally, by the nature of their work and the relationships

<sup>16</sup> Until 1891, Anglican communities were not governed by the Anglican hierarchy; they determined the nature of their sisters' vows on an individual basis.

<sup>17</sup> Choir sisters were differentiated from their lay counterparts by their appearance and the type of work they performed in the Community. Lay sisters were often working-class women who were assigned domestic duties and followed a less rigorous spiritual life.

they formed with those whom they worked; and culturally, by the geographical and political character of the society in which they lived. As the existence of religious orders was unprecedented in the Church of England, these organisations often had to prove their loyalty to the Church, and their value to society. Thus, the identities they crafted were not as nuns, but as *pseudonuns*: active, Anglican, yet highly-ambiguous. Within this context, sisters' lives were often shaped by conflict and anxiety. Their unprecedented status, situated controversially on the margins of Church and society, ensured that while sisterhoods attracted a good deal of publicity, initially, few women were willing or able to commit to this life.

For those who did become sisters, the distinctiveness of the lifestyle was a significant factor in the decision to join a sisterhood. They cast aside domestic culture in favour of conventual culture that appeared to outsiders not only anachronistic but antagonistic in relation to nineteenth-century society. In doing so, Anglican sisters created identities which ran counter to those of Victorian middle-class womanhood, characterised by domesticity, maternalism, and increasingly, by consumption.<sup>18</sup> Through their sartorial simplicity, independent behaviour, and personal rejection of men, marriage, and motherhood, Anglican sisters not only distanced themselves from the experiences of most married women, but they also took advantage of a significant degree of freedom which eluded many of their married counterparts.<sup>19</sup> Yet, like those of married women, sisters' lives were decidedly

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<sup>18</sup> On the construction of the Victorian domestic ideology, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992) esp.75-93.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion of home life put forth by such women as Florence Nightingale, who herself contemplated joining a monastic community. See Poovey, Uneven Developments. On the potential constraints of middle-class domesticity, see Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes.



complex, frequently contentious, and deeply embedded in religiosity which formed a vital component of Victorian womanhood. In their creation of a distinctive spiritual culture in the convent, however, Anglican sisters removed female piety from the contained, regulated domestic sphere. They exchanged patriarchal authority for that of the Community Rule as administered by the Mother Superior. Herein lay the radical potential of sisterhoods for their members and also for society. Through the construction of monastic identities, Anglican sisters challenged popular conceptions regarding the position of women in Victorian society, devised powerful new forms of female spirituality, and threatened to destabilise the fragile basis on which Victorian identity politics rested.

Sisters' identities were also shaped profoundly by a variety of discourses. Such discourses - about monasticism, religion, class, gender, sexuality, morality, nation and race - worked to fabricate representations of Anglican sisterhoods and their members. Issues of identity were central to the 'convent question' in nineteenth-century England. A host of commentators fashioned public identities for sisterhoods which were used to justify or denigrate their existence. Sisters' lives were powerfully affected by the ways in which the religious life was imagined and represented discursively. While supporters framed this life as the natural expression of feminine piety, detractors seized upon the artificial nature of sisterhoods to discredit them. Through representation too, Anglican sisters were positioned as *pseudonuns*: their identities were not fixed, but rather continually in the process of being crafted and remade. Due to the controversies which surrounded the revival of female monasticism in England, sisters negotiated their own identities in relation to these myriad representations. Debates

over the nature of the identity of Anglican sisterhoods, and the ways in which they interacted with sisters' actual experiences challenge our understanding of the politics of Victorian identity: the controversies surrounding female religious orders in the Church of England expose more widespread social tensions concerning female independence and the power of religion as a radical force.

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### **Contextualising the Convent**

The establishment of women religious in the Church of England occurred at the convergence of three strands of nineteenth-century English culture: the Oxford Movement, Victorian gender ideology, and female spirituality.<sup>20</sup> Henry VIII's dissolution of monasticism in the sixteenth century did not foster a concomitant desire among English women to abandon their aspirations for the religious life.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the legacy of the Protestant Reformation in England ensured that religious orders were staunchly equated with Roman Catholicism, and thus an anathema to English civil liberties. Not until the early-nineteenth century, did discussions about monasticism - fuelled by evangelicalism and Romanticism, and given concrete expression in the Oxford Movement - again become part of the

<sup>20</sup> The origins of Anglican sisterhoods are explored in Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy"; Part of this discussion on the conditions which facilitated the establishment of sisterhoods derives from the introduction to Joy Frith, 'A Higher and Holier State': Challenges to Female Power in Early Anglican Sisterhoods, 1845 -1870," M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> See Bridget Hill, "A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery," Past and Present 117 (1987), 107-130. Hill argues that "As an outlet for women's self-expression, religious organisations played a continuous role from the Restoration down to the early nineteenth century. They represented an area where a measure of independence, even a degree of self-fulfilment, was possible for women. This was certainly true of the religious sisterhoods and deaconesses that began to multiply in the mid-nineteenth century." 127. One of the most influential considerations of female monasticism prior to the nineteenth century was Mary Astell's A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest, published in two parts in 1694 and 1697. See also William A. Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life: The Spirit of Love [1728] Paul G. Stanwood, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

cultural climate.<sup>22</sup> Originating in the 1830s, during what has been described as an “era of disaster” for the Church of England,<sup>23</sup> the Oxford Movement emphasised the continuities between the English Church and its Roman counterpart, including the restoration of such High-Church rituals as oral confession and the use of the cross, and a greater focus on spirituality and holiness.<sup>24</sup> The Movement was led by a group of clerics, most notably John Henry Newman, Henry Manning, John Keble, and Edward Pusey. Collectively this groups was known as the Tractarians after the “Tracts for the Times” which they printed to promote their ideas, and, less-charitably, as “Puseyites.”<sup>25</sup> Drawing heavily upon the evangelical concern for the moral reform of society, and the romantic interest in Gothic architecture and the medieval, the Oxford Movement provided the ideological legitimacy for monasticism in the Church of England.<sup>26</sup> Its proponents sought the practical application of their ideas by establishing a number of religious communities

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<sup>22</sup> For a full discussion of the attempts to revive monasticism for both men and women, see the introduction to Peter F. Anson, The Call of the Cloister; and the first three chapters of A. M. Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845 -1900 (London: S.C.M. Press, 1958);

<sup>23</sup> See Alan D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel, and Social Change, 1740 -1914. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1976), 27.

<sup>24</sup> The beginning of the Oxford Movement has usually been identified with John Keble's Assize Sermon at Oxford, entitled “National Apostasy” in which Keble contested the government's attempt to suppress the Irish bishoprics and to impinge upon church property. Significant Anglo-Catholic rituals included the veneration of saints, fasting, mortification, and the administration of penance and absolution. See A. Vidler, “The Tractarian Movement, Church Revival and Reform,” in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians; and William Sachs, The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> On these figures, see G. Rowell, The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> On the politics of the Oxford Movement, see D. G. Paz, Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Herbert Schlossberg, The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); A. M. Allchin, The Silent Rebellion; Elisabeth Jay, Ed. The Evangelical and Oxford Movements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Liddon, Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey; and Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church. Vol. I (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966).

for men.<sup>27</sup> Plagued by a lack of commitment and conversions to Roman Catholicism, most spectacularly that of Newman himself in 1845, these first attempts at monastic life were a resounding failure, and would not achieve success until the 1860s. Although influential, the Oxford Movement remained marginalised within the Church of England, its Anglo-Catholic rituals and 'Romish' practices abhorred by many.

Adherents of the Oxford Movement attracted widespread controversy not only because of their religious doctrines and practices, but also by their implicit challenge to middle-class culture and its gendered ideals.<sup>28</sup> Critics of the movement attempted to diffuse the threat of monasticism to the patriarchal family by characterising Anglo-Catholicism as effeminate, a charge based on its devotional rituals and the clerical garb of its clergy.<sup>29</sup> A Punch cartoon entitled *Fashions for 1850; or, A Page for the Puseyites* delighted in a caricature of Anglo-Catholic clerics in all manner of sartorial excess.<sup>30</sup> The mawkish, eccentric Pusey was frequently singled out as the favourite target of ridicule. Anglo-Catholicism also tapped into a powerful strand of anti-Catholicism, which, as Linda Colley argues, formed a central component of British identity.<sup>31</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain improved dramatically as a result of

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<sup>27</sup> See Anson, 29 -43. The earliest communities were the Order of St. Benedict (1863) and the Society of St. John the Evangelist (1865).

<sup>28</sup> John Shelton Reed also explores the gender-based threat of the movement. See "Giddy Young Men": A Counter-Cultural Aspect of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism" *Comparative Social Research* 11 (1989); and David Hilliard, "UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality" *Victorian Studies* (Winter 1982) Both authors argue that the movement provided a space for homosexual men.

<sup>29</sup> See John Shelton Reed, "'A Female Movement': The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Catholicism" *Anglican and Episcopal History* LVII: 2 (July 1988)

<sup>30</sup> *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 19 (1850)

<sup>31</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707 -1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Colley focuses on the years prior to Queen Victoria's reign, however, the anti-Catholicism which she identifies in this period is subsequently heightened throughout the nineteenth century.

Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, and the subsequent creation of twelve English bishoprics.<sup>32</sup> This institutional growth, however, heightened fears of a Roman Catholic insurgency in England. These fears were aggravated by the number of Irish immigrants in response to the Famine, especially in the south of England. In such a climate, and fuelled by prominent conversions, Anglo-Catholicism was popularly re-imagined as feminine and associated with Roman Catholicism, and its monastic institutions for men and women were perceived as stepping-stones to Rome.<sup>33</sup>

The reception of sisterhoods must also be understood within the context of two of the other most influential events of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries: the French Revolution and the evangelical revival and, specifically, their effects upon women and the construction of Victorian gender ideology. Roman Catholic female monasticism had re-entered England during the protracted Napoleonic Wars, as nuns seeking refuge from persecution fled across the English Channel. The first indigenous Roman Catholic order was founded in 1845 and by 1900

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<sup>32</sup> See E. R. Norman, The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Walter Arnstein, Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1982). The Emancipation Act was primarily designed to avert the impending civil war in Ireland, however it was viewed by Anglicans as an act of Catholic aggrandisement. The Act also banned all male monastic orders yet by 1865 the number of such institutions had risen from 1 in 1841 to 58. For a text of the act see E. R. Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1968), 131-9. The creation of the 12 bishoprics by Pope Pius IX was interpreted in England as an act of "Papal Aggression" and was met by an outburst of anti-Catholic sentiment in 1851. Nicholas Wiseman became the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

<sup>33</sup> One of the manifestations of opposition toward Anglo-Catholicism and anti-Catholicism was the formation of Protestant Associations. Refer to Paz for a discussion of the politics of these groups.

approximately ninety orders housed up to 10,000 nuns.<sup>34</sup> In most cases, these orders were engaged in active, public roles, such as teaching and nursing, rather than contemplation. The French Revolution had disturbed not only women religious, but also ideas about women in society more generally, as feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges argued for a wider sphere of female influence in society.<sup>35</sup> Their arguments, and the backlash they spawned, thus gave an increased sense of urgency to debates about woman's 'proper' sphere. The Revolution in France therefore, not only exposed English society to a widespread resurgence of female monasticism, but also created fears about the expansion of female power.

The evangelical revival of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries also provided a powerful backdrop for the development of monasticism in England through its emphasis on the spiritual rejuvenation of society. Religion was a vital weapon in the Victorians' arsenal against sin. For women taught to believe that, as the more spiritual sex, the moral cleansing of society was largely their responsibility, religion served as a call to action. Its prescription for active female piety, as promoted by such prescriptive writers as Sarah Lewis, positioned women not only as the moral guardians of the family, but as "the moral regenerators of society."<sup>36</sup> Victorian social conditions formed an ideal environment in which this

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<sup>34</sup> Susan O'Brien, "Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England," Past and Present 121 (1988), 110-140. Prior to this date, Catholic orders in England did exist but were not native to England. On the re-establishment of Roman Catholic orders in England, see Barbara Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales, 1800-1937. A Social History (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), Table 1, 165.

<sup>35</sup> See Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Joan Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). On the effects of the Revolution upon perceptions of women, see Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, Gendering European History, 1780-1920 (London: Leicester Press, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Lewis, Woman's Mission (Boston: Wm. Crosby & Son, 1840).

regeneration could flourish. Society's dispossessed, whether huddled in the tenements of the city, or eking out a living in rural cottages, desperately needed access to health care, education, food, clothing and shelter. Yet, the provision of these necessities, it was widely maintained, must be accompanied by a requisite programme of moral reform and Christian indoctrination. The assumed moral and spiritual superiority of middle-class women as set out by Victorian gender ideology gave them a particular degree of social power over the working class and the poor. It was their expected duty to 'rescue' and restore to the path of virtue society's outcasts. Throughout the nineteenth century, collective anxieties about prostitution, for example, provided a potent arena for women's mission. This social and ideological context provided the impetus for the dramatic growth in women's philanthropic societies.<sup>37</sup> Organisations such as the London Female Penitentiary Society, founded in 1807, had almost 300 female subscribers by 1841.<sup>38</sup> Societies devoted to education, nursing, missionary work and expanding Christian zeal, proliferated over the century, attracting thousands of women to their causes. Protestant churches capitalised on the missionary zeal of middle-class women in an effort to regenerate society and to expand the size of their flocks. Evangelicals were particularly successful in organising missionary work and their philanthropic societies abounded in London's

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Prochaska refers to "an explosion of societies run by women" in the nineteenth century. The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), 23. See also Ellen Jordan, The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain (London: Routledge, 1999); Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes; Lee Holcolmbe, Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850-1914 (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973); and Frank Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Prochaska provided details lists of societies founded throughout the century.

<sup>38</sup> Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy, 246.

slum districts.<sup>39</sup> Yet, while women were the backbone of these missions, they had limited control and were largely excluded from the decision-making process.<sup>40</sup> While these zealous women composed a “pool of inexpensive workers” their activities however significant, remained secondary to their domestic duties.<sup>41</sup>

Evangelical Christianity provided a space in which women could extend their influence beyond the home, but it also ensured that women’s social position, both within and beyond the home, was subservient to men.<sup>42</sup> Marriage and the family was the proper arena in which woman’s dependence on man could best be achieved. Perhaps most importantly, her sexuality could be regulated within the private sphere of home. As the extent of women’s involvement in philanthropic societies demonstrates, the idea of separate spheres did not physically confine women to the home, but it did serve as a powerful ideological imperative to reinforce the primacy of woman’s role as wife and mother, as set out in Victorian domestic ideology.<sup>43</sup> Those who deviated could recall the sufferings of Wollstonecraft - who lost her reputation - and de Gouges - who lost her head - in their attempts to

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<sup>39</sup> See Anne Summers, “A Home from Home-Women’s Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century,” in Sandra Burman ed., Fit Work for Women (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 33-63; Judith Rowbotham, ‘Soldiers of Christ’? Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom Gender & History 12: 1 (April 2000); and Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy.

<sup>40</sup> Lillian Lewis Shiman, Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 44. By 1824 there were over 500 of these types of associations.

<sup>41</sup> Viola Klein, “The Emancipation of Women: Its Motives and Achievements,” in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1966), 264.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the writings of John Angell James, Female Piety: or the Young Woman’s Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality [1853] (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1865).

<sup>43</sup> On the influence of the evangelical revival on the construction of womanhood, see Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class. On the need to move beyond “separate spheres” see Amanda Vickery, “Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women’s history,” in Pamela Sharpe, Ed. Women’s Work: The English Experience, 1650 -1914 (London: Arnold, 1998), 294 -332.



envision an alternative, more egalitarian social system.<sup>44</sup>

Within such a cultural and religious framework, the decision to consider the religious life could not have been taken lightly by those who longed for a more radical form of devotion. This was certainly the case for twenty-three year old Marion Hughes, who became the first woman to profess monastic vows in the Church of England. Hughes had been inspired by Newman's advocacy of the religious life as "giv[ing] dignity and independence to the position of women in society" in *The Church of the Fathers*.<sup>45</sup> Her vows, professed in 1841 prior to the establishment of Anglican sisterhoods, and without the knowledge of her parents, reveal how Hughes's dedication to the religious life derived from her powerful sense of her relationship with God. In her diary, she recorded this unprecedented commitment:

This day, Trinity Sunday, 1841, was I enrolled one of Christ's Virgins, espoused to Him and made His handmaid....It was all very wonderful, very blessed; now that I look back I rejoice in the strong trust in Christ which He gave me and the undoubting peace--once and once only at the midnight that followed the day, came for a few moments of mental darkness that I had cut myself off from all human ties, that I might be *ever* alone, but I made an act of faith and the fear and doubt passed away never to return.<sup>46</sup>

Hughes's temporary fears speak to the profound spiritual commitment required of women who wished to devote themselves to the religious life. Many women felt that such a life required the rejection of one's family; indeed while her parents remained alive, Hughes delayed joining a

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<sup>44</sup> Upon the publication of her husband William Godwin's memoirs of his wife a few months following her death, which revealed her sexual history, Barbara Taylor explains that "A fog of censure descended upon her reputation that was not to disperse for almost a century." Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> R. Townsend Warner, *Marion Rebecca Hughes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). See [J. H. Newman] "Letters on the Church of the Fathers" *British Magazine*, 6 (June 1835), 667.

<sup>46</sup> Warner, *Marion Rebecca Hughes*, 10-12. Italics in original. See also Anson, 289-90; Allchin, 59.

sisterhood for eight years . Yet, her freely-chosen decision to become "one of Christ's Virgins" - a unique status within the Church of England at the time - testifies to the power of "the call to God" to enable women to devise innovative identities based on their spirituality.<sup>47</sup> Even without an outlet for its institutional expression, Hughes's profound faith enabled her to imagine a spiritual life beyond that prescribed within Victorian culture.<sup>48</sup>

Marion Hughes was not alone in her desire to one day join a sisterhood. Lucy Pusey, for example, E. B. Pusey's daughter, had decided at the age of twelve upon the religious life; her death shortly thereafter, a year prior to the formation of the Society of the Holy Cross in 1845, inspired her father to render tangible the desire for such a life. As early as 1839, Pusey had recognised that without institutions which catered to devout spiritual expression, the Church of England ran the risk of losing some of its most dedicated female adherents to Roman Catholicism:

I want very much to have one or more societies of 'Soeurs de la Charité' formed: I think them desirable (1) in themselves as belonging to and fostering a high tone in the Church, (2) as giving a holy employment to many who yearn for something, (3) as directing zeal, which will otherwise often go over to Rome. The Romanists are making great use of them to entice over our people; and I fear we may lose those whom one can least spare.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1840s, such Roman Catholic orders as the Sisters of Mercy and the Faithful Companions of Jesus provided their members with education, the

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<sup>47</sup> On the significance of the call to God, see, for example, Olive Anderson, "Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflexions on Feminism, Popular Religion and Social Change" The Historical Journal xii, 3 (1969) esp. 474.

<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of the power of female spirituality to create radical new identities, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant feminists and Catholic saints in Victorian Britain" in Eileen Janes Yeo, Ed. Radical Femininity: Women's Self-representation in the public sphere (Manchester: Manchester UP., 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Pusey to Rev. Dr. Hook, Dec. 1839, cited in Liddon, Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey vol. 3, 6.

supportive atmosphere of community life, and active vocations in teaching and nursing. Nunneries presented an attractive lifestyle to Roman Catholic women, as well as many new converts attracted by the religious life. In her study of three of the earliest Roman Catholic orders established in Britain, Susan O'Brien reveals that significantly, two of the three original Mother Foundresses of these orders were converts from Anglicanism.<sup>50</sup>

Nineteenth-century feminists too recognised the important contribution of active religious orders in allowing women to expand their social role in a meaningful way. In an influential lecture, "Sisters of Charity" given in 1855, feminist art critic Anna Jameson argued that "We require in our country the recognition--the public recognition,--by law as well as by opinion, of the woman's privilege to share in the communion of labor at her own free choice, and the foundation of institutions which shall train her to do her work well."<sup>51</sup> Florence Nightingale, who had supervised nuns working as nurses in the Crimea, appealed to the recently-converted Cardinal Manning in her call for female education: "You do know now what a home the Catholic Church is. And what is she to you compared with what she would be to me?...For what training is there compared to the Catholic nun?"<sup>52</sup> Although neither Jameson nor Nightingale were in favour of monastic ritual - and maintained that vows were to be avoided - both women recognised the value of conventual institutions in allowing women the space to develop practical vocational skills.

Thus the emphasis placed on middle-class women's moral superiority

<sup>50</sup> O'Brien notes that of the eleven foundresses six were converts, 134.

<sup>51</sup> Mrs. [Anna] Jameson, Sisters of Charity. Catholic and Protestant. Abroad and at Home (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 11

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in S. Leslie, "Forgotten Passages in the Life of Florence Nightingale" in Mary Ewens, "Removing the Veil" in Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds., Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 259.

and active social role as set out discursively within Victorian gender ideology, evangelicalism, and feminism, and as practised within Roman Catholic religious communities, and the philanthropic societies in which women exerted considerable public influence, provided a complex context for the development of the earliest sisterhoods in the 1840s and 1850s. Women served as a powerful stimulus for the creation of religious orders in the Church of England through their demands for training, their spiritual dedication, and the examples provided by Roman Catholic nuns. However, while the function of these communities was widely deemed necessary, the form of the religious life was deeply troubling to most Victorian observers. The notion that a woman may actually prefer celibacy to the sexual attentions of - and regulation by - men was viewed by most with horror.<sup>53</sup> Critics maintained that Providence had provided women with a special sphere within the home and to abandon this role was to renounce God's plan. *The Pall Mall Gazette* highlighted the revolutionary potential within monasticism to undermine women's "highest" calling:

To be a good wife, mother, daughter, or sister, is, so to speak, the highest ambition of a woman...If she is a sensible person [she] is able to take a proper measure of charitable occupations to think of them in their true light as occasional pursuits forming a part of life, and not as an absorbing profession taking up the whole of it. 'Recognize and heartily encourage' the ascetic monastic system, and you change all of this.<sup>54</sup>

Few questioned the right of women to devote themselves to pious works of charity. However, when they did so as members of a religious order, independently of male control, they were challenged by those who felt that

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Charles Kingsley's condemnation of monastic celibacy in *Yeast. A Problem*. (London: J. M Dent & Sons, 1860).

<sup>54</sup>[Anon]"Sisterhood Life," *The Church and the World: Essays on Questions of the Day* Orby Shipley, ed. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867),170-1.

sisters threatened the primacy of the family, and therefore, the entire basis of English society. The changing religious context, specifically the rise of anti-Catholicism, together with the growing public influence of middle-class women, created a provocative backdrop for debates about Anglican monastic institutions, and the position of women within them.

Debates about the value and virtue of convents in England assumed a variety of forms, many of which were fuelled by sensationalist accounts of nuns trapped in convents against their will and subjected to all manner of abuses by crafty priests.<sup>55</sup> While women became Anglican sisters for reasons of faith, and entered into active service, the popular Protestant imagination trivialised their faith and their work.<sup>56</sup> The cloistered, highly-sexualised image of the nun served as a far more effective and controversial representation in which to challenge these women's right to an alternative lifestyle.<sup>57</sup> The fantasies of certain politicians were particularly acute, reaching such a pitch that in 1851 and 1852 the matter was brought before Parliament in bills calling for the investigation of all conventual establishments. According to MP Henry Drummond, a staunch proponent of inspection, such institutions were "either prisons or brothels,"<sup>58</sup> and he encouraged the nun

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<sup>55</sup> Ideas about the entrapment of women in convents were popularised by accounts such as [Maria Monk] Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk. As Exhibited in Her Sufferings During a Residence of Five Years as a Novice, and Two Years as a Black Nun (London: Richard Groombridge, 1836), which became a best-seller in Britain and America in the 1830s. For a discussion of such tales, see Nancy Lusignan Schultz's introduction to Veil of Fear: Nineteenth-Century Convent Tales, Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk (West Lafayette, IN: NotaBell Books, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Susan Casteras, "Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices," Victorian Studies 24: 2 (Winter 1981), 182. See her analysis of the Victorian pictorial cult of the nun.

<sup>57</sup> This theme is briefly explored by Frederick S. Roden, "Sisterhood is Powerful: Christina Rossetti's *Maude*" in Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, eds. Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> For an analysis of the wider framework of anti-Catholicism at mid century, including the inspection of convents, see D.G.Paz, Popular Anti-Catholicism, 17; and Arnstein, Protestant versus Catholic.

trapped inside to "flee to the nearest workhouse if she wants to escape!"<sup>59</sup> Ironically, in a debate concerning the regulation of women, the argument centred upon the issue of personal liberty, and specifically the extent to which the convent deprived women of theirs. Yet, as opponents of the bills were keen to point out, many nuns had returned to their monastic homes in France despite being "freed" by Napoleon. Moreover, they argued that the life vows taken by women religious, like those of marriage, "were made of one's own volition."<sup>60</sup> Those who supported monasticism thus maintained that the investigation of convents, rather than the convents themselves, was an affront to female liberty and also to English civil liberties.

The controversy exposed how questions of female monasticism could be renegotiated in terms of national identity, pitting English Protestant 'freedoms' against foreign Papal 'restrictions.'<sup>61</sup> By equating the religious life, either Anglican or Roman Catholic, with "Popery," detractors sought to distance it from the perceived civil liberties of the English as manifest personally and institutionally within the family and the Church of England. The investigation was never implemented, but the debates around it bore

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Cardinal Wiseman, "Convents. A Review of Two Lectures on the Subject by the Rev. Hobart Seymour" (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1852), 3. For the Roman Catholic response to the proposed bill, see William Ullathorne, "A PLEA for the RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES of RELIGIOUS WOMEN" with reference to the Bill proposed by Mr Lacy. (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1851). Ullathorne, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham, and staunch opponent of the bill, explained its intent: "it is expedient to make provision for preventing the forcible detention of females in Houses wherein persons bound by religious or monastic vows are resident or associated." 1. PH 6248.

<sup>60</sup> Wiseman, "Convents," 22-23.

<sup>61</sup> In his spirited defence of the bill, Drummond penned a clever expostulation pointing to the ways in which the religious life was inextricably linked with Roman Catholic corruption: "Monastery! why that makes NASTY ROME: and behold, when I looked again it was MORE NASTY; a very vile place, OR MEAN STY. 'AY MONSTER,' cried I, have I found you out?" "What monster?" asked the Pope. 'Why your own image is there, a STONE MARY.' 'Stone Mary!' says he, 'is MY ONE STAR.' 'Say rather, MY TREASON,' said I. 'YET NO ARMS,' quoth he. 'No,' I rejoined, 'you rely on quieter means, which do as well while you have NO MASTERY: I mean, MONEY ARTS.' 'No,' replied he, these are TORY MEANS, and -----, MY SENATOR, will baffle them.' I do not know what answer I made, but it is clear that NO MEAN STORY may be made out of that one word, MONASTERY. Drummond, "A Plea for the Rights." 1.

witness to the discursive manipulation of the identity of religious orders and the extent to which the controversy hinged as much on issues of patriarchal authority and female independence as those of religion.<sup>62</sup>

While Roman Catholic bishops, who did maintain official jurisdiction over their monastic enterprises, defended nuns' conventual rights, those of the Anglican hierarchy, who did not, were non-committal in their support. As did Bishop Blomfield in relation to the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, many Anglican bishops withdrew their approval when controversy erupted. The primary concern among Church leaders was the lack of authority they held over sisterhoods and their inability to influence their Rules. By the 1860s, the controversy surrounding these institutions found a forum in Church Congresses and Convocations. During the Second Annual Congress of 1862, the discussion around sisterhoods focused explicitly on how Anglican sisters fashioned their collective identity.<sup>63</sup> As spokesman for these fledgling organisations, Rev. Thomas Carter, who was involved with the Community of St. John the Baptist, maintained that sisters should be free to profess religious vows, and to adopt the outward badges of the religious life such as the prefix 'Sister' before their name and a distinctive dress.<sup>64</sup> The combination of this spiritual and physical transformation, he maintained, was vital to a woman's new identity as a sister. To many Church leaders, however, these outward tokens of difference were viewed with almost as

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<sup>62</sup> In 1870, C. N. Newdegate, MP, called for an inspection into monastic houses in Britain. Identity stood at the heart of the Report: "With regard to Anglican Institutions, no evidence has been laid before us as to the existence of any institutions of a monastic or quasi-monastic character." Report from the Select Committee on Conventual and Monastic Institutions, 1871, iii. See Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic*; and Walter L. Arnstein, "The Great Victorian Convent Case" *History Today* (February 1980).

<sup>63</sup> Church Congress Reports, Oxford, 1862. This was the first time that the Congress discussed Anglican sisterhoods. Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford was one of the most devoted supporters of these communities in the nineteenth century.

<sup>64</sup> Church Congress Reports, Oxford, 1862.

much suspicion as the difference implied by the life itself.<sup>65</sup>

Dissent among the episcopate prevented any resolution on the issue of authority and sisterhoods continued to operate beyond the scope of ecclesiastical governance. Not until the 1891 Church Convocation did sisterhoods finally receive official recognition from the Anglican hierarchy.<sup>66</sup> By this time, Anglican sisterhoods had become widely accepted throughout Britain for their work in education, nursing, and missions to the poor. Recognition was no doubt enhanced by the fact that, as the century progressed, Anglican sisterhoods had branched out around the globe in order to participate in the civilising project of imperialism. From their earliest imperial service at the Crimea, as part of Florence Nightingale's band of nurses in the mid 1850s, Anglican sisters established missions from New Zealand, to India, to North America.<sup>67</sup> Their experiences overseas brought them not only recognition at home, but also a new sphere of influence, where the presumed moral superiority of such women was reinforced and rendered more complex by their sense of racial privilege. In the imperial context, sisters' identities were recrafted by the racial ideologies which tempered those of gender and class in the British context.

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### Archival Archaeology

This study is based on research conducted at the convent archives of two active communities in England: the Society of St. Margaret, in East

<sup>65</sup> The reports from the Church Congresses and Convocations provide a particularly informative medium through which the debate over sisterhoods can be examined. The crucial point of contention which emerged between male clerics opposed to sisterhoods and those who supported them was whether or not sisterhoods and the professing of vows elevated sisters above the station of other women. For details of the debate, see Joy Frith, "A Higher and Holier State," 19-20.

<sup>66</sup> The Report contained seven articles which asserted hierarchical authority over sisterhoods and stressed the importance of individual sister's liberties. Chronicle of Convocation, 1891.

<sup>67</sup> Anson's The Call of the Cloister includes a list of sisters' overseas missions.



Sussex, and the Community of All Hallows, in Norfolk. These orders were selected based on the nature and contemporaneity of their formation, their geographical locations, the controversies which they generated, the politics of their work, and their involvement in imperialism.<sup>68</sup> Instead of considering the entire history of each Sisterhood, this study takes a thematic approach: I am interested in the establishment of these Orders, how each constructed specific monastic identities, and the ways in which they expose tensions in Victorian culture. This is not a comparative study, though comparisons between these communities are drawn when relevant to the analysis. Rather, these Sisterhoods highlight differing aspects of the revival and development of conventual life. Both were founded in 1855, but within distinctive conditions and with diverse intents: St. Margaret's was established to nurse the poor in their homes, while All Hallows' began as a refuge for "fallen women." The mission work with Native peoples undertaken by members of All Hallows in British Columbia, Canada later in the century, allows for an investigation of conventual life in the imperial context. Taken together, the differing contexts and personalities involved in these three cases expose disparate aspects of how Anglican sisterhoods established themselves on the English and the imperial landscapes. The diversity of the responses they generated highlights the complex relationship between monasticism and Victorian identity politics.

Researching at convent archives presents a different set of challenges and opportunities than that which is often found in many other research situations.<sup>69</sup> Specifically, my relationship with these Communities was

<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, the records of the Society of St. Margaret's Canadian operations were virtually non-existent. The Community does have a substantial archive at its House in Boston. However, it was decided to focus exclusively on imperial mission of the Community of All Hallows.

<sup>69</sup> For a relevant discussion of this type of research, see Susan O'Brien, "10,000 Nuns: Working in Convent Archives" *Journal of Catholic Archives*, 9 (1989) 26 -32.

formed not simply as a researcher, but as a guest in their homes over a combined period of several months. Within this setting, my knowledge of sisterhood life was facilitated as much by understanding its present, as by learning about its past. To this end, I immersed myself in the daily rituals of convent culture. This included partaking of meals with the sisters, often in silence, participating in recreational activities at the convent and, most significantly, attending services in the chapel several times daily. Although I had been baptised an Anglican, a practising Christian I am not. As such, the opportunity to experience first-hand and to share the sisters' spiritual lives was invaluable to my comprehension of these women and their lifestyle.<sup>70</sup>

Both of the Sisterhoods in this study possess a wide variety of archival material ranging from carefully prepared scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings and mementos, to personal correspondence between the Superior and the sisters, and private diaries. Each has also published its own Community histories which present detailed narratives.<sup>71</sup> These booklets were particularly instructive in determining how the sisters wished to depict their collective past. Generally these accounts eschewed the controversial, preferring instead to accentuate the positive aspects of the Community's historical development.<sup>72</sup> These Sisterhoods also published periodical

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<sup>70</sup> In total, I spent almost six months living and working with the sisters of four separate religious communities including branch houses of the Society of St. Margaret in Aberdeen, and Boston, the Community of the Sisters of the Church in Richmond, and the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine in Toronto, Canada. Although the research from these locations does not appear in this study, the time spent with the women in these orders informed my understanding of the religious life more broadly.

<sup>71</sup> See Sister Violet, The Community of All Hallows: The Story of an East Anglian Community (privately printed); [Sister Gabriel] Doing the Impossible: A short Historical Sketch of St. Margaret's Convent. East Grinstead 1855 -1980 (privately printed); Sister Catherine Louise, The Planting of the Lord: the History of the Society of Saint Margaret in England, Scotland, and the USA, 1855 -1995 (privately printed). SSM archives also contain several fascinating photo albums.

<sup>72</sup> Lynne Strachan provides an interesting discussion of convent sources in Out of the Silence: A Study of a Religious Community for Women: The Community of the Holy Name (Melbourne: Oxford UP., 1988).

magazines of the order's work: these were established well after the Order's formation and were geared primarily for publicity. Although I had hoped to uncover details of the identities of many of the earliest sisters, I soon realised that one of the most significant aspects of the records held by these religious orders is the degree to which the lives of the individual sisters is rendered invisible. Profession rolls, which record information about each sister, often provided little more than dates of birth, of entry into the Sisterhood, and of death or departure. Rather, the story which these sources tell is one of community. While I was certainly aware that details concerning a sister's life before entering the religious life might be scarce, I was unprepared for the lack of information on how individual sisters had contributed to their Order. Particularly in the Sisterhood's published texts, such as the magazines, individual sisters are virtually impossible to discern. If individual writings by sisters were rare, the ways in which these women constructed their identities could be gleaned from their behaviour and the ways in which they were represented by others. Often, sisters' identities were constructed in opposition to other Victorian women, and it is through these oppositions that the ambiguities of their identities fully emerge.

The ambiguous, complex nature of Anglican sisters' identities can also be discerned through non-material texts, in particular, the homes in which the sisters lived and the institutions they operated. At the Community of All Hallows in Ditchingham, I lived and worked in the original convent, a stunning example of Gothic architecture rising majestically from the Norfolk Broads. The experience of being able to share the same physical - albeit not temporal - space as the women whose lives I was studying allowed me to gain a unique perspective on their environment. My guest room had originally

been occupied by members of the Sisterhood's penitent order. The time I spent with the sisters in their spectacular Gothic chapel provided an unparalleled glimpse into the nature of their spirituality. At the Community's original site, a moderate sized pink house, now referred to as "Nunnery Farm," I was able to examine the "stables" where disobedient penitents were temporarily housed. Perhaps the most revealing site at All Hallows, however, was its fascinating cemetery, where the internal dynamics of this Order were rendered indelible. Collectively, these sites present a powerful image of the history of these sisters and the ways in which their identities were crafted.

While the sisters of St. Margaret's no longer reside in the magnificent Gothic convent which became their home in 1870, it remains fixed in their lives: their new home, a modest, modern residence complete with guest wing and chapel is situated next door.<sup>73</sup> The grandeur of these Gothic convents, particularly when contrasted to the original humble residences, bears witness not only to the importance Anglican sisterhoods gained later in the nineteenth century, but also the disparity between sisters' individual vows of poverty and their collective wealth. If bricks and stained glass operate as powerful texts of the history of sisterhoods in Britain, in the Canadian context a sense of the sisters' environment is imparted chiefly by the natural landscape. Surrounded by mountains and forests, often blanketed in snow, and isolated from "civilisation," the sisters in British Columbia framed their identities within a climate both extraordinary and exotic.

<sup>73</sup> Arriving at the convent in East Grinstead today, the mother house of this thriving international Community, one is initially taken by its modest appearance. This practical, modern building, houses the sisters' quarters, offices, refectory, library, and the heart of the convent, the chapel. Along one side runs the guest wing, nicely appointed with modern furniture for those seeking solace and spiritual renewal. This facility reflects the needs of St. Margaret's current population: a group of about twenty-five women, many of whom are middle aged. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the new convent is the degree to which it differs from its formidable predecessor.

While this vast array of internal sources provides details about the sisters' experiences and how they created their own identities, public representations of sisters and their Communities derive from a wide collection of letters, pamphlets, articles, newspapers, annual reports, and sermons. Particularly in reference to All Hallows in British Columbia, which does not have its own in-house records, historical material from public record offices and Church archives has been utilised extensively. The experience of living and working with women religious during the course of this research has changed my perception of these women immeasurably. It has not, however, smoothed out any of the contradictory aspects of their identities, although in some ways it has intensified them. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of researching women religious is the dearth of material written by the sisters themselves. I have tried, however, to ensure that their voices remain audible among the cacophony of moral reformers, clergy, opponents, and government officials.

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### **Historiographical Highlights**

The emergence of published accounts of Anglican sisterhoods coincided with the centenary of the establishment of these institutions. In addition to the studies undertaken by the individual orders, two scholarly works were published in the 1950s: Peter Anson's *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion*, first issued in 1955, and A. M. Allchin's *The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845-1900*, appearing in 1958.<sup>74</sup> Although differing in approach, these studies each address a wide number of sisterhoods, and deal with the movement as a whole within the context of the history of the

<sup>74</sup> Other texts address individual orders and personalities, such as Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon.

Church of England and the Oxford Movement in particular.<sup>75</sup> Both authors recognise the innovative character of sisterhoods, with Allchin's title suggestive of the counter-culture aspects of the movement. Useful in the scope and detail they provide, these works serve as effective introductions to sisterhoods, but were not intended to highlight women's experience; rather, they make the clergy the stars of their accounts. Despite this privileging of clerical actors, Anson and Allchin's studies stand out from the majority of contemporary church histories which fail to consider the influence of women at all.<sup>76</sup>

The development of women's history in the last thirty years, however, has provided a fertile ground for the examination of female spirituality.<sup>77</sup> In the British context, Olive Anderson's brief study of female preachers was among the first to address this theme, pointing to the provocative and contradictory ways that popular religion could both enlarge and constrict "independent female activity" in Victorian society.<sup>78</sup> Yet, only in recent years have feminist historians begun to consider seriously the relationship between

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<sup>75</sup> Anson's book is a survey of all Anglican orders, male and female, since their inception in the U.K. He provides a brief summary of each, descriptive rather than analytical. Allchin deals selectively with five sisterhoods, in addition to chapters on the Oxford Movement, the status of women, Church Convocations and Congresses, and Male Communities. One other text deserves mention here, Michael Hill's The Religious Order: A Study of virtuoso religion and its legitimation in the nineteenth-century Church of England (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), which goes much further to consider the relationship between women and monasticism.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Rowell, The Vision Glorious; and Norman, The English Catholic Church.

<sup>77</sup> Important early studies include, Olive Anderson, "Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflexions on Feminism, Popular Religion and Social Change" The Historical Journal xii, 3 (1969); and Dale Johnson, Women in English Religion, 1700 -1925 (New York, 1983) a collection of primary documents. By contrast, religion plays little part in Jane Lewis's, Women in England, 1870-1950 (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1984).

<sup>78</sup> Anderson, 484.

women and religion discursively and in practice.<sup>79</sup> Two edited collections, published in 1986 and 2002 respectively, illustrate how studies of women and religion in Britain have evolved. In her introduction to the earlier of the two, *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 -1930*, Gail Malmgreen laments that historians have explored the physical but not the spiritual universe of nineteenth-century women. She argues that historians, rather than dismissing religion as a purely repressive force, must “keep alive the central paradox, the complex tension between religion as ‘opiate’ and as an embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and religion as a transcendent and liberating force.”<sup>80</sup> According to Malmgreen, nineteenth-century women were aware of the inherent contradictions in a gender ideology which exalted their spirituality but denied them access to power. The essays in this volume thus examine the role of religion in women’s lives and how women attempted to negotiate these contradictions within a variety of religious contexts.

The more recent collection of essays edited by Sue Morgan, *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750 -1900*, suggests a variety of ways in which scholars have responded to Malmgreen’s appeal: the title of the collection alone speaks to how approaches to this link between faith and

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: women, power, and spiritualism in late nineteenth - century England* (London: Virago, 1989); and Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*. The special issue of *Women’s History Review*, entitled, “Between rationality and revelation: women, faith and public roles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” examines the reasons why feminist scholars have been reluctant to address religion in their examination of women’s lives. 7: 2 (1998).

<sup>80</sup> Gail Malmgreen, ed. *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986)7.

feminism have changed.<sup>81</sup> Addressing the question of how religion could serve as a source of rebellion raised by Malmgreen, these essays reveal how "women subverted the traditional patriarchal language of religion and piety into a political arsenal for the self-advancement of themselves and their own sex."<sup>82</sup> While Malmgreen's collection demonstrates how religion provided an arena for women to move beyond the confines of the private sphere, the essays in Morgan's book challenge the validity of the separate spheres paradigm, suggesting the ways in which gendered space cut across a simple private/public dichotomy.<sup>83</sup> Although the theoretical parameters have shifted in the later collection, one of the most fundamental aspects of the relationship between women and religion remains its contradictory nature, which, Morgan explains "is particularly manifest in religious feminist expression."<sup>84</sup> As Joan Scott and others have argued, paradox is a defining principle of feminist discourse.<sup>85</sup> Paradox was central to Victorian gender ideology, as it was to women's relationship with Christianity in the nineteenth century: that paradox defined women's identities during this period reveals how women both utilised and manipulated the frameworks

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<sup>81</sup> Sue Morgan, ed. Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900 (Houndsmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) I follow Morgan's usage of the term 'feminism' as it applies to the nineteenth century. She refers to it as a device which allowed for 'the development of a sense of sisterhood and the proffering of alternative visions of the future that compels some collective or generic expression.' 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Morgan, 12- 13. See in particular, the new work by Sue Morgan on purity crusader Ellice Hopkins, "Faith, Sex and Purity: the religio-feminist theory of Ellice Hopkins" Women's History Review 9:1 (2000); and Eileen Janes Yeo. "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914" Women's History Review 8:2 (1999).

<sup>83</sup> See Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres."

<sup>84</sup> Morgan, 12.

<sup>85</sup> Joan Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer; Taylor also considers this concept in Mary Wollstonecraft, as does Eileen Yeo in the introduction to Radical Femininity.



which shaped their lives.<sup>86</sup>

In the attempt to further our understanding of how women challenged patriarchal authority, and to discern how religion operated paradoxically in women's lives, the study of monasticism holds great potential. Because women religious appear to embody many of the characteristics which define Victorian womanhood, such as piety, self-sacrifice, and devotion, while at the same time their lives are a personal rejection of the domestic ideal, they provide a clear example of the paradoxes within Victorian identity politics. For the nineteenth century, a copious amount of literature on Roman Catholic women religious which is culturally, geographically, and theoretically diverse now exists.<sup>87</sup> Within the British context, innovative studies on convent culture prior to the dissolution raise significant questions

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<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the paradoxical nature of Christianity in shaping women's lives, see the introduction to Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer, eds. That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women and Christianity (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

<sup>87</sup> Important American studies include Mary Ewens, The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Arno, 1978); Barbara Misner, "Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies": Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850 (New York: Garland, 1988); Margaret Susan Thompson, "Women, Feminism, and the New Religious History: Catholic Sisters as a Case Study" in Philip R. Vandermeer and Robert P. Swieringa, eds. Belief and Behaviour: Essays in the New Religious History (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). French-Canadian nuns are examined in Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987). The most ambitious survey of nuns historically is Jo Ann Kay McNamara, Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Irish nuns have received more scholarly attention than their English counterparts, see Catriona Clear, Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1988). The first book to deal directly with female monasticism in Britain was Lina Eckenstein's Women Under Monasticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896). For a recent analysis of the British context, see Barbara Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales.

regarding the nature of monastic identities.<sup>88</sup> Nancy Bradley Warren, for example, in a study of female monasticism in later medieval England, analyses the construction of monastic identities, demonstrating the tensions that existed between the “ideological scripts” which shaped nuns’ identities and the identities which were created through nuns’ everyday practices.<sup>89</sup> Warren argues that nuns frequently “extended their identities beyond that of bride of Christ” in order to participate in the maternal authority restricted to the abbess.<sup>90</sup>

Although Anglican orders have received less attention, recent work points to a growing interest in these communities as well.<sup>91</sup> The most sustained examination of sisterhoods is Susan Mumm’s *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian England*, which presents a detailed social history of the origins and growth of these institutions, charting the ways in which they developed within the context of nineteenth-century social and religious conditions.<sup>92</sup> As does Mumm, Martha Vicinus

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<sup>88</sup> These studies include Roberta Gilchrist, Gender and Material Culture: The archaeology of religious women (London: Routledge, 1994); and Marilyn Oliva, The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350 - 1540 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998). See also Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

<sup>89</sup> Nancy Bradley Warren, Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). The concept of ‘ideological scripts’ refers to the documents of monastic profession and visitation, as well as monastic rules.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>91</sup> For studies on Anglican sisterhoods which consider these communities from a feminist perspective, see Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) Chapter Two; Susan O’Brien, “Terra Incognita”; Susan Casteras, “Virgin Vows”; John Shelton Reed, “A Female Movement”; and Bridget Hill, “A Refuge from Men.”

<sup>92</sup> Susan Mumm, Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain (London: Leicester University Press, 1999). I thank the author for kindly providing me a copy of the manuscript of her dissertation along with other helpful material and advice during the course of my research. For a comparison of Roman Catholic and Church of England Monastic Communities, see Hope Campbell Barton Stone “Constraints on the Mother Foundresses: Contrasts in Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious Headship in Victorian England” Ph.D Thesis. (University of Leeds, 1993).

considers the empowering nature of sisterhoods for women in her brief study of these communities. According to Vicinus, "Anglican sisterhoods were clearly in the vanguard of women's single-sex organisational autonomy and their insistence upon women's rights to a separate religious life."<sup>93</sup> However, she cautions against viewing such institutions in a celebratory manner, noting that they present "a complicated picture of institutional subordination and self determination."<sup>94</sup> These studies, both for the pre-Reformation and Victorian eras, are particularly valuable in their analyses of the practices of women religious in relation to the ideological constructs of their time, most importantly, the gendered precepts which shaped women's position in society.

This study departs from previous examinations of Anglican sisterhoods as it analyses the experiential and discursive identity of sisterhoods as situated within the wider framework of Victorian identity politics. It is informed by a diverse range of theoretical perspectives. Feminist theory sets forth important arguments concerning the historical construction of identity. Feminist philosopher Denise Riley's important work, *Am I that Name?*, destabilises the category "women," providing a theoretical framework in which to analyse how the identity of "Anglican sister" - itself a social category - was fashioned in relation to a specific historical context.<sup>95</sup> The insights of historians Joan Scott and, specifically in relation to the Victorian period, Mary Poovey, into the significance of gender as a category of analysis, help to conceptualise the relationship between

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<sup>93</sup> Vicinus, 48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988). On the social construction of motherhood, see Eileen Janes Yeo. "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914" *Women's History Review* 8:2 (1999).

female monasticism and the discursive construction of ideas about masculinity and femininity throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>96</sup> Poovey's analysis undermines any notion of the stability of Victorian gender politics and sheds light on how those who defied its tenets had the potential to expose the artificiality of this system.<sup>97</sup> Post-structuralism's insistence on the ways in which language constructs meaning is essential to an understanding of the discursive fashioning of identity.<sup>98</sup> Its de-centring of the subject, however, is less helpful in determining how sisters were responsible for creating their own identities through experience. The emphasis on experience, as illustrated, for example, in Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, enables a consideration of how women in sisterhoods not only worked through and around the discourses which regulated their lives, but also created meaning from their own practices, beliefs and rituals.<sup>99</sup> Marxist insights into the material nature of historical change and the significance of class to social relations, such as those offered by E. P. Thompson, are highly relevant to any study which examines the development of radical, hierarchical cultures, such as monasticism, as well as the controversial work of moral reform.<sup>100</sup> Nor can an analysis of how Victorian women constructed their identities, not only in the colonial context, but also in England, proceed without engaging with debates on race and ethnicity as put forth by post-

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<sup>96</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988);

<sup>97</sup> Poovey, 11.

<sup>98</sup> For example, according to Denise Riley, identity exists as the product of historically-based discursive forces. Am I that Name? Chapter 1. For Scott, gender helps us to understand how "collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed." Gender and the Politics of History.

<sup>99</sup> Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (London: Virago, 1983).

<sup>100</sup> E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London: Penguin, 1980). On the significance of class to social organisation, see also Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class.

colonial theory.<sup>101</sup> Just as the sisters' identities were situated within discourses of "Englishness," so too were they fashioned by ideas of "whiteness" in the imperial setting.<sup>102</sup> These constructions had significant implications for how these women were positioned in relation to both English and imperial culture.

Within these diverse theoretical frameworks, my understanding of the culture of women religious would have remained incomplete, however, without a sense of the complex spirituality which pervaded this culture. Here, recent investigations by a number of feminist historians, notably Barbara Taylor, Sue Morgan, and Eileen Janes Yeo provide provocative insights into the powerful force of spirituality in nineteenth-century women's lives.<sup>103</sup> Taylor was among the first to argue the need to mine the unconscious, to devise a theory of fantasy in order to effectively penetrate the spiritual universe of our subjects. Morgan explains the potential of such an approach: "Rather than simply providing new information about women's lives, the inclusion of religion as an interpretative framework may significantly revise our existing picture of the way in which feminists negotiated complex, seemingly contradictory, discursive influences in their expression of gender identities and transformation of an inequitable social order."<sup>104</sup> For Yeo, the radical potential of religion is such that it "can provide a belief system...which can be manipulated to shape gender identities different from conventional models, legitimising them with transcendent

<sup>101</sup> See, most significantly, Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1975).

<sup>102</sup> On the significance of race to the construction of the identity of British women, see for example, Vron Ware, Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History (London: Verso, 1992); Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>103</sup> Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant feminists and Catholic saints"; Sue Morgan, "Faith, Sex and Purity"; and Barbara Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy" History Workshop Journal 39 (1995).

<sup>104</sup> Morgan, "Faith, Sex, and Purity," 4.

authority."<sup>105</sup> The women who joined the fledgling Anglican sisterhoods at mid century did so on the basis of their personal relationships with God. The identities they created for themselves as women religious, while significantly structured by the discourses of class, gender, race, and monasticism operating in Victorian culture, were fundamentally underpinned by the power of their faith. While the nature of this faith was indeed culturally conditioned, it was also deeply personal: it supported the first sister, Marion Hughes, through her soul's darkest night, just as for Mary Wollstonecraft, it had defined her very being: "What else (but religion) can fill the aching void in the heart, that human pleasures, human friendships can never fill...What can make us reverence ourselves, but a reverence for that Being of whom we are but a faint image."<sup>106</sup> As did Wollstonecraft, Anglican sisters anchored themselves in God as they struggled to define themselves within a culture which lauded female piety yet worked to deny its expression within monasticism.

Anglican sisters utilised their intensely personal, yet controversial religious faith as a means of transgressing the boundaries of Victorian gender ideology. In so doing, they appropriated dominant ideals about femininity in order to subvert them in their daily lives: dependence on man, recrafted as dependence on God, translated into independence from patriarchal authority. They also derived social power by tapping into the class politics of the age: in their work they capitalised on the assumed moral and spiritual superiority of upper- and middle-class women in order to exert social control over working-class women. The radical nature of this lifestyle was not lost on Victorian society, and led to considerable persecution of these women, despite a growing acknowledgment of the social value of their work. Unwilling to

<sup>105</sup> Yeo, *Protestant feminists and Catholic Saints* 142.

<sup>106</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (London, 1790), 34, 39. Cited in Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy," 110.

target female piety directly, detractors often seized upon the form of the religious life as a means of disparaging sisterhoods. Yet the opposition displayed toward sisterhoods was only superficially based on antiquated notions of convent culture, popularly imagined as cloistered, cheerless, and corrupt: concern about female independence and self-determination stood at the heart of debates surrounding Anglican religious orders. These fears, and the forms in which they were expressed publicly, reveal the radical potential of female monasticism to expose the fault lines in Victorian culture. In the imperial context, where a different set of cultural and political rules applied, sisters' identities, while less controversial, were similarly complex: as agents of Church and state, these women struggled to negotiate their cultural and racial privilege with the physical demands of colonial life and their sense of duty toward Native society.

This study then, positions Anglican sisterhoods within the wider framework of Victorian culture as a way to illuminate not only the internal dynamics of female monasticism, but also the external forces which shaped these communities. It analyses the relationship between the spiritual and the functional aspects of sisters' lives, and negotiates between the discursive and the experiential constructions of these women's identities and those of the novel institutions they developed. Three sections each focus on a particular Order within a specific cultural context. The first section, featuring the Society of St. Margaret, explores how gender influenced the formation of Anglican sisterhoods, highlighting the controversial relationship among these institutions, English society, and the Church hierarchy. Chapter One examines the genesis of this Sisterhood, analysing how the discursive construction of St. Margaret's identity drew upon fears surrounding female

monasticism and shaped the experiences of its original sisters as they attempted to put their monastic identities into practice. The challenge posed by sisterhoods to patriarchal authority is the theme of Chapter Two, which investigates one woman's determination to become a sister against the vehement opposition of her father, ultimately exposing the depth of popular resentment toward these institutions.

Section two, which charts the development of the Community of All Hallows, considers how the identity of Anglican sisters was constructed in relation to discourses about sexuality, class, and moral regulation. Chapter Three examines how concerns about female sexuality and the rehabilitation of "fallen women" led to the establishment of All Hallows. The controversy surrounding the creation of this religious order exposes how women utilised the emphasis on female spirituality to challenge male authority and to regulate other women, both sisters and penitents. This theme of the negotiation of power, based on class and spirituality within the sisterhood, and gender beyond it, is analysed further in Chapter Four, which examines how the growing institutionalisation of Anglican monasticism led to the development of an internal hierarchy in the convent. Chapter Five addresses the ways in which the politics of moral reform and discourses of fallenness were applied paradoxically to both regulate and revolutionise the lives of penitent women.

In the final section, the setting changes dramatically to the remote interior of British Columbia, where a small group of All Hallows sisters established a school for Native girls. The involvement of sisters in empire building is the subject of Chapter Six, which analyses how the politics of racial discourses and imperialism structured the experiences and identities of these



women in their work with Native children and their families. Chapter Seven investigates the effects of the sisters' work at the school more closely, highlighting the destabilising effects of the colonial context upon their self-perceptions, and their "civilising mission." This framework operates both thematically and chronologically in order to trace the development of each specific Order, and of monasticism more generally throughout the nineteenth century: section one focuses on the formative stage of Anglican sisterhoods in the 1850s, section two covers the process of evolution to the 1880s, and section three addresses the period from the 1880s to 1901 when these communities had achieved recognition and were expanding across the globe.

Anglican sisterhoods occupied a unique position in nineteenth-century society: located culturally as a threat to middle-class womanhood, and situated religiously on the margins of the Church of England, these institutions bear witness to the radical potential not only to imagine, but to create alternative lifestyles within a culture famous for the limitations it imposed upon women's freedoms. The novelty of the lifestyle that sisterhoods offered and the debates which they generated provide provocative and illuminating insights into the politics of Victorian identity. By creating a culture at once predicated upon, and in opposition to, that of English society, the women who joined these orders gained a significant degree of control over their lives. But the challenge posed by the religious life extended far beyond the familial. In an age of burgeoning capitalism and individualism, the cooperative nature of sisterhoods seemed strikingly at odds with the modern world in which they existed. By assuming a collective identity, Anglican sisters devised creative ways to subvert the power held by men which attempted to circumscribe women's lives. Yet, this outwardly

corporate character often masked internal divisions which shaped monastic life as dramatically as external conflict. Sisters gained social and conventual power in relation not only to men, but also to other women, beyond and within the convent. Significantly, they did so not as nuns, but as *pseudonuns*, constructing identities in opposition to those popularly ascribed to Roman Catholic sisters, and without the support of their own episcopate. The complex ways in which their identities were fashioned, both by the sisters and by wider society, reveal that the relationship between faith and feminism, while highly ambiguous, was not always antithetical for those willing to commit to a life "at play in the fields of the Lord."

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## CHAPTER ONE Negotiating Identity: The Society of St. Margaret and the Creation of Anglican Women Religious

There was always a sort of breadth and large-mindedness about its foundation - a sort of what we now call Christian socialism about it...The associations of those early St. Margaret's days are such a vision of peace, brimful of aspirations...Nothing seemed too great to attempt, nothing seemed too high or too remote to hope for. We would, I believe, have dared or done anything.<sup>1</sup>

Mother Kate, SSM.

Visitors to England today are generally not predisposed to include a trip to East Grinstead, West Sussex, as part of their itinerary. This town, which lies approximately midway between London and Brighton on the edge of the Ashdown Forest, does, however, have a history of attracting unorthodox religious groups.<sup>2</sup> In fact, East Grinstead and the surrounding countryside is known as the "cult capital" of Europe. Today this area is home to the world headquarters of the Church of Scientology, as well as to a host of other non-traditional religious groups such as the wicans. Unlike London, considered too provocative a locale for such "cults," East Grinstead, recently described as "[a]lmost a national synonym for middle-class ennui," does not strike the observer as a hot-bed of religious exotica.<sup>3</sup> Its twisted, cobblestone paths and the longest array of Elizabethan buildings in England are suggestive of a more traditional past. Yet, this flavour of religious unconventionality was perhaps as marked in the nineteenth century as it is now, especially with the arrival of the Reverend John Mason Neale and the establishment of an Anglican sisterhood in the 1850s.

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter of Mother Kate [Kate Warburton] SSM, cited in A. G. Lough, The Influence of John Mason Neale (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 68.

<sup>2</sup> East Grinstead is located about 25 miles south of London.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Sullivan, "There Will Always Be an England," The New York Times Magazine February 21, 1999.

The Society of St. Margaret was formed early in 1855 with three sisters under the spiritual guidance of John Mason Neale, a High-Church clergyman whose ritualistic practices, as will be discussed below, caused considerable debate both socially and within the Church. Although eight different Anglican sisterhoods had been established in England by 1854, female monasticism remained highly controversial throughout the country due to its association with Roman Catholicism, and its practitioners were few in number.<sup>4</sup> Nor was the Sisterhood's original mission, to provide nursing care for the local community in their own homes, particularly in the cottages of the rural poor, an accepted vocation for ladies. From its humble beginnings in a two-room cottage in the village of Rotherfield, however, the Community gradually expanded and diversified to include the operation of schools, an orphanage, guilds for women and girls, and refuges.<sup>5</sup> As the work of the Sisterhood became increasingly accepted, so too did the idea of the religious life in the Church of England. The magnificent Gothic convent, designed by eminent architect George Street, and which became the sisters' home in 1870, bears witness to the prominence gained by this Order and its co-founder, Neale, for whom the convent was constructed as a memorial.<sup>6</sup> The chapel is particularly spectacular, complete with exquisite stained glass, black marble columns, and stalls carved individually by one of the sisters.<sup>7</sup> Such a home

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of these earliest sisterhoods, see Peter F. Anson, The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion (London: SPCK, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Community-based accounts are provided by [Sister Gabriel] Doing the Impossible: A Short Historical Sketch of St. Margaret's Convent, East Grinstead, 1855 - 1980 (1984), and Sister Catherine Louise, The Planting of the Lord: the History of the Society of Saint Margaret in England, Scotland, and the U.S.A. 1855 - 1995 (privately printed, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> The sisters explained to me during my stay with them in 1997 that they were required to sell their Gothic convent as it no longer suited the needs of the Community. It was obviously a painful decision. The convent is now divided into luxury apartments, which sell for up to £1,000,000 a piece. The Gothic convent was constructed with the proceeds of the Neale memorial fund: Neale died in 1866. See his obituary in The Church Magazine, no. 9 (September 1866).

<sup>7</sup> The day I was taken to visit the convent, a badminton net had been strung across the stalls, reflecting the less-spiritual needs of the new community of residents.

could only have instilled in the sisters a strong sense of their monastic identities and intensified their conviction of God's blessing upon their mission.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, over a hundred sisters from the Community worked throughout Britain, and around the world in North America, Sri Lanka, and Johannesburg.<sup>9</sup>

The Society of St. Margaret serves as a particularly effective case study in which to examine the origins of female monasticism in nineteenth-century England for several reasons. The southern county of Sussex, in which the Sisterhood was located, maintained a strong tradition of anti-Catholicism: as such, any undertaking which intimated at Roman Catholic ritualism was approached with suspicion.<sup>10</sup> As well, the controversial presence of John Mason Neale in the formation of this Sisterhood undermined local goodwill and created substantial tensions with the bishop of the diocese as well as the clergy. Cottage nursing was difficult work, requiring significant training and perseverance in the disease-ridden homes of the poor. The novelty of the life and the work discouraged many women from committing to the religious life. For those who did join, internal conflicts were also at play: relationships among the sisters, as they adapted to sisterhood life and their new-found identities as sisters, were also not always smooth. In their personal dynamics with each other, as well as with the diocesan hierarchy, these women, like many of their lay counterparts, defied gender stereotypes through their personal ambition, defiance of conformity, and outspoken nature. Taken together, the challenges sisters faced, and the

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<sup>8</sup> For an insightful analysis of the significance of architecture to monastic women in the medieval context, see Roberta Gilchrist, Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> The Community established a branch house in Aberdeen in 1864, in Boston in 1873, and also ran a home in Montreal. Work in Johannesburg began in 1898.

<sup>10</sup> The dynamics of anti-Catholic sentiment in Sussex will be examined in detail in Chapter Two.

ways in which they were negotiated, expose the operations of religion, gender, class, and ultimately, power within the dynamic of female monasticism and Victorian identity politics.

This chapter examines the material together with the discursive construction of the Society of St. Margaret during the Sisterhood's formative period, from late 1854 to early 1856. Initially, a brief discussion of John Mason Neale establishes context, followed by an examination of the appeal for trained nurses at mid-century. A consideration of contemporary reactions to the idea of a sisterhood in Sussex provides a detailed analysis of how Anglican religious orders and the identity of "sister" were imagined discursively at mid-century by lay and clerical commentators. Finally, an exploration of the practical difficulties involved in establishing a sisterhood focuses on the experiences of the first sisters as they attempted to adjust to the religious life. The identity of "sister" was not automatically assumed upon joining a religious order; nor was this identity fixed but was rather constantly being reshaped. As it was both imagined and performed, the identity of sister was positioned in relation to ideas about Victorian middle-class womanhood and its emphasis on the practical piety and social utility of women. By considering both the discursive and the practical construction of female monastic identities, this analysis challenges our understanding of the ways in which both men and women negotiated and responded to Victorian gender ideology.<sup>11</sup> Notions of authority, dependency, and the regulation of women were essential components of this ideology and, as such, are central to this analysis. Not only were ideas about sisterhoods being constructed and contested during this era, but so were the ideological systems which shaped

<sup>11</sup> On the construction of this ideology and the ways in which men and women engaged with its tenets, see, most notably, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780 -1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

social relationships more broadly.<sup>12</sup> A study of this fledgling Community thus sheds lights on wider debates about the position of women in the nineteenth century and the extent to which female identities could be manipulated. The nature of the records at St. Margaret's is particularly well suited to such an investigation: convent diaries, external correspondence, and a variety of visual and printed material provide multiple perspectives from which to analyse the formation of this Community and its significance in the mapping of identity.

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### **The Formation of a Nursing Sisterhood in Sussex: Context and Controversy**

It is impossible to examine the Society of St. Margaret without careful consideration of the pivotal position of John Mason Neale in its establishment. Although in posterity, Neale has achieved greatness among Victorian clerics, this prestige eluded him in life. In fact, throughout much of his career as an Anglican priest, Neale faced considerable opposition. Neale was one of the founders of the Cambridge Camden Society in 1839, the Cambridge equivalent of the Oxford Movement, and it was as a member of this group that he developed his high-church views.<sup>13</sup> Ordained in 1842, he was prevented from parish work due to poor health, and after spending three years on the continent, Neale returned to England in 1846 to assume the position of Warden at Sackville College, East Grinstead at a salary of £28.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For an analysis of the nature of ideological systems at mid-century, and particularly the ways in which they were being contested, see Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (London: Virago, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> The Society, co-founded by Neale and Benjamin Webb was concerned with the study and revival of Gothic architecture, ancient ritual, and ecclesiology. For a wider analysis of ritualism, see Nigel Yates, Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830-1910 (Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Biographical detail is taken from Anson, The Call of the Cloister; Michael Chandler, The Life and Work of John Mason Neale, 1818-1866 (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995); A. G. Lough, John Mason Neale - Priest Extraordinary (Newton Abbott: privately printed, 1976); and Lough, The Influence of John Mason Neale (London: SPCK, 1962).

The College was an ancient almshouse which in the nineteenth century operated as a charitable home for the elderly.<sup>15</sup> This appointment caused some controversy: while previous wardens were all single and without means, Neale was married with several children and comfortably well-off.<sup>16</sup> Of greater significance, however, was Neale's Tractarian bent, made explicit in such works as *Ayton Priory, or the Restored Monastery*, a novel promoting monasticism which Neale had published in 1843.<sup>17</sup> Such views did little to endear Neale to his diocesan superior, the Bishop of Chichester, Ashurst Turner Gilbert, who did not share Neale's ecclesiastical ideals. Indeed Neale's Anglo-Catholic tendencies were such that the Bishop placed him under clerical inhibition in May 1847: "I feel it to be my duty to inhibit you, and I do hereby inhibit you, from celebrating Divine Worship, and from the exercise of clerical functions in my Diocese [due to the] fippery with which you have transformed the simplicity of the Chapel at Sackville College into an imitation of the degrading superstitions of an erroneous Church."<sup>18</sup>

Sackville College was officially exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, but within a year of his arrival Neale again was taken to task for administering Holy Communion and publicly reading prayers in an unconsecrated part of the building. Following an inquiry by evangelical churchmen, along with the Bishop, Neale was formally accused and found guilty of "introducing new doctrines" to College residents and his duties as spiritual head of the College

<sup>15</sup> Sackville College was founded in 1609 by Robert Sackville and in the nineteenth century was under the patronage of Lord and Lady De La Warr.

<sup>16</sup> See Lambeth Palace files, Neale Papers, MS 2677, for a discussion of the controversy.

<sup>17</sup> *Ayton Priory* presented a catalogue of the advantages of the religious life, and suggested some of the potential problems associated with its revival in the Church of England. Neale considered such aspects as vows, daily services, and the issues of authority and discipline. Significantly, Neale's focus in this novel was on male rather than female religious orders. John Mason Neale, *Ayton Priory: Or, the Restored Monastery* (Cambridge: Deightons, 1843); See also Lough, *The Influence of JMN*.

<sup>18</sup> The Bishop of Chichester to John Mason Neale, May 8, 1847. Lambeth Palace Library, MSS 2678, Neale Papers. Also see Lough, *The Influence of JMN*, Chapter 12.



were curtailed accordingly. Just when it looked as if the situation could get no worse, Neale and his wife, Sarah Norman Webster, were charged with unlawful assault and false imprisonment by a long-time resident of the College, Mary Ann Preston.<sup>19</sup> In a packed court room, the jury was cautioned against personal prejudice due to Neale's religious opinions. Verdicts were handed down on both charges for the plaintiff with fines levied upon Neale and Mrs. Neale.<sup>20</sup> Although many other residents of Sackville College supported Neale, and petitioned the Bishop to remove his inhibition, such scandal could not have strengthened his position at the College or within the community.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it was without episcopal sanction, and with the disdain of many citizens of East Grinstead, that Neale contemplated the revival of female monasticism in Sussex.

Most accounts of the origins of the Sisterhood place Neale squarely at the helm.<sup>22</sup> Official texts published by the Community speak lovingly of "the Father Founder" and the genesis of St. Margaret's is attributed solely to his ingenuity.<sup>23</sup> In one such account, Neale is described as having "the panache of a young Augustine and the spiritual depth of a Frances de Sales. He was a brilliant scholar, student of twenty languages, author of scores of books....[an]

<sup>19</sup> Lambeth Palace, MSS 2678. Neale Papers. The file contains unidentified copies of a newspaper report of action for assault in East Grinstead county court. The date is not given, but is likely 1848. Significantly, none of his biographers mentions this case.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Neale was charged with assault, and fined one farthing. Neale with false imprisonment, fined 40 shillings. The report is covered with marginalia, such as "false" and "not what happened."

<sup>21</sup> "A Statement of the late proceedings of the Lord Bishop of Chichester against the warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead" (London: Joseph Masters, 1853) PH 9632. Again in 1850-51, Neale's ritualistic practices resulting in a group of rioters attacking the College, smashing windows. See Lough, *Influence*.

<sup>22</sup> See Arthur M. Allchin, *The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities 1845-1900* (London: SCM Press, 1958); Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*; Chandler, *The Life and Work of John Mason Neale*; Lough, *John Mason Neale*; and Thomas J. Williams, "The Beginnings of Anglican Sisterhoods" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Church* vol 16 (1947), 361.

<sup>23</sup> See the following pamphlets: *The Planting of the Lord: Doing the Impossible: The Society of St. Margaret*, 2nd. Ed. (1952); and [Katherine Warburton] *Memories of a Sister of St. Saviour's Priory* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1903), 306.

immensely dynamic, enthusiastic, buoyant, earnest, spiritual semi-invalid."<sup>24</sup> Other histories of the Community and biographies, while not as universally glowing in their praise for the priest, nonetheless present him as chief architect of the Sisterhood.<sup>25</sup> The typical narrative runs as follows: from his window at Sackville College, as Neale surveyed the surrounding countryside he lamented the physical, as well as the spiritual welfare of its inhabitants, and determined that something had to be done.<sup>26</sup> Years later he recorded the fateful moment: "the November rains were then driving in lines almost horizontal, and feeling the miserable inadequacy of...the parochial system to reach those poor scattered cottages, and huts, those distant farms and hamlets...it flashed into my mind, If I could but have women for that work!"<sup>27</sup> Oh, how many men have shared such a sentiment!

Fortunately, Neale did not have to look far for available women. Two, Ellen Horner and Alice Crocker, were resident at Sackville College where Horner worked as a nurse and Crocker served as Neale's amanuensis. The third, Sarah Ann Gream, daughter of the rector of Rotherfield, reportedly declared to Neale days after his above appeal for help, "Why not have a sisterhood? -- and I will belong to it."<sup>28</sup> Gream, the first Mother Superior of St. Margaret's, was born in Godstone, Surrey in 1810 to a well-established

<sup>24</sup> Doing the Impossible, 5. Anson describes Neale as "perhaps the most brilliant and versatile priest of the Church of England in the nineteenth century." The Call of the Cloister, 337.

<sup>25</sup> See, in particular, Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: "And so it came to pass that God put into his heart to try to form a Sisterhood, whose special object should be to go out into these poor cottages, to live with and nurse the sufferers under their own roof." 339. See also Lough, Influence of JMN; Chandler, The Life and Work of JMN; and Eleanor A. Towle, John Mason Neale. A Memoir (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906). According to Chandler, "Neale was a pioneer when he founded the Society of St. Margaret....The initiative was controversial, but it represents another lasting and beneficial contribution by Neale to the life of the Church." 75.

<sup>26</sup> SSM Archives, Accession #169, Neale's Journal. Versions of the same account are found in Chandler, Allchin, Anson, Lough, Towle, and the official Community histories.

<sup>27</sup> John Mason Neale, Sermons on the Song of Songs 2nd. Edition (1867) Quoted in Allchin, 102-103.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Quoted in Allchin, 103. See also Chandler, 75.

clerical family. According to Community records, Gream was responsible for suggesting not only the idea of a sisterhood but also its name.<sup>29</sup> The eldest daughter of at least four children, few details of her childhood or youth have been recorded.<sup>30</sup> In 1851, she resided with her widowed father, who was in his late seventies and in declining health, in Rotherfield, a village about fifteen miles from East Grinstead.<sup>31</sup> It is likely that she became acquainted with Neale through her father. He certainly supported the idea of a sisterhood as it was in his name - "old Gream"- that the original proposal for nursing sisters was circulated. Ann Gream's commitment to care for her ailing father, however, meant that whilst she was prepared to begin living as a sister, she was not free to relocate to East Grinstead.<sup>32</sup> Her motivations for becoming a sister can only be surmised.<sup>33</sup> Financially, she was secure, as her father's living at the rectory was in excess of £1500.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as a middle-aged spinster, the attractions of a purposeful life in the company of others may well have appealed to her. The daughter of a clergyman in rural Sussex, who, according to one of Neale's biographers, "had an intimate knowledge of the conditions of life and character of the rustic population," she would have been under no illusions as to the difficulty of the proposed work.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Neale's Journal, SSM Archives, Accession 169.

<sup>30</sup> 1851 Census records reveal that Gream lived at home with her father, five adults, and a six year old child.

<sup>31</sup> Rotherfield's population was 3531 in 1851. It is located 7 miles south of Tunbridge Wells, 14 miles from East Grinstead. For details of the village, see the 1855 Post Office Directory for Sussex, 942. East Sussex County Record Office.

<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, there is no record as to whether Ann Gream's continued residence with her father was her decision or his. Either way, she believed it was her duty to care for him until his death.

<sup>33</sup> On the complexities of assessing the motivation behind joining a religious order, see Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian England" Ph.D Dissertation, University of Sussex, 1993; Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850 -1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) Chapter Three; Gail Malmgreen, ed. Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 -1930 (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> 1855 Sussex Post Office Directory, 942.

<sup>35</sup> Eleanor Towle, Memoir, 233.

Ellen Horner was a widow in her late twenties when she arrived at Sackville College to nurse in the proposed infirmary.<sup>36</sup> Originally from Ibstone, Oxfordshire, as Sister Ellen she devoted over forty years to nursing the poor until her death in 1898.<sup>37</sup> Although the records remain silent, her motivation for joining the Community seems straightforward: widowed at an early age, presumably childless, she must have considered service as a nurse a suitable sphere of duty, although as a middle-class woman, she would not have felt it appropriate to accept paid employment as a nurse.<sup>38</sup> While becoming a sister may not have been her original intent, she no doubt realised the practical aspects of communal life and was spiritually prepared to commit her life to God. Even less is known of Alice Crocker's background, and, specifically, why she arrived at Sackville College just before Christmas 1853.<sup>39</sup> Born in Warburn, Bedfordshire in 1829, Alice was just 25 years old when she became a professed sister. She may originally have served as a nurse to the residents of the College, but certainly by 1854 she was also acting as Neale's secretary, a position which she retained, in part, upon becoming a sister. A highly-ambitious woman, Sister Alice succeeded Mother Ann as Superior in 1864 and was largely responsible for the expansion of St.

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<sup>36</sup> Sister Ellen's obituary, St. Margaret's Magazine, vol 5, no 6 (1898) New Series, 322. This magazine, hereafter SMM, was the official publication of the Community, reporting on the diverse operations of the sisterhood in Britain and internationally.

<sup>37</sup> See House Diaries, SSM Archives.

<sup>38</sup> See Frank Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Anne Summers, "A Home from Home: women's philanthropic work in the nineteenth century" in S. Burman, ed. Fit Work for Women (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Lee Holcombe Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850 -1914 (Newton Abbott, Devon: David and Charles, 1973); and Ellen Jordan, The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Jordan provides examples of the pressures middle-class women faced who attempted to work for wages, see esp. 35 -36.

<sup>39</sup> SSM Archives. Accession 169, Neale's Journal, entry for Dec 15, 1854 states that Alice had been at the College for a year. She was born August 27, 1829. See 1861 Census.

Margaret's throughout Britain and later, overseas.<sup>40</sup> Clothed together as novices in February 1855, these three women became the first sisters of St. Margaret's, where they remained for the duration of their lives, and without them, Gream's idea of a sisterhood may have never come to fruition.<sup>41</sup> The formation of the Order depended on the development of a community ethos in which individual wants and ambitions were sacrificed in order to promote the collective good. As the *Community's* magazine explained in its first issue in 1889 in an article entitled "Sisterhood Life," personal sacrifice was imperative to the formation of St. Margaret's: "And now the hearts of a few women, here and there, were deeply stirred with love for their Lord...So they gave up the comforts and pleasures of home life, that they might draw nearer Him who had not where to lay His Head."<sup>42</sup>

The selection of Superior was crucial not only to the Sisterhood's development but also to community dynamics. To assist in the choice, Neale drew upon the experience of Harriet Monsell, the Superior of the Society of St. John the Baptist at Clewer, established in 1852.<sup>43</sup> Neale accepted Monsell's offer to visit Clewer, just outside Windsor, and was strongly influenced by her advice. "I went to Clewer twice," he wrote to close friend Rev. Benjamin Webb, "and learnt all that I could there, and had a long conversation with the

<sup>40</sup> *Community histories* applaud Mother Alice, recording that "she was known and loved by everyone in the area," and that upon her death, in 1902, the sisterhood was flooded with flowers and messages of sympathy. *Doing the Impossible*, 55. Mother Ann receives no such acclaim.

<sup>41</sup> According to some sources, there was originally a fourth sister, but she did not stay with the Community, and there is no mention of her in either the Community profession roll or the early letters. From the onset, the sisters also helped Neale with his literary work. Sister Alice served as Neale's secretary, while a number of other sisters became translators and even wrote parts of his texts. Neale noted in a letter to Benjamin Webb that one-third of an article was written by S. Alice. While most biographies overlook this fact, Chandler acknowledges that the sisters worked on Neale's literary projects, 75, 96-7.

<sup>42</sup> *SMM* vol 1 (1889), 408.

<sup>43</sup> See T. T. Carter, *Harriet Monsell. A Memoir* (London: J. Masters & Co., 1884) In this biography, Carter spoke of "her ready frankness, her quick discernment, the practical business-like way in which she dealt with cases." 129. He also explains that she was much loved by the sisters at Clewer. Neale also received advice from T. T. Carter at Clewer, and William Butler at Wantage.

Superior, who is one of the most sensible women I ever saw."<sup>44</sup> This meeting with the Superior at Clewer impressed upon Neale the necessity of finding a suitable head. He obviously thought that neither Alice Crocker nor Ellen Horner would be appropriate, perhaps due to their relatively youthful ages of 25 and 30 respectively. Of Ann Gream, however, he had no doubts. He believed she would make an ideal Mother Superior and was rather pleased with himself at his "discovery:"

[I]t was necessary for me to have a Superior for my future Sisterhood. Her I found in Miss Gream, the very exact person of all others that I could have chosen, just about the right age--forty-five; used all her life to parish work; used to nursing, and most anxious to be employed in some new way.<sup>45</sup>

Significantly, Neale did not refer to his new Superior's spirituality or religious character in his letter to Webb. Rather, Ann Gream appears to have appealed to Neale because of her maturity, her practical experience, and her enthusiasm. Neale was surely influenced by the example of the "most sensible" Harriet Monsell in his choice of Superiors. She wrote to him shortly thereafter: "I must congratulate you on having found such a truly excellent sensible woman for your Superior, it is most hopeful as a first step."<sup>46</sup>

That Neale secured a Superior of a "sensible" and practical nature was crucial not just to the smooth operations of the Community, but also to its popular perception. Victorian gender ideology figured prominently in the

<sup>44</sup> Letters of JMN, 243. JMN to Benjamin Webb. Webb was a co-founder of the Cambridge Camden Society. In 1855 he was the rector of Sheen in Staffordshire. Ellen Horner's visit to Clewer in December 1854 helped to develop a lasting relationship between the two Communities which was instrumental in shaping St. Margaret's, providing one example of the cooperation, rather than competition, that could exist among sisterhoods during their formative period.

<sup>45</sup> Letters of JMN, 235. JMN to Benjamin Webb. Ann Gream officially became the Superior in June 1855.

<sup>46</sup> Neale's journal, 1854. Harriet Monsell to JMN. She was related to Archbishop Tait through marriage.

construction of the identity of "Mother Superior." The Superior of a sisterhood occupied an uneasy position of power in Victorian society: she was officially the head of the Community, yet this ideology proscribed that female power chiefly be exercised along moral and maternal lines.<sup>47</sup> Like Harriet Monsell, who entered the religious life upon the death of her husband, Ann Gream was in her forties when she became a Superior. These Victorian Superiors were able to utilise the discourses of social motherhood that circulated in the nineteenth century which enabled unmarried women to fashion public philanthropic identities, often in positions of power.<sup>48</sup> Not all Superiors, however, adopted such benevolent personae. Priscilla Lydia Sellon, the Superior of the Society of the Most Holy Trinity, while earning significant praise for her work during the cholera epidemic of 1849 in Plymouth, established a notorious reputation as tyrannical, manipulative, and given to ascetic extremes.<sup>49</sup> Aged twenty-seven when she assumed the superiorship, Sellon's brazen, wilful attitude earned her many enemies and subjected her Community to frequent public investigations.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the precise nature of her relationship with E. B. Pusey, the spiritual director of Sellon's Order, became the subject of public gossip.<sup>51</sup> Thus, while the widowed Harriet Monsell was applauded for her efficient yet motherly

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<sup>47</sup> See Eileen Janes Yeo, "Some Paradoxes of Empowerment" in Yeo, ed. Radical Femininity: Women's self-representation in the public sphere (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> On this concept, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "The Creation of Motherhood: Britain and France, 1750 -1914" Women's History Review vol 8, no 2 (1999).

<sup>49</sup> Thomas J. Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon: The Restorer after Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the English Church (London: SPCK, 1965). See also Anson, Allchin, and John Shelton Reed, "A Female Movement": The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Catholicism," Anglican and Episcopal History 57 (1988) 235 - 238.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Phillpotts, the Bishop of Exeter and a former supporter, officially withdrew his support in 1852. The sisterhood faced frequent public inquiries and investigations. See Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon.

leadership, Priscilla Sellon's more authoritarian style of rule was chastised and belittled. With such models before him, Neale's delight in finding such a dutiful daughter to become 'his' Mother Superior is hardly surprising.

With an initial labour force assembled, the next step was to publicise the project. Neale's precarious position in the diocese, coupled with public misapprehension toward sisterhoods, however, demanded that the identity of the project, initially at least, be camouflaged. As such, the circular which was printed early in 1855 and dispatched to members of the local clergy and other Anglo-Catholic supporters carefully avoided any mention of the priest's name or reference to a sisterhood.

"St. Margaret's House, Rotherfield"

It is proposed to establish an Institution for supplying the Clergy of Central Sussex and South Surrey with nurses trained for attendance on the sick poor...Their services will be entirely gratuitous; the Clergyman who may require them, making himself responsible for their general superintendence whilst they are engaged in his parish.<sup>52</sup>

As Neale explained in a letter to Benjamin Webb, this cloaking of the true identity of the "Institution" was purely intentional: "I have printed a little statement of our scheme, simply speaking of nurses, "whether ladies or others" and dropping all name of a sisterhood. This is to be sent to the 210 parishes which lie in our district, not in my name, but in that of old Gream, who entered heartily in the plan."<sup>53</sup> The circular was modelled after one which had been composed by William Gladstone ten years earlier in connection with the first Anglican community, the Sisterhood of the Holy

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<sup>52</sup> SSM Archives. Accession #62. The circular was prepared by a committee of five men, four clergymen (not Neale) and W M Blackwood of Rother House, Rotherfield. For further details, see Lough, *The Influence*, 41; Anson, 339.

<sup>53</sup> JMN to Benjamin Webb, February 1, 1855. Quoted in *Letters of John Mason Neale*, 236.



Cross.<sup>54</sup> Although both proposals emphasised the need for a system to alleviate misery and degradation, significantly, Gladstone's document, unlike that prepared by Neale, explicitly stated that the proposed institution would take the form of "a Sisterhood living under a religious Rule." Neale's circular, however, focused exclusively on the need for responsible nurses, informing readers that women were to be trained at Westminster Hospital with the House Committee, a group of supportive clergy, responsible for paying the nurses' tuition fees. The nursing "Sisters" - and here Neale utilised a little lexical luck by borrowing the term applied to nurses without drawing attention to their identity as religious sisters - would labour in the homes of the poor upon request of the local clergy, under whose direction they would operate, supplying their "skill, kindness and religious comfort." Thus, the original proposal for St. Margaret's, rather than advertise the institution as such, drew upon contemporary gender ideology in order to reconfigure the radical identity of women religious as nurses, who would be fully trained, would work without remuneration, and most significantly, would be dependent on the clergy.

Appeals for well-trained, Christian nurses had been growing throughout the century. In 1826, Alexander Dallas, curate of Wooburn, in Buckinghamshire, published a widely-circulated pamphlet entitled, "Protestant Sisters of Charity" in which he outlined a proposal for paid village nurses.<sup>55</sup> Three years later, a more sustained appeal appeared from Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, who advocated a sisterhood without vows

<sup>54</sup> For a copy of Gladstone's proposal, see Williams, Priscilla Lydia Sellon, Appendix A, 287 -9. Gladstone served as secretary to this Community. Gladstone's support for sisterhoods expressed his High-Church sympathies together with his concern for social reform. See G. I. T. Machin, Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869 -1921 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).

<sup>55</sup> A. R. C. Dallas, "Protestant Sisters of Charity - A Letter to the Bishop of London" (1826). The appeal reappeared in Robert Southey, Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospect of Society (London: John Murray, 1829).

or habits which would allow women to enlarge their sphere of action while tending to the social problems of the day. He demanded: "Why have you no Beguines, no Sisters of Charity?...No Vincent de Paul has been heard from your pulpits: no Louise le Gras has appeared among the daughters of Great Britain! Piety has found its way into your prisons, your hospitals are imploring it in vain."<sup>56</sup>

By mid-century, inspired by the work of Quaker Elizabeth Fry, who founded the non-denominational "Institution of Nursing Sisters" in London in 1840, High-Church Anglicans saw in these appeals a means by which sisterhoods could make their appearance on the English landscape and gain instant social recognition.<sup>57</sup> Like Fry's Institution, sisterhood nursing was designed to cater to patients in their own homes; sisterhood nurses, however, would not receive remuneration. Although cottage nursing itself derived little publicity, during the cholera outbreaks at Devonport in 1848 and 1849, sisters from the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross and the Society of the Most Holy Trinity received widespread acclaim for their efforts.<sup>58</sup> A cholera epidemic in London in 1854 also helped to launch Florence Nightingale's career.<sup>59</sup> In 1848, a committee of prominent High-Church men, including C. J. Blomfield, the Bishop of London and future prime minister William Gladstone, were instrumental in the establishment of St. John's House Training Institution

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<sup>56</sup> Southey, Sir Thomas More Vol II, 317.

<sup>57</sup> Fry's Institution was originally founded as the "Protestant Sisters of Charity." The Institute employed women to nurse in people's home who paid a fee of £10 for the service. By 1860, more than 60 women were employed as nurses. See Jordan, The Women's Movement, 127-8.

<sup>58</sup> Marian Hughes's Society of the Holy and Undivided Trinity had also nursed during a cholera epidemic at Oxford in 1854.

<sup>59</sup> See Margaret Forster, Significant Sisters: the grassroots of active feminism, 1839-1939 (London: Penguin, 1986), 107. Nightingale volunteered at the Middlesex Hospital in London.

for Nurses in London.<sup>60</sup> This facility, from which evolved the Community of the Nursing Sisters of St. John the Divine in the 1880s, provided spiritual and moral training in an effort to create a new breed of nurses altogether unrecognisable to those familiar with Dickens' Sairey Gamp.<sup>61</sup> Nurses, who received a salary upon completion of their training, were sent out into the homes of individual families when the need arose.<sup>62</sup> St. John's House also featured ladies whose mission was to visit the families of the poor. Referred to as "Sisters," these ladies were expected to live at St. John's House with the nurses, but their work was purely voluntary.<sup>63</sup> By the middle of the 1850s, several sisterhoods were involved in nursing, primarily in London.<sup>64</sup>

With the outbreak of war in the Crimea in 1854 and the publicity generated by Florence Nightingale's nursing exploits at Scutari, the need for responsible and well-trained nurses finally received public attention.<sup>65</sup> Fourteen Anglican sisters were among Nightingale's party in the Crimea: the contribution of these sisters helped not only to raise the status of nurses, but

<sup>60</sup> For further details on the nurses' training programme at St. John's, see Anne Summers, "Pride and Prejudice: Ladies and Nurses in the Crimean War" History Workshop Journal (16) Autumn 1983, 35. Particularly, Summers notes that St. John's inculcated a sense of moral and spiritual superiority in women according to their class background. See also Anne Summers, Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 20-23.

<sup>61</sup> See Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (1844). Mary Poovey comments on the ways in which the image of the nurse was being restructured in relation to ideas about class and gender at mid-century. Uneven Developments, Chapter Six.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the establishment of the Institution and its operations, see Jordan, The Women's Movement Chapter Seven, "Transforming Nursing"; Kathryn Gleadle, British Women in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> According to Jordan, this side of the operation was not a success: between 1849 and 1853 only four women became resident sisters. 133.

<sup>64</sup> The Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, the Society of the Most Holy Trinity, the Community of the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine, and the Society of All Saints were all involved with nursing. See Michael Hill, The Religious Order: A Study of virtuoso religion and its legitimation in the nineteenth-century Church of England (London: Heinemann, 1973).

<sup>65</sup> See Anne Summers, "Pride and Prejudice"; Sue M. Goldie, ed. "I have done my duty": Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, 1854-56 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); and Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments esp. Chapter Six. For an extended analysis of the connection between nursing and war, see Anne Summers, Angels and Citizens

also to help legitimate the function of sisterhoods in England. Appeals for better quality nurses were also being publicised by women at this time: Mary Stanley, who had also been in the Crimea, bemoaned the current state of nursing in *Hospitals and Sisterhoods*, published in 1854.<sup>66</sup> She advocated the absolute necessity of religiously-inspired nurses, maintaining that the duties of a nurse "cannot be rightly performed, if they are undertaken in any other spirit than that which proceeds from the love of Christ."<sup>67</sup> At the same time, prominent literary journalist Anna Jameson delivered two drawing room lectures arguing for the necessity of proper training facilities to support female labour, including hospital nursing, in England.<sup>68</sup> Jameson's *Sisters of Charity: Catholic and Protestant, At Home and Abroad* published in 1855, helped to popularise her call for "the social employment of women." None of these women writers believed that religious orders in which women were bound by vows provided the best model for English nursing, and, significantly, they were primarily interested in hospital rather than private nursing. Their work nonetheless helped to generate concern about the reform of nursing, and this in turn, contributed to raising the standards by which nurses would be judged. The involvement of sisterhoods as English nursing was just beginning to professionalise speaks to the ambiguous position these communities occupied in relation to Victorian feminism: while sisterhoods were instrumental in promoting the necessity of trained nurses, their voluntary service impeded the public recognition of nurses as

<sup>66</sup> Mary Stanley, *Hospitals and Sisterhoods* (London: John Murray, 1854). Stanley's relationship with Nightingale was often acrimonious, as they held differing views about nursing.

<sup>67</sup> Stanley, 84.

<sup>68</sup> Mrs. [Anna] Jameson, *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant, Abroad and at Home* 2nd. Ed., (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 11. The second lecture was titled, "The Communion of Labour: A Second Lecture on the Social Employment of Women." For an analysis of these lectures and Jameson's ideas, see Jordan, *The Women's Movement*, 151 - 155.

valid members of the workforce.

The idea of establishing a nursing sisterhood with trained ladies thus could not have been better timed. While domestic social conditions demanded improvements to health care, international affairs also played a part in highlighting the necessity of trained nurses. Writing to Benjamin Webb early in 1855, Neale explained how he wished to capitalise on the Crimean War and the publicity that Nightingale's nursing was generating: "Now my little cub [the Sisterhood] was beginning to take good proportions; the next thing was to feed him. Just then came the Scutari business. On this I took courage, and wrote to everyone in our part of the Diocese that had a chance of being in favour of the plan...I had not a single demurrer to the scheme...Then I began to beg."<sup>69</sup> Nightingale's work also proved beneficial to the Sisterhood by providing potential sisters. Early in 1855, Mary Elizabeth, the wife of Sidney Herbert, the Secretary of War, sent Neale a list of women who had applied to go to Scutari but who, for various reasons, had remained in England.<sup>70</sup> Although Sussex may have lacked the glamour of the Crimea, Neale hoped that his proposed sisterhood would benefit from the publicity nursing attracted in the war. As he started out, his mood was effusive: "it is the greatest hit I have seen since the first start of the C[ambridge] C[amden] S[ociety]."<sup>71</sup>

Not only did the idea of a nursing sisterhood benefit from contemporary conditions, but also from the prevailing poor reputation of the character of nurses. "Every Parish Priest must have felt the want of nurses to whom he can with any degree of satisfaction entrust the charge of his sick

<sup>69</sup> JMN to Benjamin Webb, February 1, 1855. Cited in Lough, The Influence of John Mason Neale, 53.

<sup>70</sup> JMN to Countess Somers, Feb 5, 1855. Neale Papers, Lambeth Palace Library. Mary Herbert was also a friend of Florence Nightingale.

<sup>71</sup> To Webb from JMN, Feb 1, 1855. Letters, 236. Also cited in Lough, Influence of JMN, 53.

poor," the circular announced, as "[t]he general character of the women who alone are usually to be procured, is too well known."<sup>72</sup> Ladies trained at Westminster Hospital, however, would not suffer from the "gross ignorance of village nurses," which, it was maintained, plagued rural society. Nor was the restoration of the patient's physical health, the only concern: "At the very time when sickness might dispose the sufferer to receive religious impressions, the behaviour of the attendant, is such as effectually to put an end to all hopes of benefit derivable from the visits of the Clergyman."<sup>73</sup> Devout Christian ladies, by contrast, would improve not only the physical condition of patients, but their moral and spiritual well-being too.

The manipulation of identity was central to the revival of female monasticism in order to distinguish it from its medieval and Roman Catholic counterparts. Although identified as such in the circular which was distributed to Neale's friends, the women who were attached to St. Margaret's were not only, or even primarily, nurses. Nursing was what they did, or would do; women religious were who they were, or would become. The women who joined St. Margaret's needed not only to learn how to become nurses, they also had to learn how to become nuns. Yet, a greater challenge lay in the reconciliation of these two forms of identity. Moreover, tensions existed between sisters' individual and corporate identities. Once a sisterhood was firmly established and numbered dozens of sisters, new sisters contributed and adapted to an already constituted collective identity. In the formative period of a sisterhood's development, however, no such communal identity existed: it had to be constructed. How then were the identities of Anglican sisters created and by whom?

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<sup>72</sup> SSM Archives. Accession #62.

<sup>73</sup> SSM Archives. Accession #62.

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### Imagining Identity: The Discursive Construction of Anglican Sisters

In a pamphlet published in 1850, the Reverend Thomas Thelluson Carter, High-Church rector of Clewer, set out to dispel the notion that members of Anglican religious orders were somehow superior to other Victorian women:

To become a member of a sisterhood involves no irrevocable vows, implies no assumed sanctity, no meritorious propitiation of heaven: it is not to lead a life of seclusion, meditation and prayer, although these two latter are indeed needed as daily preparation, for the *active service* and self-denial both of body and mind to which the Sisters of Mercy are called.<sup>74</sup>

Carter's characterisation of a sister less as a saint than as a social worker illustrates an important aspect of the manner by which the identity of Anglican sisters was crafted at mid century. This identity was constructed conversely in relation to Victorian womanhood: while the piety of women religious was downplayed, the social utility of these women was emphasised. This dynamic figured predominantly in the advice which Neale and the future sisters received as they prepared a set of guidelines by which the Sussex Sisterhood would operate, and through which the identity of the sisters would be defined. These guidelines, organised as the Community Rule, contained over forty parts, illustrating exactly how the Sisterhood would

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<sup>74</sup> T. T. Carter, "Sisters of Mercy in the Church of England" (London: Joseph Masters, 1850), 9, emphasis in original. Carter became the Chaplain of the Community of St. John the Baptist, established at Clewer in 1851. He was one of the most prolific defenders of sisterhoods at mid-century. He attempted to dispel some of the most common misconceptions about these societies in various tracts and pamphlets. Significantly, the issue of vows was not discussed in depth in the correspondence surrounding the establishment of SSM.

function in terms of administration, work, and spirituality.<sup>75</sup> Such a Rule was necessary, *St. Margaret's Magazine* later noted, "if strangers, wholly unused to one another's peculiarities, were to live in peace."<sup>76</sup>

St. Margaret's Rule derived from a blending of old and new ideas about female monasticism. In the summer of 1854, Neale travelled in Europe with one of the future sisters to visit a number of Catholic convents in order to learn about the practical and spiritual aspects of the religious life.<sup>77</sup> In France they spent time with the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Sisters of the Poor, while visiting the Beguines in Belgium.<sup>78</sup> Neale was particularly impressed with the Rule of St. Francis de Sales' Visitation Sisters, and it was on this Rule, modified by that of St. Vincent de Paul's Sisters of Charity, that the Rule of the Society of St. Margaret was eventually based.<sup>79</sup> In stark contrast to Victorian gender ideology which emphasised the limitations on middle-class women, St. Vincent de Paul's doctrine for women religious stressed freedom of movement and a conscience governed purely by faith, explaining that, "Instead of a convent they have only the dwellings of the sick, for a cell some poor chamber, often a hired one; for a chapel, the parish

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<sup>75</sup> The sisterhood's proposed first Rule was: "The object of this Institution is the supplying to the villages which lie within a distance of 25 miles of the locality in which it is situated, Sisters of Mercy; who, when requested by the clergyman of the parish under his direction, may visit and attend the sick, and do such other works of charity as hereafter may be found expedient or practicable; the numbers of, and the means possessed by, the Sisterhood being duly taken into consideration." SSM Archives. See Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) for an analysis of how the Rule shaped nuns' personal and collective identities.

<sup>76</sup> SMM vol 1 (1889), 408.

<sup>77</sup> SSM Archives. Neale's Journal, Accession 169. According to a sermon quoted by Allchin, Neale and four sisters travelled to Europe again in January 1855 to visit a number of sisterhoods. Anson, 105.

<sup>78</sup> See [Mary Sackville Lawson], ed. *Letters Of John Mason Neale* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1910); Lough, *The Influence of JMN*.

<sup>79</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious. Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) esp. 111. See also Allchin, especially Chap. Six, and *Doing the Impossible*, 9. Sister Alice was the only future sister to join Neale on this trip; unfortunately no records exist of her reactions to the various convents they visited.



church; for a cloister, the streets of a town; for enclosure, obedience; for a gate, the fear of God; for a veil, holy modesty."<sup>80</sup> Once back in England, Neale sought to adapt St. Vincent's Rule to the contemporary climate. As such, in the months leading up to the Sisterhood's formation in February 1855, he and the future sisters sought the advice of various friends and colleagues. Through the suggestions they offered, the Rule was updated to embrace nineteenth-century cultural conditions, specifically in accordance with the tenets of Victorian gender ideology.

In this discourse, Neale drew upon the rhetoric of Victorian womanhood, positioning the Sisterhood as a Victorian charity and the sisters as a voluntary band of workers. The proposed Rule highlighted that each sister would have "full and uncontrolled liberty" to leave the Institution at her discretion, that those under the age of twenty-five must have the permission of their parents to join, and that "free intercourse" with family members was encouraged. The grey dress of the sisters was to be "plain and uniform...without any unnecessary ornament."<sup>81</sup> The identity constructed for these women exposed the ambiguities in Victorian gender ideology: it positioned the sisters as dependent and independent, at once minors and adults; it stressed freedom of movement and commitment to family while, in practice, sisters' schedules would be strictly regulated and their opportunities for family contact sharply curtailed. Their appearance would be distinctive, but in an indistinguishable manner. Importantly, the Rule emphasised that these women would perform a useful social function. In the wake of the 1851 census, which revealed that 43 percent of women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried, concerns about "surplus women" and their

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<sup>80</sup> As cited in Sr. Violet, *Doing the Impossible*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Neale Papers, MSS 2677, Lambeth Palace Library.

redundancy created an atmosphere in which the productivity of single women was heavily debated.<sup>82</sup> Most significantly, however, the Rule served as a proxy to regulate women who were governed by neither father nor husband. By their very existence, such non-domestic women threatened the stability of Victorian gender ideology; although imperfect, the Rule provided a measure of authority in the absence of either patriarchal power or that of the episcopate.

Like any insightful Victorian entrepreneurs embarking on a new initiative, Neale and the future sisters proceeded to collect the key elements necessary for the project: information and capital. Launching an impressive solicitation campaign, Neale and Ann Gream contacted various clergy and acquaintances, sending them each a description of the proposed nursing sisterhood and a preliminary list of the Institution's Rule. The campaign began with letters to Neale's most affluent friends, such as Virginia, Countess Somers, to whom he laid out the Community's most pressing needs: "I hope that we shall find a sufficient number of persons willing to work; some we have already: but we stand sadly in need of funds."<sup>83</sup> Of such persons, Neale commented that while "zeal [was] the first requisite, strength the second...we cannot avail ourselves of either without money." Appealing to Countess Somers' sense of social obligation, he reminded her that while the clergy would directly benefit by the scheme, "they can only give their best wishes and advice," therefore, he must apply "to those to whom God has given the means, as well as the will, to help."<sup>84</sup> While the Countess responded

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<sup>82</sup> See for example, D. M Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858); Adams. "Woman's Mission" *Westminster Review* 52 (1849). W. R. Greg's now infamous query "Why are women redundant?" did not appear until 1862.

<sup>83</sup> Neale to Virginia, Countess Somers, December 7, 1854. Neale Papers, MSS 2677, Lambeth Palace Library. The Countess had given generously in Neale's prior fund-raising campaigns.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

generously of her money, wishes and prayers, many other supporters could only provide goodwill.<sup>85</sup>

A significant number of responses to the proposal offered suggestions and advice on how best to proceed. Specifically, these responses indicate how female monasticism, and its medieval heritage, was perceived as contrary to the ideals of Victorian culture. They highlighted and drew together three strands of identity politics at mid century: religion, gender, and national character. Not only was the monastic life viewed by many as in opposition to the principles of the Church of England, but it was also seen as a slight on Victorian domestic ideology, and against the notion of English liberties.<sup>86</sup> These tensions centred upon questions of authority: how were sisterhoods to be governed by the Anglican hierarchy, and how were the women within them to be regulated? If English national character was premised on the primacy of the Church and the family, how were sisterhoods aligned with such ideals? Even those whom Neale undoubtedly believed would endorse his plan displayed a wide diversity of opinion toward the establishment of an Anglican sisterhood. Many respondents supported the scheme in theory, but worried that in practice, a sisterhood in Sussex would receive strong opposition from the local people. In effect, they endorsed the function of the Community, but not the form. Additionally, Neale's High-Church reputation, many feared, would taint the Order and create problems with the local clergy.

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<sup>85</sup> For example, a letter from a friend at Eastmore Castle, Ledbury asserted that the plan was "an admirable one," and enclosed £10, stating that "I shall be very glad if I can in any way be the means of making it known amongst those, who would be likely to sympathize with it." Letter from Eastmore Castle, Ledbury, Dec 22, 1854, to JMN. Accession #169, Neale's Journal. Clerics, however, had less to donate. For example, Neale received support from Henry Thompson, vicar of Chard, but no money.

<sup>86</sup> Specifically, the conventual system was linked with "backward," as well as adversarial nations, such as Ireland and France respectively. See D. G. Paz, Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England(Stanford CA.: Stanford UP, 1992).

Potential objections to the Sisterhood demonstrate the extent to which monasticism was equated with Roman Catholicism in the English imagination. Although by 1855 Anglican orders for women had been established in the country for a decade, this Victorian heritage tended to complicate matters rather than pave a smoother course for those that followed. Several sisterhoods had attracted widespread controversy, especially Priscilla Sellon's Order at Devonport under the dubious guidance of Dr. Pusey, which in 1849 and again in 1852 was subjected to vociferous public scrutiny as to suspected 'Romish' practices. Rumours abounded that Pusey had illegally celebrated Holy Communion in the sisters' house over Christmas. Henry Phillpotts, the Bishop of Exeter, launched an inquiry which concluded that the Community had not transgressed Church of England practices, and the sisters and Pusey were acquitted, but the affair created a good deal of negative publicity about the nature of sisterhoods in general.<sup>87</sup> Popular beliefs that sisterhoods served merely as stepping-stones to Rome were borne out by the departure of several of the earliest Superiors to Roman Catholic orders, including Elizabeth Lockhart of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin in 1850.<sup>88</sup> Many observers remained unconvinced of the Anglican identity of these orders; the scandals at Devonport, along with the conversion of high-profile Anglo-Catholic priests and sisters, served only to heighten contemporary anxieties.<sup>89</sup>

The religious complexion of Anglican sisterhoods was undoubtedly

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<sup>87</sup> The affair also prompted various displays of loyalty toward the sisters, most notably William Wordsworth's sonnet, "To Miss Sellon" in February 1849. Phillpotts withdrew his official support of the Community in 1852. See Williams, *Priscilla Lydia Sellon*, Chapter 5; and Allchin, *The Silent Rebellion*, 66-8.

<sup>88</sup> She was accompanied by several of the sisters, and followed in 1856 by Emma Langston, the original superior at Park Village.

<sup>89</sup> The most spectacular conversion was that of Cardinal Newman in 1845. Manning converted in 1851.

one of their most controversial aspects. At East Grinstead, Neale's High-Church tendencies at once stamped the new Community with a Roman Catholic flavour. The Bishop of Chichester, as noted above, was no friend of Neale and considered him a rather dangerous influence.<sup>90</sup> Various acquaintances warned Neale of the lack of co-operation he would likely receive from the Bishop as well as from the local vicar, John Harward. The detrimental effect of Neale's association with the Sisterhood was made clear to him by the Marquis of Salisbury: "at East Grinstead the vicar of the Parish might be unwilling to act in concert with you and the Bishop would probably disapprove of any part which you might take."<sup>91</sup> Neale echoed these sentiments, writing to Sister Alice shortly after the Order's formation that he thought the Bishop would approve of the Sisterhood "on the condition that I have nothing to do with it."<sup>92</sup> Neale must have been comforted, however, that the sisters considered him essential, as he recorded a letter received "from S. A[lice] agreeing with what S. E[llen] had said, that, if the Bishop would not let me be the Chaplain, they would not belong to the Sisterhood. I neither praise nor blame them, but it makes my business easier."<sup>93</sup> Significantly, although the Bishop had episcopal authority over the clergy in his diocese, including Neale, no such authority extended over the Sisterhood. As such, while the sisters would have welcomed his support and his willingness to serve as the Community's official Visitor, ultimately, the

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<sup>90</sup> Neale's journal. SSM Archives.

<sup>91</sup> The Marquis of Salisbury to JMN, Dec. 18, 1854.

<sup>92</sup> Accession 170, SSM Archives. JMN to Sister Alice, May 23, 1855.

<sup>93</sup> Neale's journal, May 25, 1855.

Bishop had no power over the Sisterhood at all.<sup>94</sup>

That questions of identity struck at the heart of the debate surrounding Anglican sisterhoods emerges clearly from a number of responses to the proposal. William Madox Blackwood of Guildford provided a catalogue of the primary complaints regarding these institutions at mid-century. He suggested that, much as he would like to offer support, those in his circle

have no predilection for Sisterhoods, being only acquainted with St. Saviour's, Osnaburgh, [where] [t]here was perhaps a mistake made there at first, the dress, unwearably hideous; the quasi-vows, repugnant to English feeling; and the priestly "direction,"...in connection with 'confession' have together tended to raise a hostile feeling, where more judicious action would in all probability have secured friends.<sup>95</sup>

The dress, the vows, and confession: to the sisters these represented the dedication of the body, the spirit and the soul, but to the public they symbolised all that was unnatural and unEnglish in female monastic orders. Their unsightly attire only added to the ways in which sisters defied Victorian gender ideals. Blackwood noted that at St. Saviour's, where the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross had relocated from Park Village, London in 1852, "a silly mystery affected by two of its inmates, has created great distrust, in addition to the peculiarities before recited and an uneasy feeling," such that his daughter,

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<sup>94</sup> Until their official recognition by the Church Convocation in 1891, sisterhoods operated as ex-officio bodies in the Church of England. While some Bishops, like Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, supported these institutions, many others did not. Sisterhoods were able, therefore, to decide upon their own Rule, types of work they would undertake, and form of Community. See Anson and Allchin for discussions of the general lack of episcopal sanction that existed throughout the nineteenth century.

<sup>95</sup> Neale's Journal. Wm Madox Blackwood to JMN. Dec 18, 1854. Blackwood sent £40 on New Year's Day, 1855. The new home of the Sisterhood of the Holy Cross on Osnaburgh St. was a medieval-styled convent complete with Gothic windows, gables and a high-pitched roof. Fears of "Popery" surrounded this Community from its inception owing to the involvement of Dr. Pusey. These fears intensified with the conversion to Roman Catholicism of the parish vicar, Dodsworth, in 1851. Many of the original Park Village sisters, including the Mother Superior, converted to Roman Catholicism, and a sister died of fasting in 1850. The Sisterhood of the Holy Cross was incorporated into Sellon's Community in 1856.

an Associate of the Community, had redirected her services elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> Writing from his parish at Frome, in which, "12,000 struggl[e] against every conceivable difficulty of sin and prejudice," W. Bennett put matters more succinctly, "If I had some of your sisters here, I could give them work enough - but the name of a "Sister"! would set this town ablaze."<sup>97</sup> Such testimonials highlighted the intense popular suspicion surrounding these Communities within the first decade of their existence.

Superiors from other Anglican sisterhoods also drew attention to the problems surrounding the identity and popular perception of religious orders. Lavinia Crosse, the Superior at the newly-established Community of All Hallows in Shipmeadow, Norfolk, advised that religious orders should not call themselves sisterhoods of mercy or charity as "there is an assumption in it which rather jars on one's feelings." Such a name, she continued, "is likely to crush the spirit of exclusiveness in some, and foster it in others; while to the world it will seem certainly to encourage [?] it"<sup>98</sup> She too warned of the attendant prejudice which often accompanied the name "sister" and how such a term seemed to some at odds with the notion of humility: "I know that...many excellent women, admirably qualified for your work and for life in a sisterhood shrink from the adoption of a name which seems to them to imply a superiority over those who have not assumed it."<sup>99</sup> Superior of the Community of St. John the Baptist at Clewer, Harriet Monsell, heartily endorsed the idea of a nursing sisterhood in Sussex, but stressed the need for discretion and for adherence to a well-prepared plan:

I believe the wisest course is to say little of your plans, to

<sup>96</sup> Neale's Journal. Wm Madox Blackwood to JMN. Dec 18, 1854.

<sup>97</sup> Neale's Journal. W. Bennett to JMN. Dec 18, 1854.

<sup>98</sup> Neale's Journal. Lavinia Crosse, SSM to JMN, Jan 18, 1855. The word "encourage" is difficult to discern.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

make up your own mind very fully before hand what it is you want to have and what to accomplish, and to prepare as carefully as you can the rules on which the Sisterhood is to work, and then let people join or not join as they like.<sup>100</sup>

Monsell's advice speaks to the degree of caution with which the religious life had to be approached by its architects at mid century. Most respondents agreed that discretion was vital to the plan's success and that hostility toward the Sisterhood should be expected. As one reply noted, "Of course the institution will be looked upon with suspicion - this you may expect - the success will depend much upon the judgments of the Superior and the chaplain."<sup>101</sup>

Just as Neale was advised not to disclose the identity of the proposed institution, so too were details of the sisters' spiritual lives to be kept under wraps. In light of sisterhoods' position on the extreme margins of the Established Church, the construction of a public identity for St. Margaret's which stressed function over form was essential.<sup>102</sup> This emphasis on the social utility of St. Margaret's emerges clearly in the discussion about the relative importance of prayer within the Community, and illustrates the different ways by which Neale and the public envisioned the essence of the religious life. Neale proposed a schedule of worship in which the Community would assemble for prayer seven times daily for the services of Matins, Prime, Tierce, Sext, Nones, Swansong, and Compline. Correspondent W. Jackson raised concerns that such worship "will at once stamp the Institution in the eyes of the great multitude...of religious men with a

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<sup>100</sup> Neale's Journal. Harriet Monsell to JMN, 1854.

<sup>101</sup> Neale's Journal. F. W. Collison to JMN, Dec 1854. Emphasis in original.

<sup>102</sup> I have not seen a copy of the original Rule as proposed by Neale but have been able to piece some of them together by using various comments from his letters and their replies. Many rules were deemed too radical by various correspondents for the English public.



"Romanising" character; and keenly prevent its usefulness."<sup>103</sup> In addition, he feared that "the use of these terms would e.g. prevent our own Bishop from accepting the office of Visitor, and thereby preclude most of his clergy from availing themselves of the assistance of this institution." A friend in Haverstock had similar concerns about the role of Bishop Gilbert, noting that the "power given to the Visitor [normally the bishop]... is more than could be wisely given to any but an ideal Bishop... our Bishop will disapprove of all these services."<sup>104</sup> At All Hallows, Mother Lavinia testified to the problems surrounding worship within her own Community: "it may be worth mentioning that a report (false) that the words Prime, tierce, etc. were used in the book of devotions employed at Shipmeadow raised probably a greater prejudice against the house than any other circumstance connected with it."<sup>105</sup> She lamented that "It is very absent that people should take offence at these innocent words; but as their use ought to be a matter of indifference to me as well as to them, I would rather avoid these than lose the good will and alms of any by retaining them." Significantly, prayer itself was not objected to in letters from respondents, but rather the fact that the Roman Catholic heritage of the nomenclature created an unwelcome association in the mind of the public. With Neale already under clerical inhibition at Sackville College, such warnings would not have been taken lightly.

It was not simply the type of prayer which raised concerns, but its frequency, which seemed to be at odds with the Sisterhood's practical goal of nursing. The majority of commentators stressed that the primary emphasis of the proposed sisterhood should be work rather than prayer. The advice from a Mr. Wollerton maintained that the schedule of prayer was too

<sup>103</sup> Neale's Journal, W. Jackson to JMN, n.d.

<sup>104</sup> Neale's Journal. M. Salisbury to JMN, Dec 18, 1854.

<sup>105</sup> Neale's Journal, Lavinia Crosse to JMN, Jan 1855. This was in connection with Rule 21.

rigorous and incompatible with regular employment, and could be "felt as a restraint, or if became habitual, would be greatly missed by those sisters who were employed out of the House."<sup>106</sup> Another commentator, F. W. Collison agreed: "if the institution is as necessary as it ought to be - the sisters would be well occupied almost the whole time of the day - and it would be impossible for them to attend so many services - a morning and evening service would be sufficient: their other devotions in the day would be in company with the poor and sick whom they were visiting."<sup>107</sup> A respondent from Haverstock suggested that "from six am to 10 or 11 pm is too long a day for women who would have work to do and they must guard against sacrificing real usefulness to a rule - surely 8 o' clock could be a better time for rising."<sup>108</sup> Such comments illustrate the concern placed not only on making certain that St. Margaret's would be a socially-useful establishment, but also on ensuring that the religious life was practicable for the women involved.

The commentary about St. Margaret's reveals that in the discussions pertaining to the social utility of women religious, gender ideology emerges most strongly. The ideas about women's philanthropic work presented in these letters highlight the different ways in which sisters' identities were constructed in relation to those of other Victorian women. Sisters, like other unmarried women, were expected to contribute to society in a useful manner.<sup>109</sup> As such, commentators recognised, and indeed emphasised, the value of the labour performed by sisters and constructed identities for these women around the issue of work. While the prevailing gender ideology

<sup>106</sup> Neale's Journal, Wollerton to JMN, n.d.

<sup>107</sup> Neale's Journal. Collison to Neale, December 19, 1854.

<sup>108</sup> Neale's Journal, From an unidentified correspondent in Haverstock.

<sup>109</sup> On the expected social contributions of middle-class women, refer to Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, and Pamela Sharpe, ed. Women's Work: The English Experience 1650-1914 (London: Arnold, 1998); Susan O'Brien examines this phenomenon in "Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England" Past and Present 121 (1988) esp. 15.

reminded married middle-class women that their devotion to charitable enterprise must never conflict with their domestic duties, sisters were encouraged to engage in full-time, unpaid labour.<sup>110</sup> Sisters' identities were also fashioned in relation to popular ideas about medieval nuns, whose apparent enforced idleness appeared as the antithesis of the emphasis placed on the utility of nineteenth-century sisters.<sup>111</sup> The religious life, viewed by many Victorians as the end of a useful life, thus was refigured consciously in this discourse as a most useful enterprise. In her analysis of middle-class women's work, Ellen Jordan demonstrates that "strong-minded women" challenged domestic ideology by arguing for its incompatibility with religious principles.<sup>112</sup> These women created what Jordan terms the "religious heterodoxy" as a way of extending their moral and spiritual influence beyond the home, into areas of education, reform, and nursing.<sup>113</sup> Through their personal rejection of domesticity and their insistence on engaging in meaningful labour, Anglican sisters participated in the construction of such a religious heterodoxy. At a time when feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe and Anna Jameson were clamouring for heightened attention to the social function of women, so too were Anglican sisters and their supporters,

<sup>110</sup> For nineteenth-century arguments concerning the social utility of the religious life, see, for example, Maria Trench, "English Sisterhoods" *The Nineteenth Century* vol 16 (1884), 339-352; Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity and the Communion of Labour: Two Lectures on the Social Improvement of Women* (London: Longmans, 1859); W. E. Sellon, "An Essay on Sisterhoods in the English Church" (London: Joseph Masters, 1849); Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* vol 1 (London: John Murray, 1829); Georgiana Hill, *Women in English Life - from Medieval to Modern Times* 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894); [P. Holland] "Two Views of the Convent Question" *Macmillan's Magazine* 19 (1869), 534-543; and Caroline Emelia Stephen, *The Service of the Poor* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1871).

<sup>111</sup> See Susan P. Casteras, "Virgin Vows: the early Victorian artists' portrayal of nuns and novices," *Victorian Studies* 24 (1981) on how the lifestyle of women religious was popularly imagined.

<sup>112</sup> Jordan, *The Women's Movement*, 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. Jordan argues that women challenged domestic ideology by arguing that religion placed men and women in the same relation to God, therefore, both sexes had a duty to help those in need. 87-106.

although for differing motives.<sup>114</sup> Thus, from an unlikely source, Anglo-Catholic clergy, and in connection with the least likely of places, the convent, the public utility of women - as workers - was emphasised and encouraged.

In order to combat the commonly-held medieval notion that women religious were trapped inside the convent, Neale's respondents, in another conversion of Victorian gender ideology, called for the enhanced independence of Anglican sisters. They argued that the form of the religious life should not overshadow its function. Thus, the women who joined sisterhoods were to be provided freedom of movement beyond that normally afforded to other middle-class Victorian women. A correspondent named Wollerton objected to a rule which stated that sisters be chaperoned when leaving the convent: "If a sister can be made to go by herself into distant parishes, she ought to be able to be trusted out of the gates of the Institution herself."<sup>115</sup> Of primary concern was the importance of allowing the sisters free intercourse with companions. F. W. Collison suggested "that the relations of the sisters should have the power of visiting them at the Institution at certain dictated times."<sup>116</sup> Mother Lavinia also cautioned against excessive restrictions, suggesting that the Sisterhood "admit friends as well as relatives." Speaking from experience, she warned that "I have a strong feeling against the expediency of inquiring into the motives of a sister for wishing to leave for a time. It creates a temptation to dissemble. It seems to imply that they cannot rule themselves, and may thus tend to dependence on another etc."<sup>117</sup> Crosse was undoubtedly aware that if too many restrictions

<sup>114</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall we do with our old maids?" *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1882); Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity*; and Jessie Boucherett, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women" in Josephine Butler, ed., *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869).

<sup>115</sup> Wollerton to JMN.

<sup>116</sup> Collison to JMN. Dec 19, 1854.

<sup>117</sup> Lavinia Crosse to JMN.

were placed on the sisters, and if their independence was taken from them, their dedication might flag and undermine the corporate nature of the Community. Benjamin Webb warned against any inkling of asceticism, advising Neale to keep the sisters comfortable and busy at work: "heat the whole house with huge stoves... if cholera is raging, why keep 1/3 of the nurses at home?"<sup>118</sup> Wollerton summed up the collective sentiment of these advisors: "The object I conclude, is to make them socially useful and not ascetic nuns."<sup>119</sup>

The emphasis on the functional aspects of sisters' identities in this discourse gave rise to a range of fears based on the class politics of Victorian society. Collison, for example, was unsure of the practicalities and moral ramifications of the Sisterhood's proposed domestic arrangements:

I like your idea of a sisterhood of nurses very much...but will there not be great difficulty in carrying out the plan in villages? In the town you can put the Sister of Mercy into a lodging from which she might go forth to attend on her charge, but take an ordinary labourer's cottage with one or two bedrooms and perhaps four or five beds packed into them containing persons of all ages and both sexes and how are you to locate a woman who has been used to a more decent way of living amongst them?<sup>120</sup>

The Rector of Burwash, Joseph Gould, was similarly anxious in his letter to Ann Gream. He feared "the miserable and disgraceful accommodation in the generality of our cottages, which will sometimes make it physically, at other times, morally impossible that a Lady could take up her residence in the same house with the patient--and yet this is often a most essential point."<sup>121</sup> Gould

<sup>118</sup> Neale's Journal, Benjamin Webb to JMN, February 1855. "I am not sure that a growing Liberalism has not rather disqualified me from fully accepting any such system. But I have a notion that successful communities have been always profoundly democratic."

<sup>119</sup> Neale's Journal, Wollerton to JMN. Wollerton believed that other Rules are "too Romish" and "too harsh". Rule 34, for example, was "an intolerable restraint."

<sup>120</sup> Neale's Journal. Collison to JMN, December 1854.

<sup>121</sup> Joseph Gould to Miss S A Gream, 12 April, 1855. Original emphasis. Lambeth Palace, MS 2677.

suggested that a "nice airy sickhouse or cottage hospital" would perhaps be more suitable. So, while a number of supporters encouraged the unpaid labour of sisters, they refused to compromise on issues of morality. Although they did not seem to question that "ladies" could adapt to the work, they were less comfortable with the idea that they might actually live like and with the working class. Of course, there were also fears that rural cottagers would not be inclined to receive nursing care from ladies, especially if they perceived these nurses to be Roman Catholic nuns. While the Community archives abound with "success stories" of the sisters' nursing cases, doubtless there were also many cases in which the sisters were refused entry at all.<sup>122</sup>

Neale's friends and advisors clearly were concerned that St. Margaret's might assume the trappings of medieval, and more pointedly, Roman Catholic monasteries, and thus alienate the sisters from the local clergy and the public. Therefore, they attempted to refashion its identity in such a way as not only to quell popular opposition but also to attract potential sisters. In so doing, however, they imagined an institution which rather than adhering to Victorian gender ideology, actually subverted its ideals. Thus, sisters were encouraged to have freedom of action, to receive professional training, and were given a good deal of responsibility without male control. These advisors emphasised that the utility of the religious life should not be undermined by its reputation. As Jackson explained, "it does seem to me grievous that Churchmen should, so often as I feel they do, throw away opportunities of usefulness by obtruding externals, either in word or gesture, upon those who would accept the substance were they not alarmed by the

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<sup>122</sup> Sister Katherine was initially refused entry to nurse a patient with scarlet fever. The patient explained to the doctor: "I will not have any ladies that worship images in my house." The doctor eventually convinced her to admit S Katherine. Cited in Memoir of JMN, 241. See, in particular, Accession 62, SSM Archives. Letters concerning nursing cases.

exaggerated Shadow which precedes it."<sup>123</sup> Thus, with such advice under consideration, Neale promoted the Sisterhood without referring to it as such and without disclosing his association with it. Its identity was recrafted as an "Institution...with nurses trained for attendance on the sick poor," highlighting the social value of women's volunteer work yet downplaying women's spiritual commitment. While Nightingale's work was making the nursing profession respectable, female monasticism had yet to find its champion in England. As the Community took its first tentative steps, Webb commented to Neale that "it will be a curious experiment whether our Church can naturalize such an Institution."<sup>124</sup>

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#### **Performing Identity: Anglican Monasticism in Practice**

A body of women, ladies or otherwise, able and willing to go out, singly or by twos, into any village or town in the Kingdom, to minister to the poor--efficient in the arts of nursing others and denying themselves--ready to live in the humblest cottage, with the roughest people, in the roughest way--ready to turn their hands to anything and everything. Where shall such a body of women be found?<sup>125</sup>

"St. Margaret's Sisterhood," *Church Review*, 1861.

As in the 1855 circular originally dispatched to the clergy, historical accounts of the formation of the Society of St. Margaret obscure the identities of the original sisters. While the circular identified the sisters only as nurses in the initial pitch to the clergy, in various Community histories their

<sup>123</sup> W. Jackson to JMN, n.d. Neale's journal. Accession 169, SSM Archives.

<sup>124</sup> Webb to JMN, 1855. Neale's Journal. Lavinia Crosse used similar language when publicising the Community of All Hallows in 1857, explaining that "ours is no experiment." Refer to Chapters Three and Four of the present study for an analysis of the suspicion and controversy surrounding the revival of female monasticism in East Anglia and the creation of All Hallows.

<sup>125</sup> "St. Margaret's Sisterhood" *Church Review*, February 1861. This article attempted to explain the identity and work of St. Margaret's to the magazine's readers, as well as to attract potential sisters.

identity is even more nebulous and when they do appear, it is as willing, but subsidiary, participants. Most histories fail to refer to them as individuals at all.<sup>126</sup> That Neale has emerged triumphant from the anonymity of the circular and the individual sisters have not is hardly surprising given the corporate nature of religious orders which normally suppress the identities and achievements of individual members. In the Community archives, however, the sisters emerge as individuals, highlighting not only the diversity of their experiences, but also the extent to which the foundation of St. Margaret's was a collaborative project between these women and Neale. These sources allow for an investigation of how the original sisters, and those who joined them, fashioned identities for themselves, and responded to those which were constructed for them in popular discourse.<sup>127</sup> They reveal that individually and collectively the identities of women religious were often riddled with ambiguities and contradictions, and that through a variety of relationships - with each other, with the public, and with God - the women of St. Margaret's created identities for Anglican sisters which were both ideological and a performance.<sup>128</sup>

While the intent was that the sisters were to be popularly imagined and represented as nurses, in their daily lives these women needed to construct actual identities as women religious. In her analysis of medieval convent culture, Roberta Gilchrist explains how "Upon entering a monastery, personal identity is structured through two stages: denial of one's previous

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<sup>126</sup> For a stimulating discussion of the invisibility of individual sisters in historical accounts, see Susan O'Brien, "10,000 Nuns: Working in Convent Archives" *Journal of Catholic Archives* (1989) no. 9, 26-33.

<sup>127</sup> Here I follow Mary Poovey's argument that "the representation of women was also a site of cultural contestation during the middle of the nineteenth century." *Uneven Developments*, 9.

<sup>128</sup> On the performance of identity, see the recent collection of essays edited by Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).



identity, and construction of an alternative, new sense of self....The nun exchanged her former family relationships for the hierarchy of the monastic community."<sup>129</sup> Along with these new relationships, sisters had to adjust to their names, appearance, monastic vows, lifestyle, and physical surroundings which were central to the construction of this "alternative, new sense of self."<sup>130</sup> In the Victorian period, such radical personal and cultural transformation, as the advice correspondence made clear, was often at odds with contemporary ideas about femininity and women's proscribed social role. As such, few women, whether for personal or cultural reasons, were able to commit to a life of monasticism. The challenges which faced those who were demonstrates the extent to which Victorian gender ideology at once underlined and undermined women's access to authority within monastic culture.<sup>131</sup>

Unlike the sisters who joined St. Margaret's after its splendid Gothic convent had been constructed, and who would immediately have felt a sense of community surrounded by its walls, the first sisters were not able to derive such a collectivity from their initial residence.<sup>132</sup> Situated in the village of Rotherfield, a short walk from the parish Church, the two-room cottage which the sisters secured early in 1855 shared little of its successor's monastic trappings. Its location enabled Ann Gream to occupy the dual roles of Mother Superior and dutiful daughter simultaneously while she cared for her ailing father. Louisa Wilkins, a friend of the sisters who resided at the Sisterhood

<sup>129</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*. 18-19.

<sup>130</sup> The sisters' religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience were central to the construction of their personal and collective identities. Although SSM sisters did profess these vows, very little mention of vows appears in the advice correspondence, the sisters' letter, or the Community archives.

<sup>131</sup> Poovey highlights the ambiguities in mid-Victorian ideology, seeing it as "coherent and authentic but also instable and artificial." *Uneven Developments*. 3.

<sup>132</sup> See Gilchrist for a discussion of how the architecture of the convent contributed to nuns' identities.

for several weeks during this period, provided a detailed description of the house:

St. Margaret's is only a small house, it consists of \* \* \* On the chimney piece in the centre stands a B[la]ck Cross, about one foot in height, raised on three steps, and a bell. Over the cross is a print of Vincent de Paul....The bed room is divided into three parts by calico curtains...[each with] an iron bedstead about 14 inches from the floor, one chair \* \* \* one tiny looking glass, which is to me a luxury.<sup>133</sup>

In contrast to the discursive representation of the proposed sisterhood, in which its religious nature was subsumed beneath its functional nature, in the small Community house, the spiritual dimension assumed pride of place and was the centre-piece of the home. These visual symbols served as constant reminders that the sisters' primary allegiance was to God, and through God, the sick poor. The sparse decor of the original house must have provided a stark contrast to the typical ornamentation of many Victorian middle-class homes. Such surroundings would have been instrumental in helping the sisters to imagine themselves as different from other women, and thus would have contributed to the construction of their identities as women religious. How they understood this identity would have been shaped in part by how they were received by the residents of Rotherfield: although no details exist of the reactions of the lay community, Wilkins noted that of the two local curates, one supported the new venture, while the other - a resident at the rectory, Ann Gream's home - did not.

Initially, the sisters faced a number of problems as they attempted to adapt to Community life. Not only did they have to receive training as nurses, but also as women religious, the latter involving a steady regime of prayer and the study of scripture. In addition, as Superior, Ann Gream was

<sup>133</sup> Louisa Wilkins to Emily Scobell, 1st Monday in Lent, 1855. "A Reply to the Postscript of the Rev. John M. Neale" (London: Nisbet, 1858), 15-16. Infuriating \*\*\* in original.

required to run the administrative aspects of the Community and to recruit new members. Finances too required constant attention and Mother Ann, "nervous about money matters," spent much of her time writing letters to solicit support.<sup>134</sup> Nor were the sisters together at Rotherfield as Sister Alice continued to work at Sackville College, and Sister Ellen was in London training as a nurse. According to Louisa Wilkins, Neale spent much of his time at the College, as she remarked to a potential sister: "The good Father does not come very often to Rotherfield; he has only been here once since I have been here and I do not expect him again this Lent."<sup>135</sup> In the absence of Neale and with the sisters dispersed, a sense of community would have been difficult to create and would undoubtedly have hindered the development of a corporate identity. This identity would have been bolstered, however, on Easter Day 1855 as the sisters wore their official St. Margaret's outfit for the first time. Neale explained the choice of colour: "We preferred grey because the poor have so often a prejudice against a nurse in black; and children dislike it so much."<sup>136</sup> Writing to fellow Tractarian Joseph Haskoll that March, Neale put on a brave face: "The Sisterhood gets on famously....I look for three or four more [sisters] very shortly...The money comes in tolerably well also."<sup>137</sup>

Despite Neale's optimism, as his letter pointed out, the most serious difficulty facing the Community during the first year was not one which had been highlighted by the advice correspondence: the recruitment of new sisters. Many potential sisters became aware of St. Margaret's through contacts with Anglo-Catholics or due to their connections with other

<sup>134</sup> Neale's Journal, Feb 13, 1855. SSM Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Louisa Wilkins to Emily Scobell, 1st Monday in Lent, 1855. p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> JMN to Benjamin Webb, April 14, 1855. Letters of JMN, 238.

<sup>137</sup> Letters of JMN, 236-7. The identity of the "one" at Rotherfield is unknown. She did not join St. Margaret's.

religious orders. Although a host of women came to St. Margaret's to consider the religious life, very few of these women decided to test their vocation as probationers. Excerpts from Neale's diary and his correspondence with Sister Alice during this time reveal the complications involved with obtaining new sisters. Of Emma Wayley, recently dismissed from All Saints, a nursing sisterhood in London, Neale commented, "I think [she] will do: - she is a little forward."<sup>138</sup> Another candidate, Jane Walker, a governess from "a nice intelligent family," may have been put off by the tone of Neale's mass, as she was "rather scandalized at wafer bread."<sup>139</sup> Upon meeting with Miss Eldred, a potential sister, Neale wrote, "I like her: but will be very raw material to work upon."<sup>140</sup> Days later, as she studied the Epistles and the gospels, Neale recorded some improvement, "She seems tolerably well up in her theology."<sup>141</sup> When Emily Anderson, former superintendent of the General Hospital at Scutari showed interest in the Community, Neale's hopes were understandably raised: "She has been in the East...she would be invaluable to us."<sup>142</sup> Finally, there was Emily Scobell, a young woman from the nearby town of Lewes whose father was dead against her joining a sisterhood. Due to this parental objection, it was to be another two years before Emily was admitted into the Community amid a storm of controversy.<sup>143</sup> Although the reasons why none of these other women actually joined St. Margaret's are unknown, that their initial interest did not

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<sup>138</sup> Accession #169, Neale's journal, Dec 15, 1854.

<sup>139</sup> Journal, Feb. 11, 1855.

<sup>140</sup> Journal, April 26, 1855. Miss Eldred was one of the names that Mary Herbert had sent to Neale in connection with nurses for the Scutari. It is unclear whether she was the same woman as the Miss Eldred who met with Neale.

<sup>141</sup> Journal, April 29, 1855.

<sup>142</sup> Accession #170. Neale to Sister Alice, June 20, 1855. Sue Goldie briefly discusses Emily Anderson, the sister of Sir Charles Anderson in I Have Done my Duty, see esp. n. 43, 122, and 195. Anderson became very ill and left the Crimea in 1855.

<sup>143</sup> The process of Emily Scobell's recruitment and life as a sister will be discussed in Chapter Two.

translate into membership testifies to the difficulties sisterhoods faced attracting members in their formative period.<sup>144</sup>

Recruitment problems speak to ways in which the religious life was in many ways at odds with Victorian culture, and specifically, the role it fostered for unmarried middle-class women.<sup>145</sup> A number of requirements were expected of potential sisters. Successful candidates needed to be well-versed in English theology. Although any member of the Church of England would be considered, it is clear that those not familiar with or responsive to High Anglican practices, such as Communion, were less desirable. Experience, especially in nursing, was highly prized. A strong constitution was mandatory in order to be able to endure the rigours of sisterhood life and not become a burden on the Community. Financial security, although not required, was certainly an asset, not only in material terms, but also for the contacts provided by a woman of means, such as Emily Anderson. Lastly, a potential sister needed her family's approval: a clerical family could be, but was not always, an asset, as much depended upon the family's views on Anglo-Catholicism. Significantly, in its initial year, St. Margaret's was able to attract only one new member. Meeting with and training potential sisters was a time consuming process, disruptive to household dynamics. Certainly the trials of sisterhood life must have seemed daunting for many women. A rigorous spiritual regime coupled with the hardships of cottage nursing

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<sup>144</sup> This pattern of low initial recruitment characterised most of the early sisterhoods. St. Margaret's was in some ways exceptional in its ability to keep members: many orders experienced high attrition in their formative years.

<sup>145</sup> For an interesting examination of the difficulties associated with recruitment and maintaining sisters, see Rebecca Rogers, "Retrograde or modern? Unveiling the teaching nun in nineteenth-century France" *Social History* 23: 2 (May 1998). Rogers list some of the reasons potential sisters left as health problems, lack of interest in the work, and an inability to follow the daily rules. 157. See also Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy," and Hope Campbell Barton Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses: Contrasts in Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious Headship in Victorian England" Ph.D Thesis, University of Leeds, 1993.

presented an extremely challenging lifestyle, especially for those middle-class women unaccustomed to physical labour. The life of a sister was not merely an extension of the philanthropic culture with which many spinsters were imbued; rather, it involved a complete dedication of body and spirit, manifest through the monastic vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. While notions of self-sacrifice and duty to others were commonplace, the physical actuality of giving up one's family - and one's identity - to live with a group of strangers - as a nun - required tremendous courage and imagination.

The process of training to become a nurse was one of the most taxing experiences the sisters had to endure, and the ways this process was experienced expose the power dynamics at play in Victorian identity politics. As noted, it was always Neale's intent that the sisters receive proper training as nurses for the benefit of their patients but also for St. Margaret's public reputation.<sup>146</sup> Mother Harriet at Clewer recommended that he combine the training of nurse and nun: "I'd suggest if it were possible your at once attaching a small hospital to your Sisterhood work in which you can have your sisters trained in the work as well as in the religious life, and then when trained they will be valuable and discreet in any Parish."<sup>147</sup> Neale faced rejection when both the Sussex County Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital refused to admit the sisters.<sup>148</sup> The latter explained that "it is not in the power of the governors to comply with the request contained in it as the training of

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<sup>146</sup> For the difficulties of training nurses in this period, see Summers, *Angels and Citizens*; Vicinus, *Independent Women* Chapter Three; and Stanley, *Hospitals and Sisterhoods* which provides various character sketches of nurses, often as irresponsible drunkards, and the situation of nursing in hospitals.

<sup>147</sup> Harriet Monsell to Neale. Neale's Journal, SSM Archives.

<sup>148</sup> *Letters of JMN*, 235. For a discussion of the fears of admitting Anglican sisters into hospitals as trainee nurses, see Rev. William Niven, "Sisterhood" Nurses. A Letter Addressed to the Governors of St. George's Hospital. 2nd. ed. (London: Hatchard and Co, 1866).

nurses would interfere with the ordinary working of the Hospital."<sup>149</sup> Eventually Neale succeeded at the Westminster Hospital in London where his contact informed him on the last day of 1854 that he "would be happy to confer with you...on the subject of training these nurses. I will bring the letter before the House Committee on Tuesday to obtain the necessary resolution, permitting such persons to be taught in our wards."<sup>150</sup> The sisters were to lodge nearby at St. John's House Training Institution for Nurses.<sup>151</sup> Westminster Hospital advised a brief, concentrated programme of training: "a diligent, intelligent woman might acquire some useful information in a month, but I think from 6 w[ee]ks to 2 months a better period."<sup>152</sup> Upon completion of this training, sisters would return to St. Margaret's and begin their work as cottage nurses.

Sister Ellen was the first member of the Community to be trained at Westminster Hospital.<sup>153</sup> By all accounts, her experience there was extremely challenging as she attempted to reconcile her identities as sister and nurse. When she arrived in London in February to begin an intensive training regime, her previous work at Sackville College had not prepared her fully for the menial tasks of a nurse. Nor was the hospital experienced in the training of nurses. At mid century, nursing remained a lamentable profession and its

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<sup>149</sup> Neale's Journal, author unknown. suggests he try Queen Square at Westminster and Devonshire Square Bishopsgate. Neale's contact there was M. Arnold

<sup>150</sup> Neale's Journal. The writer's name could be J M Basham.

<sup>151</sup> Neale's Journal. Salshurst Vicarage to JMN, n.d. The vicar suggested not to model St. Margaret's on St John's House as its founded on Roman Catholic foundations which "might possibly injure its friends." On the rules for the training of nurses at St. John's, see "Rules of the Training Institution for Nurses, for Hospitals, Families, and the Poor, St John's House, Norfolk Street" (Westminster: Vacher and Sons, 1855); and "Rules of the Sisters Working at S John's House." On the early history of the House, see R. Few, A History of St. John's House (London 1884).

<sup>152</sup> Neale's journal. "Basham" to JMN, n.d.

<sup>153</sup> Community archives do not support the assertion made by Chandler and Anson that Ann Gream trained at the Westminster Hospital in January 1855. See Doing the Impossible, 9.

practitioners were often poorly trained.<sup>154</sup> Correspondence between Sister Ellen and Neale, written just after her arrival in London reveals the difficulties she faced adjusting to the work. In his capacity as spiritual advisor, Neale sought to bolster her courage:

God bless you, my dear child. Remember that the meanest thing you have to do in the Hospital is glorious, if it is done for Him. I say from my heart, I would rather make one poultice, or clean one saucepan for His sake, than write the most learned book that ever was written, for my own.<sup>155</sup>

Was Sister Ellen, envisioning Neale in his study, with books rather than saucepans stacked around him, able to find comfort from such words? Unfortunately, her letters to Neale are lost. During her first weeks as a sister, she not only was separated from her Community, but also had to outwardly deny her identity as a woman religious and was deprived the benefit of regular prayer. Sister Ellen could, however, retain one element of her new identity, as nurses were usually referred to as 'Sister.'

One of the ways in which Sister Ellen attempted to incorporate her identity as a sister with that of trainee nurse was through the regulation of her body. During the season of Lent, Neale's correspondence to her repeatedly urged her against the dangers of fasting as she was frequently ill.<sup>156</sup> By early March, in response to a complaint that "I have done nothing all day but murmur and cry," he again attempted to strengthen her religious identity:

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<sup>154</sup> See Anne Summers, "Ministering Angels: Victorian Ladies and Nursing Reform" in George Marsden, Ed. *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Society* (London: Longmans, 1990), 121 - 133; Summers, *Angels and Citizens*; Forster, *Significant Sisters*; Mrs. Aubrey Richardson, *Women of the Church of England* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1907) esp Chapter Nine; and Jordan, *The Women's Movement*, Chapter 7.

<sup>155</sup> *Letters of JMN*, 241. Neale to Sister Ellen. Quinquagesima Sunday, 1855.

<sup>156</sup> For an analysis of bodily regulation through diet in the medieval context, see Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).



Do you not imagine that God knows best what training as a Sister of Mercy you need? and how, by-and-bye, will you be able to speak to others of patience and resignation if you don't practise it yourself now? I know it seems very hard to be kept back from doing a good work. But remember this: if I gave you for a penance, not to receive Holy Communion, or not to read or talk to the people for a certain number of days, would you not submit at once? What you would do for me, can you not do for God?<sup>157</sup>

Evidently, Sister Ellen did not believe that the type of training she received at Westminster Hospital was necessary in order to become an effective nursing sister. Her training forced her carry out duties which cut across class lines and which required her to submit to male authority. As Anne Summers points out in her analysis of nursing at this time, "[h]ospitals were the site of a major power struggle between the sexes."<sup>158</sup> Yet, as Neale explained, as sister and nurse, Sister Ellen had to accept the principles of humility and patience as set out in her vow of obedience. Here the tensions within these identities are revealed: significantly, while she chaffed against the secular authority of the hospital, she readily accepted the clerical supervision of Neale despite officially being under his spiritual care for only a brief period. As a sister she felt able to defer to male regulation, as a nurse she did not. Operations of class, gender, and power also figured in Sister Ellen's relationship to the other nurse trainees. As was Sister Alice when she was later sent to train in London, Sister Ellen was put in charge of the other trainees at Westminster Hospital. Despite the emphasis on humility which formed an essential element of her identity as a sister, she seemed more comfortable exercising power over other nurses as part of her own class privilege.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Letters of JMN, 242. March 12, 1855. Emphasis in original.

<sup>158</sup> Anne Summers, Angels and Citizens, 4. On the difficulties associated with the transition from "lady to nurse" see Chapter Three, "Lady into Nurse."

<sup>159</sup> Summers notes that both middle- and lower-class women resided at St. John's while training as nurses.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps because of, rather than in spite of, her initial trials, Sister Ellen managed to reconcile successfully the tensions between her identities as sister and nurse and to perceive them as complementary. The vicar at Crookham, where Sister Ellen nursed a year after her hospital training, highlighted the calmness of spirit which she seemed to have developed: "The presence and example of such a person, so labouring for the love of God in a parish has an influence for good which can scarcely be overestimated, over and above the actual services which she comes to render."<sup>160</sup> Upon her death in 1898, after a career nursing of over forty years, her eleven page obituary in the *Community* magazine offered up a catalogue of her devotion and skill. Although the obituary remarked that "she was a nurse by nature" her training illustrates that the process of becoming a nurse, just like that of becoming a sister, required a continual struggle against nature.<sup>161</sup> Her training also reinforced, however, that if a sister must at times cast off her personal will in order to become an effective nurse, she need not abandon her social status and her moral power over others. Although the nurses of St. Margaret's were to be outwardly submissive to clerical authority while at work, their training reinforced a sense of elitism which helped to define and distinguish their status as sisters.

Class politics figured prominently in the construction of identity at St. Margaret's from the onset, not only to distinguish the sisters from lay society, but also to differentiate them from one another. As he first considered the idea of a religious order, Neale had commented to Webb that, "I happened to know three persons--two ladies, one not--who were anxious, and to whom

<sup>160</sup> Unknown to JMN, Crookham, April 28, 1856. SSM Archives.

<sup>161</sup> St. Margaret's Magazine, S Ellen obituary. vol 5, no 6 (1898) New Series. 322.

the way was open, to join a Sisterhood."<sup>162</sup> Harriet Monsell had warned Neale, however, against the dangers of such conscious differentiation of sisters according to rank. She explained the conditions at Clewer, emphasising the need for financial resources:

Those who are accepted as Sisters by the Chaplain and Superior are all equal, all needful wants are provided, for to be able to contribute or not - it rests with you not to take the ones into your community who cannot pay. These you can afford to maintain, but once accepted into the Sisterhood, know not whether they are poor or rich.<sup>163</sup>

Ideologically, such advice was sound, but within the class-bound system of Victorian society the creation of classless conditions was virtually impossible.<sup>164</sup> Such conditions rarely were achieved in Anglican communities where sisters' backgrounds varied widely. Moreover, the formal distinction between choir and lay sisters - a distinction based on class and degree of education - further dissolved any notion of parity among the sisters. As Monsell's comments reveal, questions of class were also of a practical concern: could women without means be accepted and supported by the sisterhood? Moreover, her advice that the appearance of equality be maintained within a religious order, was in practice, difficult to uphold.<sup>165</sup>

Elizabeth Haywood, the fourth woman to join St. Margaret's, illustrates

<sup>162</sup> Letters of JMN, 234. On the positioning sisters as 'ladies' see M. Hill, The Religious Order, 284.

<sup>163</sup> Harriet Monsell to JMN, November 10, 1854. Her remarks conclude with - "the disposal of entire money of rich sisters becomes a question which is for the present left unsolved with us. The only very needful principle to have recognised is that with herself a sister surrenders all she has to God, to use for Him, and so at the disposal of her own conscience, if she wishes to spend it on extra business in the sister's life she could not, for all there must be equal - besides she would soon feel that was not using it for God."

<sup>164</sup> Susan O'Brien argues for "the centrality of class and status in the history of convents" in "Lay Sisters and Good Mothers: Working-Class Women in English Convents, 1840 -1910" Studies in Church History vol. 27: Women in the Church, W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>165</sup> The early Community records do not indicate that sisters were expected to contribute financially to the sisterhood. Some orders requested a 'dowry', usually £50, from women who could afford such a fee.

the relationship between class and identity within the new Sisterhood. Haywood became St. Margaret's first lay sister, and was clothed as a novice in October 1855. Unlike choir sisters, lay sisters were women of the lower ranks whose position in the Order was essentially that of domestic servant and whose spiritual life was less developed. Sister Elizabeth's time in the Sisterhood was short lived: she died of cancer in August, 1860. It is difficult to ascertain the motives which encouraged her to join the Sisterhood, and precisely why she was accepted. Perhaps the sisters felt that they required a housemaid at the Rotherfield cottage and thus admitted Sister Elizabeth, whose health was poor, as a lay sister. However, despite her lay status, there is no actual evidence which proves that she served the Community as a domestic at all; rather, the records reveal her involvement, at least initially, as a nurse.<sup>166</sup> Significantly, though, she was not trained at Westminster Hospital. Despite her five years as a sister, in the Community archives her presence is nearly impossible to trace.<sup>167</sup> The few references that Neale did make about Sister Elizabeth usually referred to her humble status in relation to other sisters. Thus, he remarked to Sister Alice "how completely the Sisters in France at this day are taken from the lower classes. Even the Superior was not in a rank higher than S. Elizabeth."<sup>168</sup> Of Louisa Wilkins, a friend of the Community, he noted that she was "so much more of a lady that [Sister] E[lizabeth] expected."<sup>169</sup>

Within the tiny Community, an internal hierarchy was established quickly. Mother Ann officially occupied a position of authority above the

<sup>166</sup> Perhaps Sister Elizabeth was initially admitted to St. Margaret's as a domestic but due to high demand (and maybe her own desire) subsequently, or also, served as a nurse.

<sup>167</sup> See Neale's journal, and Anson, who also records her work as a nurse. As her death occurred prior to the census of 1861, her age and background also are difficult to ascertain.

<sup>168</sup> Neale to S. Alice, June 13, 1857. See also July 24, 1857, and quote about Louisa Wilkins.

<sup>169</sup> Accession 170. Neale to Sister Alice, June 20, 1855. This refers to Elizabeth and not Sister Ellen because Neale would have referred to the latter as such, not as "E".

others upon her profession in June 1855 when she officially became Superior. But Sister Alice was close on her heels. Although only twenty-five, she was professed in August of that year, and within two months she had become the Assistant Superior of the Community.<sup>170</sup> In light of her youth, and the fact that most novitiates lasted two years, Sister Alice's rapid profession and promotion is unusual. Five years her senior, Sister Ellen would have been the more obvious choice as Assistant.<sup>171</sup> Sister Alice, however, had established an unusually close relationship with Neale while at Sackville College which was developed further after she became a sister. The nature of this relationship, and the power politics within it, provide important clues as to Sister Alice's privileged position at St. Margaret's.

Diary entries and the extensive correspondence which they undertook during the formative years of St. Margaret's reveal much about the character of Sister Alice and the nature of her intimacy with Neale. Like those of many sisters, the records pertaining to Sister Alice present no clues as to the nature of her relationship with her birth family. Perhaps a lack of closeness - emotionally and physically - from her own family contributed to the bond she formed with Neale, for it was, in many ways, one of father and daughter. She seems to have had considerable control both over his emotions and his actions, as it was not unusual for him to travel some distance to be at her side at a moment's notice.<sup>172</sup> His affection for her cannot be disguised in his journal: it emerges not only in the manner in which he wrote about her, but also in that he did not refer to the other sisters in the same fashion at all. Neale's journal entry for April 28, 1855, at which time Sister Alice was editing

<sup>170</sup> Neale's journal, Oct 9, 1855.

<sup>171</sup> I have found no evidence which might indicate how and why Sister Alice became the Assistant Superior. The selection process is unknown. Neale should have chosen Sister Ellen due to her age - remember his concern about age when selecting a Superior.

<sup>172</sup> Refer to Neale's journal 1854 - 1855 for details of their relationship.

one of his manuscripts, provides an example: "S. A[lice] came in to read the last proof of Portugal, and wrote a Sisterhood letter. Her grey dress, now first worn in a cloak, looks extremely well. A turn with her on the terrace at 12:45. At 2 she went...I shall miss her unspeakably till her return."<sup>173</sup> Throughout his journal, Neale recorded minute details of his private time with Sister Alice as well as the emotional upheavals he felt when they were separated. The intimacy of their relationship gave Sister Alice a powerful ally in the negotiation of disputes within the Sisterhood and must be seen as an important component in the determination of her status as Assistant Superior.

Although clothed as a novice at the same time as Sisters Ann and Alice, Sister Ellen was not professed until September 1857. Her late profession would have affected her identity and the way she viewed herself in the Sisterhood. So too would Neale's preferential treatment of Sister Alice serve to reinforce her inequality. When Sister Ellen, ill and exhausted, returned from her training at Westminster Hospital, she was sent out to nurse, whereas when Alice returned, she was whisked off to France with Neale to enjoy Notre Dame and visit various religious orders.<sup>174</sup> Sister Elizabeth, on the bottom rung, was still a novice when she died in 1860, an unusually protracted novitiate.<sup>175</sup> In theory, even if she was considered equal by the other sisters, in practice her class background would have affected her status in the Community. In her discussion of the class politics of early-Victorian nursing, Anne Summers explains that it was primarily through the relationship of mistress and domestic servant that women of different social

<sup>173</sup> Neale's journal, March 28, 1855. SSM Archives. Accession 169.

<sup>174</sup> Neale's journal, June 1855.

<sup>175</sup> Dates of profession were determined in sisterhoods by the other professed sisters and the Chaplain, in this case, Mother Ann, Sister Alice, Sister Ellen and Neale.

backgrounds came into contact with each other.<sup>176</sup> Due to their class differences, the other sisters were unable to treat Sister Elizabeth as an equal: such class-based attitudes could not easily be dispelled, nor were they encouraged in a system which deliberately set out to enforce them through the choir/lay classification. As servant or nurse, Sister Elizabeth's distinction as a lay sister, and her lack of training at Westminster, rendered her subordinate status all the more cogent.

While the hierarchical nature of social class in Victorian England might have enabled Sister Elizabeth to adjust to her inferior status within the Sisterhood, sisters from upper middle-class backgrounds were less accustomed to having their lives governed by other women who were their social equals. The hierarchy within St. Margaret's, combined with the power relations among the sisters, most notably the ambition of Sister Alice, created at times a tense atmosphere. These individual dynamics undermine the ideal of self-abnegation among women religious. To be sure, Sister Alice was an unusually strong-minded sister, but her determination to get her own way belies the popular Victorian equation of "sister" as tool of the clergy, suggesting rather the ways in which sisters could manipulate the clergy for their own personal gain. Two examples serve to illustrate not only Sister Alice's character, but also her power over Neale. By the summer of 1855 the sisters were not getting along well with each other, and Alice in particular was fed up with nursing and constant relocation. Neale tried to assuage her: "you know it is an old promise that you are to nurse here, whenever nursing is wanted."<sup>177</sup> His diary entries reveal not only how tensions were building, but also how Neale was struggling to maintain harmony among the sisters.

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<sup>176</sup> Anne Summers, "Ladies and Nurses," 41.

<sup>177</sup> JMN to Sister Alice, July 1855. SSM Archives, Accession 169. Emphasis in original.

On August 20, Mother Ann was most anxious for someone to nurse at Shoreditch and decided Sister Alice would have to go. Upon informing Sister Alice of this decision, Neale recorded that "she [was] a little disappointed, but behaved very well."<sup>178</sup> Then, on September 24, he reported that he found "Sister Alice a good deal annoyed at having to leave - but explained that Elizabeth H[aywood] was to take her place" at Shoreditch.<sup>179</sup> Such juvenile petulance and self-centredness seem starkly at odds with the self-sacrificing ideals of the religious life. Yet, it does not follow that independent women could be transformed into docile, obedient creatures with the assumption of a religious habit. Rather, in his sermons Neale frequently had to remind the sisters of the exertion involved in the religious life: "You know what you have to expect: a continual struggle with yourself, perpetual self-denial, continual hard work, a routine of prayer and toil which will often go sadly against flesh and blood."<sup>180</sup> As he had done in his letters to Sister Ellen at Westminster Hospital, Neale exhorted the sisters to defer their own will to that of God. The lifestyle of a nun, just like that of a nurse, or the "angel in the house," did not come naturally to the women who joined sisterhoods, it too had to be constantly and emphatically impressed.<sup>181</sup> Power struggles existed among the sisters, and also within them.

As in any family, Victorian or otherwise, the negotiation of power within a religious order often led to inelegant disputes. For example, a dispute between Mother Ann and Sister Alice arose over the task of scheduling work assignments. It appears that Sister Alice believed that she

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<sup>178</sup> Neale's journal, August 20, 1855. Neale did not record the reactions of other sisters to their nursing assignments.

<sup>179</sup> Neale's journal, entries for 1855. This was Sister Elizabeth's first nursing post. (Shoreham)

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Chandler, 92.

<sup>181</sup> Refer to Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes for the tensions that existed within women's lives as they attempted to conform to this ideology.



was more capable of arranging the work schedule than Mother Ann and should be given this task. For her part, Mother Ann seems to have resented her assistant's attempts to infringe on her authority. Matters escalated to the point that Neale sought outside counsel and turned for advice to Sister Alice's counterpart at the Community of St. John the Baptist. She counselled that the Assistant should work closely with the Superior, "as one person in mind:"

[I]n that the idea that the Assistant Superior would ever be wishing to encroach on the Superior, it would never be entertained for a moment - And with the dear, humble, saintly Mother at St Margaret's I can't see how this should not be...I think for this matter, if you were to tell the Superior that you thought S. Alice had a turn for arranging routine work, and you advised her to give her the time tables to do, I am sure she would do so - or else advise her to do them with Sister Alice.<sup>182</sup>

Mother Ann's time-tabling skill was merely a pretext to the deeper conflict within St. Margaret's which centred upon Sister Alice's influence over Neale in her attempts to circumvent the Community's power structure. Neale's inability to diffuse the situation himself speaks more to Sister's Alice's determination than to his management style. She was, after all, his favourite sister. The conclusion to the Assistant's letter is interesting as it reveals that the personality clashes at St. Margaret's were not unique, but rather symptomatic of the religious life: "For pity sake, don't let any jar get between "these two" - they seemed to me, on the road to be so happy together - the spirit of etiquette is terrible in a Sisterhood and utterly contrary to all love and trustfulness."<sup>183</sup> In contrast then, to the image of the "humble, saintly Mother," Sister Alice emerges as self-interested, competitive, and

<sup>182</sup> Neale's journal, Sister Ellen to JMN, Assistant Superior of Clewer, October 9, 1855.

<sup>183</sup> Neale's journal, Sister Ellen, Assistant Superior of Clewer, to JMN. October 9, 1855.

manipulative. Taken together, these exchanges illustrate that the ideals of equality among sisters, and of deference to the Superior were in practice, much contested. Women did not abandon their former identities when they became sisters, nor did they wholeheartedly absorb the tenets of obedience. The early power struggles at St. Margaret's bear witness to parallels rather than the divergences between the religious life and that of other Victorians. Class hierarchy, competitiveness, and individualism were as tangible within the convent as they were beyond its walls.

As the case of Sister Alice reveals, one of the primary ways in which the identities of the sisters were mediated was through their relationship with Neale. Although Neale's influence at St. Margaret's was indelible, in the early years of the Community, personality clashes among the priest and his male colleagues created a rash of public problems for the sisters. Shortly after the establishment of the Sisterhood, Neale found himself embroiled in a nasty dispute with the assistant warden at Sackville College, Mr. Rogers. Displeased with Neale's ritualistic tendencies, Rogers raised nineteen formal charges against the warden, arguing that as Neale was married and under the age of fifty, he should be dismissed from the College.<sup>184</sup> With the Bishop of Chichester backing Rogers' complaints, Neale went so far as to consider leaving not just the county, but the country. A letter to Webb explained his thinking: "If R[ogers] succeeds, as by means of the Bishop he perhaps may, in turning me out, then all my thoughts and wishes would turn to the Diocese of Brechin [Scotland], Sisterhood and all....I assure you I am seriously thinking of this."<sup>185</sup> Although the Bishop of Brechin, Alexander Forbes, was

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<sup>184</sup> As noted, most previous wardens were unmarried men. Rev. J. Haskoll from JMN, March 13, 1855. Letters of JMN, 237. Haskoll was a member of the Society of the Holy Cross, a community of male religious.

<sup>185</sup> Neale to Haskoll, March 13, 1855. Letters of JMN, 237.

one of Neale's most loyal supporters throughout this period and may well have welcomed him, Rogers' charges eventually were dropped and relations with Bishop Gilbert eased. Relations with the vicar of East Grinstead, John Harward, however, remained tense throughout the year. Neale's relationships with the Sussex clergy, and those of his colleagues at the College, which ranged from awkward to openly hostile, reveals how the presence of a controversial priest could hamper the development of sisterhoods at mid century.<sup>186</sup> While Victorian gender ideals usually shielded pious women from the opprobrium of the clergy, men like Neale were offered no such protection. Thus, rather than rely upon Neale to build bridges with the local clergy, the sisters at St. Margaret's created these links themselves, and none so powerfully as the "humble, saintly" Ann Gream.

The Superior played a crucial role in negotiations with Bishop Gilbert of Chichester, whose support and eventual acceptance to serve as Visitor, were key to the Sisterhood's public perception. As Community ambassador, she drew upon and subverted gender ideology to create a less-threatening identity for St. Margaret's than that symbolised by Neale. Not only did she correspond with Bishop Gilbert directly, but she influenced him to bend his will to her own. In May 1855, at a meeting of the rural deans of Chichester, the question of the Sisterhood was raised. Gilbert's second-in-command, Archdeacon Otter, who supported the Order, subsequently informed Neale that "the numbers [of deans] were too great to allow for a fair discussion there, and that it better stand over."<sup>187</sup> The Superior was then requested by the Archdeacon to prepare a brief account of the nature of St. Margaret's

<sup>186</sup> Examinations of sisterhoods have traditionally linked the success of these groups with the assistance they received from the clergy - both at the local level and from Bishops - see Anson, Allchin - but many sisterhoods received limited support from the local clergy and encountered Bishops who were quite negative in their response.

<sup>187</sup> Neale to Benjamin Webb, May 23, 1855. Letters of JMN, 239.

suggesting that the hierarchy was more amenable to liaise with the Superior than with Neale.<sup>188</sup> The Superior wisely positioned herself as subservient, answering the Bishop's request for a copy of the Community Rule, and apologising for the extent of her response. Responding to the Rule and the request to serve as Visitor, the Bishop was similarly gracious: "Dear Miss Gream, I do not find the least fault with your letter for its' [sic] length, but on the contrary am much obliged to you for entering so fully into an account of your project. I have a few remarks to make upon the Rules...and have no doubt I shall be able cordially to accept the office of its' [sic] Visitor."<sup>189</sup>

The Bishop's proposed "remarks," however, like many of those which Neale received from his colleagues, threatened St. Margaret's identity by challenging those elements which made it unique. One of the rules with which the Bishop took issue, was that of the dress of the sisters. To the sisters, their attire was their most conspicuous outward badge of identity, as significant to themselves as it was to others. The Bishop placed its significance elsewhere:

With regard to all Institutions in which a peculiar dress is adopted, I very much doubt either the benefit of it with regard to the parties themselves, or desirableness with reference to the good will of others. It does not seem in entire consistent with the precept "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" and I should fear does occasionally cherish that self-complacent feeling with which we are inclined to regard our own good deeds. That it does help also to excite or confirm prejudices in others is undeniable.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Neale's journal, May 19, 1855. See also Letters of JMN, 239.

<sup>189</sup> Bishop of Chichester to Mother Ann, May 28, 1855. SSM Archives. Significantly, the Bishop addressed her as "Miss Gream" rather than "Mother Ann."

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* The Bishop's other concerns focused primarily on insuring that the Sister's did not make promises which they could not keep, esp. in connection with nursing commitments. He also was concerned that sisters obtain permission from parents or guardians before joining the Sisterhood and that they were able to freely visit with relatives and friends.

Mother Ann's defence of the sisters' attire demonstrates her reasoned, sensible approach: "I quite agree with you that the dress should not be unnecessarily marked and conspicuous, we have determined to have grey dresses and white caps, and so quiet and unpretending it is that I am able to wear it in my own home, and I have already begun to do so, as being more appropriate for one engaged in such an undertaking than a variety of colours would be."<sup>191</sup> Strengthening her argument by noting how nurses in the Crimea had worn a uniform dress, Mother Ann explained to Neale "that I hoped [the Bishop] would yield that point to me."<sup>192</sup> Neale's record of the incident in a letter to his friend Haskoll testified to the persuasive powers of the Superior: "The Bishop after receiving the rules that were printed wrote to Miss Gream a very *kind* letter, quite complimentary in parts....The only important difficulty he made was with the uniform dress...Miss Gream sent him a very good answer, but he has not again replied."<sup>193</sup>

The Bishop's concern focused on how the uniform dress would affect the identity of the sisters: he feared that it might set them apart both within their own minds, and within the minds of those they were to serve. For the sisters, however, the distinction manifest by their uniform dress was crucial: in making the sisters feel united with each other, it also enabled them to differentiate themselves from secular womanhood. Mother Ann's decision to wear the dress at home, rather than just as a uniform while at "work," reinforces the significance of sisters' attire as integral to their identity. Moreover, the Superior's ability to stand firm in negotiations with the Bishop belied her image as humble and meek. Her identity as a Mother Superior,

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<sup>191</sup> Neale's Journal, July, 1855.

<sup>192</sup> Neale's Journal. Extract of a letter from Mother Ann to Neale.

<sup>193</sup> Mother Superior's book of letters, SSM Archives. Italics in original. July 7, 1855. See also Lough, The Influence of JMN, 102.

rather than that of the daughter of a village rector, enabled her, by drawing upon the rhetoric of female humility and decorum, to combat the subservience of these ideals. In her analysis of "radical femininity" Eileen Janes Yeo demonstrates "how women mobilised themselves by creating identities largely within and against the dominant discourses of their time."<sup>194</sup> In demanding that the sisters look the same, the Superior won the right to assert their difference.

Over the following months, the Sisterhood established itself within Sussex society and the clerical community. Although tensions with the Bishop of Chichester would flare again, for the time being, Mother Ann was able to procure a truce, and the Bishop agreed to serve as Visitor. Gradually, through their nursing efforts, the sisters endeared themselves to the local community. During the second half of 1855, the sisters spent an estimated combined total of 424 days nursing.<sup>195</sup> The Archdeacon of Lewes offered high praise at the end of the year:

The conduct of the two Sisters who have been employed as nurses in my parish has been such to claim my unqualified admiration and regard....Both have performed their work with all a Sister's devotion, and with a tenderness and care which mere money cannot purchase for the wealthiest. Nor, although for a time jealously observed, has either of them exhibited the least desire to set forth any peculiar opinions. They have obeyed their rule, which placed them under my direction as the clergyman of the parish; and their readings to the sick have been under my guidance.<sup>196</sup>

Thus, the promise of Neale's circular was borne out: the nurses just as originally advertised, were diligent, discreet, and obedient. The "experiment" seemed to be a success, but not one easily attained. As a result of their

<sup>194</sup> Eileen Janes Yeo, "Some Paradoxes of Empowerment" in Yeo, ed. *Radical Femininity*, 1.

<sup>195</sup> "S. Margaret's Sisterhood" [Reprinted from the *Church Review*, Feb 1861], 7.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

achievements as workers, the women of St. Margaret's were accepted as sisters - by the name "Sister," in their own distinct attire, and with their own religious practices, however "peculiar" their opinions were considered. Finances were also healthy as the Sisterhood recorded a surplus in its first year with donations of £237 and expenses of £185. In addition, the sisters were turning in a tidy profit framing cheap pictures to sell for 6d. each, with the proceeds used to buy comforts for poor patients.<sup>197</sup> Most significantly, the Community was beginning to attract new members. Neale's excitement was palpable in a letter to Webb of April 1856: "What takes up most of my thoughts now is the extraordinary success of our Sisterhood. I know of five more who are about to join us...Four of the five have ample means--say, £120 or £150 a year."<sup>198</sup> Thus, despite the sisterhood's financial well-being, Neale's interest in attracting "ladies" to the Community remained high.

To conclude, however, with a rosy picture of the fledgling sisterhood would not only misconstrue the experiences of the first sisters, but it would also avoid more difficult questions about how identity politics and ideas about the religious life specifically, influenced St. Margaret's development. Although they were initially publicised as lady nurses, the sisters had to create identities for themselves as women religious. They did not have to look far to be reminded that the Church of England did not fully sanction the religious life and may have indeed questioned their own commitment to such a Church. When, in June 1856, the sisters finally were able to take up residence at East Grinstead in "a red brick building of 1753, ugly enough, but not offensive" they were welcomed the first Sunday by the local vicar, John Harward, with a sermon on 'Popery.'<sup>199</sup> Although public reaction was not

<sup>197</sup> Letters of JMN, 268.

<sup>198</sup> Letters of JMN, 270-1. Neale to Webb, April 28, 1856.

<sup>199</sup> Lough, John Mason Neale--Priest Extraordinary 103, and Letters of JMN, 271.

universally negative, detractors existed, and the identity of sisters in the Church of England remained controversial. As late as 1864, a letter in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* commented disparagingly upon Mother Ann's attempts to solicit funds: "A woman in the garb of a (so-called) religious order, a kind of Nun, or some such absurdity, is going about seeking subscriptions for the order."<sup>200</sup> Throughout the century, public attitudes toward sisterhoods remained deeply coloured by the ways in which these orders were imagined and their members identified.

The precise effects of such hostility can be seen in the general reluctance of Victorian women to dedicate themselves to such a life. Although many accounts - both from nineteenth-century observers and more recent historians - suggest that middle-class women sought refuge in such societies in an attempt to alleviate boredom and to find self-fulfilment, the case of St. Margaret's does not validate such assumptions.<sup>201</sup> Historian Anne Summers rejects the idea that women were motivated by boredom, pointing to the sense of duty and commitment which fuelled women's philanthropic work in the nineteenth century: "It is belittling and insulting to suggest that women only had a negative motivation for their actions."<sup>202</sup> Ann Gream, Alice Crocker, Ellen Horner, and Elizabeth Haywood were motivated by a complex combination of factors in their desire to become Anglican sisters. Each was committed, independent, and above all, determined to shape her own identity as a woman religious. Without direct evidence from the sisters,

<sup>200</sup> *Staffordshire Advertiser*, August 22, 1864. J E Armstrong to JMN. SSM Archives.

<sup>201</sup> Many nineteenth-century commentators, even those who supported sisterhoods, argued that religious orders could serve as a refuge for surplus women, see, for example, [Dinah Murlock Craik] *About Money and Other Things* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886). A recent study of spinsters in England asserts that "So great was the frustration of some middle-class daughters confined to a life in the parental home that they rushed to be recruited into Anglican sisterhoods." Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001) 14.

<sup>202</sup> Summers, "A Home from Home," 38.



the historian's task of reconstructing their individual and corporate identities remains challenging. The importance they attached to the markers of identity which differentiated them from other Victorian women suggests that a sense of difference was a vital component of their identity as sisters. The internal hierarchy within the Sisterhood, however, reminds us that a corporate identity of sameness did not mask the divides of rank in Victorian society at large, or temper those of character which were just as fundamental to these sisters' sense of self.

The formation of the Society of St. Margaret in the mid 1850s was a discursive as well as a material construction. The idea of an Anglican sisterhood in Sussex had not been contemplated prior to Neale's proposal: to the Established Church and English society such a project was innovative, radical and potentially perilous. As such, the identity of the Sisterhood needed to be crafted for the public in a manner so as to cause the least offence and generate the most sympathy. The Community as imagined by the clergy and by members of the public was concerned primarily with the physical rather than the spiritual universe of the sisters.<sup>203</sup> By privileging the function of the Community over its form, this discourse tended to focus on the external, rather than the internal conflicts which might disturb the religious life. In practice, however, the power dynamics within the convent - both social and psychological - most shaped the sisters' identities. The sisters were subject to a continual negotiation of both their personal and monastic selves - a process which highlights the disruptive influence of monasticism upon Victorian gender ideals.

For most Victorian women, however, the idea of transforming their

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<sup>203</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991) for insights into the ways in which communities are products of the imagination.

identities into religious sisters proved too great an obstacle to overcome. Moral exhortations to centre their piety chiefly within the home weighed heavily upon the minds of middle-class women.<sup>204</sup> Feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe denied that women should abandon the ties of blood to enter the "artificial community" of a sisterhood: "What does it mean to give up the father's or husband's name, which ought to be so dear and sacred to every daughter or widow, and become henceforth only Sister Mary or Sister Catherine, as if the family was to be nothing, and the community everything!"<sup>205</sup> Victorian women faced enormous pressure to conform to socially-proscribed expectations. Even those women who did overcome such pressure were often full of misgivings as to the nature of their calling. Significantly, of the next five sisters to join St. Margaret's, and for whom Neale had such high hopes, four left the Community, two for the Roman Catholic Church. The fifth succumbed to scarlet fever in 1857 creating an aftershock which threatened to destroy St. Margaret's altogether. Her story, which is analysed in the following chapter, looks more intently at the themes of individual motivation, domestic ideology, patriarchal authority, public opposition, and the tenuous nature of episcopal support toward Anglican sisterhoods. By focusing on the trials of one sister and her family, this next chapter explores more fully the complexities of becoming a sister as well as the effects of female monasticism in relation to personal, cultural, and national identities.

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<sup>204</sup> See, for example, those of the Reverend John Angell James, Female Piety: or the Young Woman's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality [1853] (New York: Robert Carter, 1865).

<sup>205</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, "Female Charity - Lay and Monastic" Fraser's Magazine 66 (1862), 784.

## CHAPTER TWO Confessions of 'a very good little sister': The Lewes Riot and the Trials of Sister Amy

The first case of infectious fever I have I will ask [the Sisters] to undertake it, and *then perhaps we shall get rid of them.*<sup>1</sup>

J. Harward, Vicar of East Grinstead, 1856.

On Friday, November 13, 1857 Sister Amy, a novice in the newly-established Society of St. Margaret, died of scarlet fever. As the sisters assembled for her funeral in the nearby town of Lewes, they were accosted by an outraged crowd. Amid the escalating tumult, the members of the Sisterhood were dashed to the ground and pelted with stones, their habits torn and shredded. Taking refuge in a local pub, the sisters watched as hundreds of rioters grew increasingly belligerent, demanding their revenge on the Reverend John Mason Neale, co-founder of the Community. According to the Reverend John Scobell, Sister Amy's father, Neale and the Mother Superior had craftily seduced and abducted his daughter, sending her to her death in the disease-ridden cottages of the poor where she nursed. Upon the discovery of a last-minute will in which Sister Amy had left £400 of her considerable estate to St. Margaret's, Scobell added theft to his earlier charges. Incensed by the Sisterhood's blatant disregard for filial rights, Scobell and the townspeople demanded retribution. Amid cries of "No Popery" and "Remember, remember, the fifth of November," the mob chased the sisters out of town, smashing the windows of their fly as they attempted their getaway under police escort. The final blow was dealt as a brick launched from the crowd ricocheted off Neale's head as he and the Mother Superior

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in a letter from J.M. Neale to Benjamin Webb, November 8, 1856. Letters of John Mason Neale Selected and Edited by his Daughter (London: Longmans, 1910), 279. Italics in original.

boarded the train. In the days that followed, as the Lewes town band celebrated the victory over 'Popery,' and the sisters returned to the convent in disbelief, the on-going feud between a disgruntled father and a fledgling religious order was just beginning to intensify.

The Lewes riot served as a lightning rod to express the nature and extent of the hostilities which one southern English community harboured toward the Anglican sisterhood in its midst. It serves as a case study by which to examine public perceptions about what were considered to be the most threatening aspects of the revival of female religious orders. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the establishment of St. Margaret's initially attracted just a few members but widespread disapproval in Sussex. By providing an alternative to the fundamental power structure which governed English society - the Church, the family, and democracy - sisterhoods were widely considered to be decidedly, and dangerously, "unEnglish." Moreover, due to their Roman Catholic influences, they were perceived as "Popish" in all but name. Such a characterisation drew upon existing religious and gender-based tensions in rural society at mid century. The aftermath of the French Revolution, coupled with the expansion and legitimation of Roman Catholicism throughout the nineteenth century, and the rise of ritualism within the Established Church, caused evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters alike to fear for their religious liberties.<sup>2</sup> The Napoleonic wars also contributed to the creation of new fears concerning the position of women in society and to the establishment of Roman Catholic religious orders which had fled from France.<sup>3</sup> By the 1850s, popular appeals to free women trapped

<sup>2</sup> See E. R. Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968) and Geoffrey Rowell, The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, Gendering European History, 1780 -1920 (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

in convents revealed the extent to which anti-Catholicism served to curtail not only religious liberties, but also female self-determination.<sup>4</sup> As a result of its growing prominence, Roman Catholicism, whether real or imagined, thus was perceived in opposition to the "English" values of democracy and freedom for the individual.<sup>5</sup> By extension, Anglo-Catholicism, and the religious orders it supported, were similarly held in suspicion as a result of their 'Romish' practices.

In Lewes, such a discourse held particular resonance. Residents of the town were fiercely anti-Catholic, and their contempt for anything which 'smacked of Rome' was exhibited each year on November the Fifth during one of the most spectacular Guy Fawkes celebrations in Britain.<sup>6</sup> Thousands would turn out to participate in the annual festival of fireworks, bonfires and effigy-burning parades in a dramatic display of patriotic fervour and protest against Roman and Anglo-Catholic ritual. As targets of public censure during these parades, women religious were vilified not only as religious but as social deviants as well. The challenge sisterhoods posed to religious and patriarchal authority, especially when wrapped in the cloak of a ritualistic

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<sup>4</sup> See D. G. Paz, Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England (Stanford CA.: Stanford UP., 1992). Although Paz locates the roots of anti-Catholicism amid a variety of practices and discourses, his is not a gendered analysis.

<sup>5</sup> For a related discussion of the prevalence of anti-Catholicism in nineteenth-century American culture which does consider the operations of gender, see Barbara Welter, "From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard: A Century of Protestant Anti-Catholicism" in Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, eds. Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Guy Fawkes' unsuccessful "gunpowder plot" to blow up the Parliament buildings in 1605 was celebrated annually on November 5th. Observance of the Fifth remained on the Church of England calendar until 1859. For discussions of the festival which refer to Lewes, see Robert D. Storch, "Please to Remember the Fifth of November": Conflict, Solidarity and Public Order in Southern England, 1815-1900," in Storch, ed., Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England (London, 1982); David Cressy, "The Fifth of November Remembered," in Roy Porter, ed., The Myths of the English (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Jim Etherington, Lewes Bonfire Night: A Short History of the Guy Fawkes Celebrations (Seaford: S. B. Publications, 1993); and David Wiles, "The Lewes Bonfire Festival," New Theatre Quarterly 12:46 (May 1996).

priest, thus touched a particularly sensitive nerve in Sussex.

This chapter investigates the ways in which the relationship between Sister Amy and the Society of St. Margaret exposes the paradoxes inherent in Victorian gender ideology and its application in English society. It argues that the religious-based hostilities directed toward this Sisterhood were underpinned by intense concerns about female independence and patriarchal authority. Other accounts of the scandal surrounding Sister Amy's death focus primarily on the struggle between the two male protagonists, John Scobell and John Mason Neale.<sup>7</sup> The sisters, when they do appear, serve as pawns, bandied about in the melee. Mother Ann, St. Margaret's co-foundress and Superior, who was instrumental in the course of events which preceded and followed Sister Amy's death, is relegated to insignificance. Perhaps more surprising is the virtual absence of the woman who became Sister Amy, Emily Scobell, in these accounts: while her death literally removes her from the narrative, she is accorded very little agency even in life.<sup>8</sup> Not only is such an approach historically imprecise, but it also fails to consider how ideas about gender operated in both the unfolding of the events and how they were understood and represented at the time. The restoration to centre stage of the woman whose funeral occasioned the riot at Lewes highlights the gender

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<sup>7</sup> Texts which include brief accounts of the Lewes riot include: Michael Chandler, The Life and Work of John Mason Neale, 1818-1866 (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995); A. M. Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845-1900 (London: SCM Press, 1958); A. G. Lough, John Mason Neale - Priest Extraordinary (Newton Abbott: privately printed, 1976); Eleanor Towle, John Mason Neale - A Memoir (London: Longmans, 1906). See also John Shelton Reed, "A Female Movement": The Feminisation of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Catholicism" Anglican and Episcopal History 57:2 (1988) for a contextualised assessment of the scandal. Brief accounts are found in [Sister Gabriel] Doing the Impossible: A Short Historical Sketch of St. Margaret's Convent, East Grinstead, 1855-1980 (1984), and Sister Catherine Louise, The Planting of the Lord: the History of the Society of Saint Margaret in England, Scotland, and the U.S.A. 1855-1995 (privately printed, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> For clarity, I will refer to her as Emily Scobell before she joins the Sisterhood, and Sister Amy thereafter. When referring to her father, I will refer to him as Scobell and his daughter as Emily.

politics which structured the controversy surrounding her decision to join a sisterhood and her subsequent death. Victorian gender ideology functioned to both destabilise and shore up "traditional" Protestant English values.<sup>9</sup> The complex process which led Emily Scobell to St. Margaret's precipitated a scandal which exposed the vulnerability of gender ideology at mid century. As institutions both novel and unwelcome on the English landscape, sisterhoods provided an arena on which debates about gender, religion and national identity were negotiated and refashioned in both private and public discourse. Upon Sister Amy's death, these debates became particularly acute, revealing the radical potential of Anglican monasticism within Victorian culture.

Central to this analysis is an examination of the ways in which the identities of Emily Scobell and the Society of St. Margaret were constructed and represented. As seen in Chapter One, the amorphous character of the identities of "sister" and "sisterhood" at mid century allowed for their manipulation in practice by the sisters and discursively by a range of commentators. The first section focuses chiefly upon Emily Scobell's transition from daughter to sister, from her father's home to the convent, assessing the motivation behind her decision to join St. Margaret's. It explores the untidy contradictions that formed Emily's sense of self and how her relationship with her father and St. Margaret's shaped and ultimately transformed her identity. Part two analyses the storm surrounding the

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<sup>9</sup> The most influential study of Victorian domestic ideology remains Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). On the unstable nature of this ideology, see Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1988). On nineteenth-century feminists' challenges to the home as women's primary sphere of influence, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant Feminists and Catholic Saints," in Eileen Janes Yeo, ed. *Radical Femininity: Women's self-representation in the public sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

funeral. The focus here shifts to an investigation of the religious and gender-based motivations of the Lewes mob. The discourse of the riot was premised on a specific redrafting of the identity of the Sisterhood and that of the deceased Sister Amy. It drew upon the rhetoric of Guy Fawkes celebrations and was grounded in concerns about the primacy of the family and patriarchal authority. The final section evaluates the bitter feud which erupted in the wake of the funeral. This feud, largely played out in the press, speaks to the function of scandal in Victorian society as a vehicle for the negotiation of power between conflicting groups.<sup>10</sup> Emily Scobell's relationship with St. Margaret's provides a unique opportunity to understand the dynamics of power among sisterhoods, the clergy, and English society. It also suggests that the politics of identity in Victorian culture could be not only malleable but malicious.

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#### From Father to Fever

I have known a good deal of convents. And of course everyone has talked of the petty tyrannies supposed to be exercised there. But I know nothing like the petty grinding tyranny of a good English family....the only alleviation is that the tyrannised submits with a heart full of affection.<sup>11</sup>

Florence Nightingale, private correspondence, 1851.

Emily Ann Elizabeth Scobell epitomises the complex tensions within Victorian middle-class femininity. As the eldest daughter of the evangelical rector of Southover and All Saints Churches, Lewes, Emily felt the pressures of genteel womanhood bear uncomfortably on her shoulders. She was

<sup>10</sup>Thais E. Morgan, "Afterword" in Kristin O. Garrison, Ed. Victorian Scandals, Victorian Strategies in Victorian Scandals, Representations of Gender and Class (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1992), 289.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Reed, "A Female Movement", 233. The source is unknown; referred to only as private.



happiest while serving others in her father's parish yet refused to conform to his household rules or his religious beliefs. Her life bears witness to the potential contradictions between Christian duty and Victorian domesticity: rather than a site for its expression, the home stifled her self-sacrificing nature; only by abandoning it for the convent and a life caring for the needy could she serve others in a truly meaningful way.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, domesticity seemed, to her, an indulgent lifestyle. By contrast, the Sisterhood enabled her to reject the frivolity of her middle-class existence; it gave her a purpose and allowed for the redefinition of her identity in relation to God.

Emily Scobell is unique in this study in that she is the only member of a sisterhood for whom detailed personal records of her life prior to her becoming a sister are available. That these private records exist at all is a result of the controversy surrounding her death and the need of the two men in her life whom she most trusted to clear their names in the face of public scandal. For the historian, such records are invaluable: not only do they provide a fascinating record of Emily's spiritual journey toward St. Margaret's, but they also hold up a disturbing portrait of middle-class family life. Her reasons for leaving home to become a sister reveal a complex mixture of self-doubt and self-preservation. Emily's transition from dutiful daughter to sacrificing sister involved a significant refashioning of her identity. Her records provide a unique illustration of just how gruelling this process could be and ultimately shed light on our understanding of the instabilities within Victorian womanhood as socially proscribed and as personally experienced.

Life at the Scobell rectory was, in many ways, typical of that of the

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the role of nursing in enabling women to expand their sphere of influence within the culture of self-sacrifice, see Anne Summers, "Ministering Angels: Victorian Ladies and Nursing Reform" in Gordon Marsden, Ed. Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society (London: Longman, 1990), 121-133.

middle-class families depicted in Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes*.<sup>13</sup> By all accounts Emily's childhood was a happy one.<sup>14</sup> Although she suffered from a variety of medical troubles, her parents ensured Emily received the best possible care. The Scobells doted on their six children and created an affectionate atmosphere at home. In her diary, Emily's sister Caroline recorded her anticipation at the return of her parents and two of her siblings after a lengthy absence: "Today we expect to be all again united in our happy home. We have decorated the house with many vases of flowers."<sup>15</sup> As teenagers, Emily and her three sisters were encouraged to develop genteel artistic accomplishment, receiving lessons in music, dancing, and drawing in nearby Brighton. The girls enjoyed a bustling social life. Caroline's diary brims with references to the balls and house parties which she and Emily, often accompanied by their parents, frequented.<sup>16</sup> A Valentine's soiree at the Brighton Town Hall "given by 28 of the gay bachelors of the neighbourhood," was a particular success: "Emily and I enjoyed it very much, we danced with two Norwegian brothers" and the girls returned home at half past six.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*. See also, Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: 'Society', Etiquette and the Season* (London: Hutchinson, 1986); Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle-class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975); Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Jane Lewis, Ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850 -1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> See the Rev. John Scobell, "To the Rev. John M. Neale," (London: Nisbet, 1857) PH 6265; The Diary of Caroline Yarde Scobell; and Emily's own testimony below.

<sup>15</sup> Diary of Caroline Yarde Scobell, 1845 -46. East Sussex County Record Office, Lewes, AMS 5683/1, April 26, 1845. Emily was born July 17, 1827 and would have been in her late teens at this time. In the absence of Emily's own diary, her sister Caroline's provides valuable insights into Scobell family life.

<sup>16</sup> For a related discussion of the social life of young women in nineteenth-century Glasgow, see Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), esp. Chapter Seven, "Downtown" focusing on parties and balls.

<sup>17</sup> Caroline's diary. February 14, 1846. Caroline would record when she did not enjoy some entertainment, such as a concert, but dancing was always popular with the girls.

While Caroline did record the presence of God in her life, the overwhelming focus of her teenage musings centred upon the pleasures and amusements of a genteel upbringing.

Although the family spent months at a time apart in the company of various relatives, Emily seems to have had a close relationship with her parents, especially her father. He would often accompany her to her archery parties, to visit exhibitions in London, and they frequently rode out together. But then something went wrong. At some point between her eighteenth birthday in 1845 - spent with Caroline and her father at the National Gallery - and 1853, Emily became drawn to a different set of influences. The "gay bachelors" of Brighton lost their appeal as she grew disillusioned with the empty round of parties and balls she was expected to attend. Moreover, the close bond she had shared with her father shattered.

It was in Brighton in the late 1840s that Emily first became interested in the religious life and the High-Church teachings of the Reverend Edward Pusey through her friendship with Sarah Arthur, a local music teacher. Upon discovering Arthur's spiritual influence upon Emily, Scobell forbade further contact between the two women.<sup>18</sup> According to Scobell's later recollections, an immediate change occurred within Emily, who became "distressed, dejected, solitary and thoughtful."<sup>19</sup> In 1853, during a protracted visit in Exeter to care for her ailing mother, Emily renewed her acquaintance with Sarah Arthur. Weeks later, Arthur wrote from Oxford, where she had become affiliated with a sisterhood, encouraging Emily to consider the religious life: "I should like you to know my friend with whom I am staying, she is such a warm-hearted good creature, a real Sister of Mercy in the

<sup>18</sup> John Scobell, "To the Rev. John M. Neale: (London: Nisbet, 1857) PH 6265, 20. See also the Statement of Rev. John Scobell, *Sussex Advertiser*, Extraordinary Edition, Dec. 1, 1857, PH 511.

<sup>19</sup> [Rev. John Scobell] "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 20.

world....If [she] could meet with some one who would like to work with her, and who could afford to maintain herself, she would like her to come and live with her."<sup>20</sup> Sarah Arthur's friend was Marian Hughes, foundress of the Society of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, established in 1849 in Oxford.<sup>21</sup> To Emily, she would have been a most impressive role model. Although forbidden by her father to even consider the religious life, Emily wrote Hughes to inquire about the Community at Oxford. Hughes assured her that while she was indeed "a Sister of Mercy...seeking to minister to her [mother's] happiness, and to do any works of love for Christ's poor," rumours of a sisterhood in Oxford were "absolutely false."<sup>22</sup> Hughes' denial of the existence of a religious order, along with Scobell's utter contempt for such institutions, contextualises the caution with which Emily approached monasticism.

By intercepting her letters, Scobell discovered Arthur's attempts to lure Emily to Oxford. He again forbade all further communication between the two, firmly believing that "this first attempt to take my daughter away from me was defeated."<sup>23</sup> In *A Plea for Sisterhoods*, published in 1850, Alexander Penrose Forbes, the Bishop of Brechin, explained potential objections which parents might raise towards sisterhoods. He argued that while Sisters of Charity were well respected in France, English domestic arrangements hindered the development of religious orders in England:

Parents are accustomed to part with their sons for the service of God, or of their country, or to gain a livelihood; and so, any of these seem natural. They are not accustomed mostly in the educated classes to part with their daughters except for

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Arthur to Emily Scobell, July 14, 1853. Rev. John Scobell, "A Reply to the Postscript of the Rev. John Mason Neale," (Lewes and London, 1858), 13-14. PH 71164.

<sup>21</sup> A pioneer in the religious life, Hughes, in 1841, was the first woman in the Established Church to pledge the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty before God, and her work in Oxford included an industrial school for girls and missions to the poor.

<sup>22</sup> Marian Hughes to Emily Scobell, Dec 17, 1853. PH 71164, 14-15.

<sup>23</sup> "Statement of the Rev. John Scobell," *Sussex Advertiser*, Dec 1, 1857.

marriage; and so it seems unnatural. Perhaps, too, the deep prejudices created against the whole conventual system at the time of the suppression of religious houses among us, have not yet worn out.<sup>24</sup>

Forbes highlighted the two primary objections toward female religious orders in England, noting that women's social function should be domestic and familial, and that the medieval heritage of the "conventual system" continued to taint its Victorian reputation. Moreover, he stressed how religious communities were perceived as an "unnatural" threat to the family, and to the relationship between daughters and parents in particular.

It was indeed her relationship with her father that Emily pondered in her diary in 1853 as her spiritual malaise intensified. In stark contrast to her sister Caroline's narrative of sweetness and light, Emily's state of mind was characterised by frustration, depression, and hopelessness:

The tale of my life is soon told. Forgetfulness and neglect. I loved--I idolised--not as love is generally understood--I loved my home--I idolised my father. I was indeed the darling of my earthly father. I was a pretty plaything, all unthinking and merry, singing, playing with everyone and everything. But now I have thought, I may not go back, I may not begin, and then leave off. God forbid! I have already sacrificed almost all my father's love by asking questions, but it is no use; he always tells me I talk nonsense, and yet he is a clergyman. Is it nonsense? I do not know what to think--what to talk--what to do. Were I contented with this world, none need be happier than I. But I have no strength by reason of my sadness. I have thought I must give up, be as I was before, but there is something that will not let me, I could overcome by time, but I will not. Oh save me from myself.<sup>25</sup>

Such a melodramatic testimonial exposes the complex emotions which faced

<sup>24</sup> A. P. Forbes, *A Plea for Sisterhoods*, 2nd. ed. (London: Joseph Masters, 1850), 6. PH 6247. On the ideology of the home, see Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830 -1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) esp. Chapter Thirteen.

<sup>25</sup> Emily's journal, 1853, as cited in John Scobell to Emily Scobell, June 1855. "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 21. Scobell noted that his wife found the journal "lying open, and read it."

young, middle-class women who were somehow not "contented with this world." Emily Scobell was not the only Victorian daughter who felt at odds with "woman's mission" as laid down by prescriptive authors such as Sarah Stickney Ellis.<sup>26</sup> Only a few years earlier, Florence Nightingale had experienced virtually identical emotions when, disenchanted with home life, she too contemplated a form of the religious life. Biographer Lytton Strachey explains: "Florence...confessed to some visionary plan of...founding 'something like a Protestant Sisterhood, without vows, for women of educated feelings.'"<sup>27</sup> Her parents were mortified at their daughter's apparent rebellion, calling her "spoiled" and "ungrateful."<sup>28</sup> Emily's family was similarly shaken: "you were living in a state of excitement, wretched in yourself, and the cause of wretchedness to others," her father claimed of her mind set in 1853.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, as Emily contemplated becoming a sister, she was also deeply rational as to the effects of such a decision. In her diary, she prepared a detailed inventory of the ways in which monasticism would change her life. Such a catalogue provides invaluable insights into the push and pull factors which motivated potential sisters:

Let me consider deeply about joining a sisterhood...First then as to what it is. I must give up marriage. And in giving up that I must give up love of any one human being before all others. There must be no love in my mind but the love of my heavenly Lord. And through Him the love of the poor.....Then

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1852). See also Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

<sup>27</sup> Lytton Strachey, Florence Nightingale (London: Penguin, 1996) p. 4. Originally published in Eminent Victorians (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918).

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Margaret Forster, Significant Sisters: the grassroots of active feminism, 1839 -1939. (London: Penguin, 1986), 102. On the power of religion as a medium to express desire, see Barbara Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy" History Workshop Journal 39 (Spring 1995).

<sup>29</sup> John Scobell to Emily Scobell, June 1855. PH 6265, 21.

I must give up my will entirely to those under whose guidance I should then be, even if their commands should be laborious and hard....Then again, I must give up all the passing amusements and gaities [sic] of the world....I should be going with the fierce anger of my father, mother and almost all my relatives, and many of my friends; thought at least foolish by all I know and going among strangers whom I may not like. I should live plainly, fasting and penance would be observed. Confession also I believe would be recommended. The love of personal beauty would be taken from me, and I should know myself more as I would be, as I am, and as I ought to be. I will consider this, and see if I can do it all through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The reshaping of Emily's identity stood at the heart of her deliberations on becoming a sister. Her catalogue of the things she would be "giving up" in exchange for the life of a sister - marriage, earthly love, her will, leisure, the support of family and friends, vanity - seems a high price to pay for what she would gain: the company of strangers, a life of hard labour, fasting, penance, confession, self-awareness. Such careful contemplation, however, suggests that Emily was deeply conscious of the trials of sisterhood life and did not perceive it as an escape from her present malaise, but rather as an exercise of faith. She was motivated primarily by the potential for self-discovery and the ability to live unencumbered by social frivolity, both of which she hoped to achieve through a stronger relationship with God. In her recent examination of the complex relationship between feminism and religion, Eileen Yeo explains the ways in which "religion can give tremendous power to belief by offering idealisations which can be internalised into the psyche and from there fortify the courage to be dissident or fuel a longing as intense as the passion of a lover for a new identity and a new life."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Extract from Emily's diary, 1853. Cited in "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 21-2.

<sup>31</sup> Yeo, "Protestant feminists and Catholic Saints," 142. See also the recent collection of essays edited by Sue Morgan, Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750 -1900 (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002).

For Emily, part of the appeal of a new life was a rejection of her worldly existence. Her home life became particularly strained when in 1855 she discovered that her parents had been reading her diary and knew of her contemplations toward the religious life.<sup>32</sup> Although she endured family evenings at home, she felt constrained and unfulfilled at the hearth: "I sat in the dining-room all the evening, to please papa; but I much wished to have been alone. I could not enter into all the conversation, which was all frivolous and worldly."<sup>33</sup> In order to escape domestic decorum, Emily took advantage of the emphasis on public duty as set out within Victorian gender ideology to develop a wider sphere of action through a variety of philanthropic pursuits.<sup>34</sup> She devoted most of her days to visiting the poor and teaching Sunday school, yet feared that her father, who had already placed restrictions on the number of times she could attend church, would also curb her charitable work. "I expect every time I return from visiting," she wrote early in 1855, "that too will be forbidden."<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the monastic life offered the opportunity for uninterrupted charity within an environment of denial. T. J. Jackson Lears notes its appeal in the American context: "monasticism as a disciplined, ascetic way of life offered an eloquent witness against the emerging culture of comfort and convenience."<sup>36</sup> Thus,

for Emily, the religious life provided the potential for a radical social and

<sup>32</sup> John Scobell to Emily Scobell, June 1855. "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 21-2.

<sup>33</sup> Extract from Emily's diary, 1853. Cited in "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 22.

<sup>34</sup> See Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives*; Eileen Janes Yeo, ed. *Radical Femininity*; and Hall and Davidoff, *Family Fortunes*.

<sup>35</sup> Emily Scobell to Miss Parker, (music teacher) c. Feb. 1855. "The Lewes Riot, Its Causes and Consequences. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of Chichester, by the Rev. J. M. Neale" (London: J. Masters, 1857), 12. PH 6264.

<sup>36</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 201. Jackson Lears points to the difficulties involved in the reconciliation of contemporary and monastic cultures at the turn of the century, especially the marriage between humanitarianism and asceticism. 200.



spiritual transformation in which her will would indeed be governed, not by the social and familial trappings under which she found herself suffocating, but by God.

In 1855, matters intensified dramatically with the death of Emily's mother. Scobell explained to his four daughters, all in their twenties, how their mother's death would, in his opinion, affect the household: "I neither could nor should take any one of you as the substitute of my lost wife....as proof of equality in my estimation, [each] should preside at my table in alternate and successive weeks, or months, as they might like best, as their mother and her sisters had done before them."<sup>37</sup> Her mother's death heightened Emily's sense of despair and may have deepened her desire to become a sister. At the age of 27, she had neither privacy nor independence in her father's home. His control over her conscience and her actions offends the contemporary mind: she too found it unbearable. While there is no evidence to suggest that she ever considered the option of marriage, Emily clearly felt uneasy with the role of dutiful daughter as envisioned by her father. Perhaps she also feared that her sisters would marry and she would be left to care for him alone.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, a friend suggested to her that "you may gain some influence over your father from being left so much alone with him."<sup>39</sup> By this time, however, it was Emily who was being influenced, by a different clergyman altogether.

<sup>37</sup> "To the Rev. John M. Neale," PH 6265, 23. See John Tosh, A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Of course, it is possible that one or more of her sisters were already married. Only one of her sisters attended her funeral just two years later suggesting that they may have moved from Sussex once married. Emily Scobell's plight can be compared with that of Rebecca Reed in Daniel A. Cohen, "Miss Reed and the Superiors: The Contradictions of Convent Life in Antebellum America," Journal of Social History (Fall 1996). Like Emily, Reed faced the dreary prospect of caring for an elderly father upon the death of her mother. She too decided to join a convent, with similarly disastrous results. See 156.

<sup>39</sup> Louisa Wilkins to Emily Scobell, 1st Monday in Lent, 1855. PH 71164, 16.

Emily's relationship with John Mason Neale began in the autumn of 1854, several months prior to the formation of the Society of St. Margaret. While involved in parochial work in Lewes, Emily established an acquaintance with Louisa Wilkins, who was closely involved with St. Margaret's, and through her, was introduced to Neale, Warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead. According to Neale, his association with Emily began with a call for help: "I was informed by a friend of [Sister Amy's] that she was in great distress of mind, and was exceedingly anxious to obtain the assistance of some priest; and that, from reading some of my books, she wished, if it were possible, to see me."<sup>40</sup> That same year, Marian Hughes asked Neale's daughter, Elizabeth, herself involved in the religious life, if she might be able to help Emily who "wishes to lead a strict life, and go to Conf[ession]."<sup>41</sup> As relations with her father deteriorated, Emily found comfort for her troubled soul with Neale. Over the next two years, she met with the priest, without her father's knowledge, in the sitting room of St. Mary's Infants' School at Lewes where she volunteered. There, behind drawn blinds, Emily would make her confession and receive absolution.<sup>42</sup> Certainly Neale was aware that Scobell would not have approved of these clandestine meetings, and while he did advise Emily to tell her father, he continued the encounters despite their secrecy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Neale claims Emily's appeal occurred in the Autumn of 1854. "The Lewes Riot, its Causes and Consequences," 6. Neale published this pamphlet after Sister Amy's death in order to exculpate himself from blame. It included detailed correspondence between himself and Emily Scobell.

<sup>41</sup> Sister marian to Miss Neale, Jan 3, 1854. PH 71164, 15. Elizabeth Neale ran an orphanage at Brighton.

<sup>42</sup> Her first confession to Neale occurred in March, 1855. See PH 6263, A Postscript in Reply to the Rev. John Scobell's Statement, 57.

<sup>43</sup> See The Lewes Riot, 10 -11. Neale's biographers attempt to explain the priest's unorthodox relationship with Emily Scobell. Lough suggests that Neale's motivation for hearing Emily Scobell's confession was to prevent her from seeking refuge in the Roman Catholic Church. Chandler admits that "Neale's behaviour before Sister Amy joined the Sisterhood is also open to criticism." 89.

With the establishment of the Society of St. Margaret early in 1855, Emily increasingly found herself in demand by a number of parties, all of whom sought to represent her best interests, and all of whom desired her unbought labour. By August, Neale believed that Emily would soon join the Community, explaining in a letter to Sister Alice that Emily was "sufficiently strong," had a good deal of experience with the poor, and had decided against Hughes' order at Oxford.<sup>44</sup> Shortly thereafter, Emily took the next step toward St. Margaret's by writing to its Superior, Mother Ann. Significantly, the Superior seemed to know exactly which elements of sisterhood life were most attractive to Emily, stressing its functional and domestic aspects:

I am very glad to hear that you have a desire to devote your life to God in some active employment, and that you think you should like to join our sisterhood for nurses. I am sure you will find the work very interesting, and I hope, with God's blessing, to have a happy and well-ordered home for you all when you are not working.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time that Emily was being wooed by the happy home life at St. Margaret's, she was also being pursued by another Superior, Marian Hughes. "Our mutual friend, Miss Arthur, tells me that you are still undecided to what work to give yourself, and that she thinks the objects of our sisterhood would suit you," she wrote to Emily in October. Hughes was surely aware of the troubled relationship among St. Margaret's, Neale and Bishop Gilbert of Chichester, as discussed in the previous chapter, when she added that

[t]he great blessing we have in the Bishop's sanction is a wonderful help to us; nothing in which we require his assistance or authority is too much trouble for him, he is ready at whatever time to do whatever we need. It gives us a sense of really working for and in Christ's Church, which is a great happiness and support amid the difficulties of an infant

<sup>44</sup> Neale to Sister Alice, August 6, 1855. Accession 170. SSM Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Ann Gream to Emily Scobell, Oct 3, 1855. PH 71164, 16 -17.

community.<sup>46</sup>

She too emphasised the social utility of a sister's life, hoping that Emily would become one of her "fellow labourers." Significantly, both Superiors crafted the identity of sister in relation to the work of their sisterhood. Neither stressed the spiritual aspects of the religious life but rather focused on the supportive atmosphere provided by their respective communities, and the nature of the work they conducted, as they competed for Emily's services. By November, Mother Ann was confident of her success: "I am very glad to hear from Mr. Neale that you are likely to join us soon...and I look forward to your helping us in our parish work....I think I may consider you already one of my *children*."<sup>47</sup> For added emphasis, the letter was signed "Your affectionate Mother, Sister Ann, Sup[erior]." In light of her own mother's recent death, Emily may have found the attention given to her by the maternal Mother Ann comforting and appealing.

Scobell's reaction to his daughter's relationship with St. Margaret's was scathing. In a letter to the Superior, he interpreted her recruitment of Emily as an attempt to usurp his paternal authority:

She intimates to me that you were prepared to receive her into your house and protection before I was aware she had any intention of abandoning mine. If it be so, I beg to ask by what right or authority--upon what principle of honor or religion--is my household broken into--my family peace invaded--my parental authority contemned [sic].<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sister Marian to Emily Scobell, October 29, 1855. PH 71164,

<sup>47</sup> Mother Ann, Superior to Emily Scobell, Nov 13, 1855. PH 71164. Original emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> Rev. John Scobell to Mother Ann, Nov 26, 1855. "The Rev. J. M. Neale and the Institute of St Margaret's, East Grinstead. Statement of the Rev. J. Scobell, with letters from the B of Chichester, and the Assistant Wardens of Sackville College; to which is added A Sermon, preached by the Rev John Scobell, on the 29th of November 1857 at All Saints Church, Lewes" PH 511. On the rights and duties of nineteenth-century fathers, see, for example, Leonore Davidoff et. al., The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960 (London: Longman, 1999).

The contest over Emily reveals the uneasy relationship between sisterhoods and families at mid century. In one respect, the reason as to why both communities wanted Emily to become a sister mesh with that which compelled Scobell to insist she did not. With the death of his wife, Scobell was forced to rely on his daughters for companionship and domestic labour. Early sisterhoods were also in need of dedicated, and preferably self-supporting, young women as an unpaid labour force for the Church. By the end of 1855, St. Margaret's had been unable to secure any permanent new members, save Sister Elizabeth, who was frequently ill and without means, whereas Emily, well-to-do and experienced in parish work, was full of potential. Thus, the active recruitment of Emily by Neale and Mother Ann, as well as by Marian Hughes, and the stern opposition of her father must be placed within the context of Victorian domestic ideology which negotiated the unbought services of middle-class women's labour.

Emily's state of mind at the end of 1855 understandably was perplexed: she stood at the heart of a recruitment battle between St. Margaret's and the Society of the Holy and Undivided Trinity; Neale's patience was being tested: "How long do you mean to continue to waver? Either make up your mind to what you know to be right....or at once make it up that the old state of things must continue;"<sup>49</sup> and her father, stinging from betrayal, remained steadfast that there was, in fact, no decision for Emily to make. Perhaps to seek solace, she left home to stay with distant relatives. At the end of 1855 she wrote to her father explaining the nature of her relationship with Neale, careful to conceal her advisor's name:

I have been guided by him for some time. If I have mistaken my vocation, he does not think so; and he has most strongly urged me, at times when I have had fears myself, to go on and

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<sup>49</sup> "The Lewes Riot, 10-11.

do as I have done. \* \* \* I have sent him your letters. \* \* \* I do at least feel it is very difficult to know who to believe or what to do. To my present friend I have made full and free confession. \* \* \* I do not think it would be right of me to give up confession.<sup>50</sup>

Scobell, who received this news not long after his wife's death, was devastated: "*You are not mine, but another's!* You have left your father -- your first love--the guide of your youth...and you have gone and cast yourself at the feet of a stranger; one whose name even you do not reveal."<sup>51</sup> Had Emily attempted to provoke her father's ire, she could not have chosen a more insidious means. The confessional was unarguably the most contentious element of Anglo-Catholic ritual throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> It resonated with all that a father feared most: secrecy, betrayal, sexual intrigue. To the vicar, it signified the death of his daughter's soul. Scobell's reaction highlights the ways in which he received Emily's disclosure of confession as a direct transfer of his daughter's allegiance from himself to another. The confessional, exposing at it might, the secrets of domestic life, posed an ominous threat to the family, and in particular, to the authority of fathers.<sup>53</sup> The language of Scobell's retort reads much like that of a scorned lover: that his rival remained anonymous only fuelled his ire.

If to Scobell Emily's confession represented "a living death to home and filial love and filial duty," to her it brought hope and assurance. She explained to Neale in April, 1856 that "You have given me, so to speak, a second life, in which I do not feel that all the desires and energies of my

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<sup>50</sup> Emily Scobell to Rev. John Scobell, December 1855. PH 511. \*\*\*\* in original. Many of the letters contained these ellipses.

<sup>51</sup> Rev John Scobell to Emily Scobell, Dec 7, 1855. and Dec 8, 1855. PH 71164, 8. Original italics.

<sup>52</sup> On the perceived evils of the confessional, see, for example, John Wolffe, The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain. 1829- 1869 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>53</sup> For a further discussion of the threatening nature of the confessional, see Reed, "A Female Movement," 221.

existence are despised as absurd or useless."<sup>54</sup> In an era which preceded the widespread availability or acceptance of psychiatry, Emily's sessions with Neale functioned as a nineteenth-century equivalent of counselling or therapy. They imbued her with a renewed sense of self-confidence, but to Victorian sensibilities, it came at a high price. John Shelton Reed explains the radical nature of confession during this period: "It is important to recognise that a woman who made her confession could be seen--and could see herself--as engaged in an act of considerable daring....To meet in secret was highly improper, and meeting secretly with a man to disclose one's sinful thoughts and actions was morally dangerous, if not worse. And to do this without the approval of one's husband or father was an act of rebellion."<sup>55</sup>

Such rebellion elicited a harsh response. Upon discovering the identity of Emily's confessor, her father turned his rage toward Neale. In February 1857, Scobell issued Neale a list of accusations concerning the nature of the latter's relationship with Emily. These included the "clandestine" correspondence and meetings between Emily and Neale, in which, Scobell alleged, the priest "usurp[ed], dishonourably and unlawfully, the office of parish priest of All Saints, Lewes...to my detriment as her natural parent and lawful parish priest."<sup>56</sup> The penultimate charge was the most scandalous:

That you seek to hold and keep up a lasting spiritual influence over my daughter living in my house....That your advice is to her, that she quit my house...and that she join and give herself, and whatever income and property she may have, to an establishment at or near East Grinstead [sic]...and under your guidance and tutelege [sic], there to resign her will, her person, her services, her property, to your or others' will and pleasure.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Emily Scobell to Rev Neale, April 27, 1856. *The Lewes Riot*, 13. See also PH 6263, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Reed, "A Female Movement," 225.

<sup>56</sup> Rev John Scobell to Neale, February 1857. Printed in *the Lewes Riot*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Rev John Scobell to Neale, February 1857. Printed in *the Lewes Riot*, 18-19. Neale claims that Scobell had already published this.

His final accusation stressed that "the whole is clandestinely and surreptitiously carried on...to the injury of my family peace and to the infringement of my public rights." According to Scobell, Neale's unauthorised infringement into his territory - both in terms of home and parish - defied his rights as parent and cleric. He was also unwilling to condone the invasion of privacy which Neale carried out without impunity. Notwithstanding that he had neither seen nor contacted Emily for fourteen months, Scobell continued to represent her as a child under his authority.<sup>58</sup>

Much has been written of the Victorian home as the refuge of middle-class women.<sup>59</sup> Its prominence, however, as the site of their oppression has been less- carefully documented.<sup>60</sup> For Emily Scobell, life at home was a constant source of anxiety and fear, as she explained to Neale in September, 1856: "My home-life does not improve, but gets worse: what it will come to, or be the end of it, I cannot think."<sup>61</sup> Finally in April 1857, she disclosed a new and alarming facet of life at the Scobell rectory, squarely at odds with Scobell's version of "family peace:"

However much I have suffered from my father, the remembrance of what my mother suffered, comes between myself and my father more than anything....He was of an overbearing and violent temperament ...If she ever did oppose my father, such scenes occurred as it can be no duty of mine to speak of....His behaviour to me is beyond anything one could imagine or scarcely believe. There is no moment of the day I can feel in any degree safe from his anger; and the states of anger he goes into are truly awful: *there have been times in*

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<sup>58</sup> Lewes Riot, 21.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes; Hall, White, Male and Middle Class; Branca, The Silent Sisterhood; Gordon and Nair, Public Lives.

<sup>60</sup> Nineteenth-century critics of the home, and women's place within it included Frances Power Cobbe, Anna Jameson, and Marian Reid. For a recent investigation of familial discord, see A. James Hammerton, Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>61</sup> Lewes Riot, 13.



*which I have feared even for my life.*<sup>62</sup>

As this damning exposé of the middle-class patriarchal family suggests, Emily's life at home provided ample motivation to seek refuge in a sisterhood. She had, in fact, been counselled by a number of relatives, including her sister, to avoid her father altogether.<sup>63</sup> Yet Emily's stated motivations for joining St. Margaret's were not primarily negative: writing to Neale at the end of 1856, she explained that "even when I was quite a child, I thought how much I should like to devote my whole life entirely to the service of God."<sup>64</sup> She maintained that having survived a serious illness as a child, she believed she owed her life to the service of God, and was convinced by the age of fifteen, "to find out some way in which I might do so."<sup>65</sup> Thus, Emily determined that as her thirtieth birthday approached, she was prepared to give up the "things of the world" because "however weak or unsteady my character may be, I have not been changeable in this."<sup>66</sup>

Emily Scobell's protracted deliberations on becoming a sister provide a rare glimpse into the personal dynamics of an often-neglected aspect of the religious life. Many accounts simply note the growth of the Community with phrases such as "by September there were nine in the Sisterhood" and proceed on to other, seemingly more significant matters.<sup>67</sup> However, from both sides - that of the sisterhood and of the potential sister - the process involved considerable negotiation. Of course not all would-be sisters had to face such trials as Emily Scobell, but for no woman was the prospect of becoming a sister without serious contemplation. As she pondered the

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<sup>62</sup> Emily Scobell to John Mason Neale, April 1857. *The Lewes Riot*, 15. Italics in original.

<sup>63</sup> *The Lewes Riot*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Lewes Riot*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> *Lewes Riot*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Lewes Riot*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> *Doing the Impossible*, 15.

religious life Emily was frightened and anxious at times, while at others she was thoughtful and optimistic. Although her particular experience is unique, it reflects the complex blend of push and pull factors that attracted many women to the religious life. Emily had many reasons to want to leave home, but she did not have to join a sisterhood to do so. The religious life appealed to her spiritually and socially, as well as to her sense of duty to the poor and to her desire to lead a useful life. As did Florence Nightingale, Emily required considerable courage to defy her parents and achieve her ambition. Of her tenacity, Neale was aware, as he wrote to Sister Alice: "Miss Scobell is in a sea of troubles about coming here, but I think she will get successfully out of them."<sup>68</sup> Her perseverance testifies to the nature of middle-class women's sense of duty during this era: she was torn between an obligation to her father, on the one hand, and to God, herself, and society on the other. That she judged the latter to be of greater value, and was not content merely to "suffer and be still," suggests that she was fully prepared to cast off a socially-prescribed identity that centred on the family, in order to embrace a religious identity that while radical, provided personal fulfilment in a variety of ways.

The case of Emily Scobell also provides significant details about the difficulties which faced fledgling religious orders. The recruitment of new members was essential to any sisterhood and was achieved by crafting the identity of sister in a specific capacity. Both Mother Ann and Marian Hughes were persistent and, even by contemporary terms, manipulative in their attempts to attract this potential sister. Neale devoted innumerable hours in visits and correspondence. The fact that her father objected so strongly does not seem to have deterred Neale or these Superiors in their quest for Emily.

<sup>68</sup> John Mason Neale to Sister Alice, Vigil of St. James, 1857. SSM Archives.

As a supporter of St. Margaret's, Louisa Wilkins acted as a crucial mediator between Emily and the Sisterhood, describing the sisters' house at Rotherfield and repeatedly encouraging Emily to visit. If the Community had not persevered to such an extent, Emily might easily have gone to the Sisterhood at Oxford or abandoned her wish to become a sister altogether. As a new order, St. Margaret's was desperate to expand: in 1856 it managed to attract only three new sisters.<sup>69</sup> As such, its promoters attempted to define sisterhood life as vital and dynamic. Mother Ann in particular crafted an identity for St. Margaret's that appealed directly to Emily: she stressed spiritual devotion, the value of the work, and the comfort of a caring home. While neither Neale nor Mother Ann urged Emily to disobey her father, nor did they suggest that, as a daughter, her first obligation should lie with her family. As did Emily, they drew upon a clearly-defined rhetoric of Christian duty to others in order to circumvent an ideology of Victorian womanhood which increasingly was losing purchase with those whom it was intended to control.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout its formative period, St. Margaret's faced a social and clerical climate rife with suspicion and fear. While its supporters stressed the functional aspects of St. Margaret's to attract sisters, detractors focused on issues of religious identity in an effort to malign the Order. In particular, Neale's High Churchmanship provided a convenient target not only for Scobell's wrath, but also for Sussex society. Among his enemies, the evangelical Brighton Protestant Association endeavoured to have the

<sup>69</sup> S. Katherine, clothed Aug 1856, S. Martha, October 1856, and S. Lydia, March 1856. SSM Archives.

<sup>70</sup> While this ideology prescribed that the Victorian woman should be subservient and even-tempered, such stereotypical attributes bore little resemblance to the lived experience of many women. Florence Nightingale, for example, suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of her thwarted ambitions, while feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe and Josephine Butler were more often exasperated and demonstrative than they were patient and aloof. See Eileen Janes Yeo, ed. Radical Femininity for an analysis of how women subverted this ideology in their daily lives.

Warden ejected from Sackville College, Assistant Warden Rogers renewed his campaign to do the same "to an extent that one could hardly have thought possible in a civilized land," Neale reported, by smashing windows and breaking down doors, and the invective of the Sussex press ensured the notoriety of Neale and the sisters. "*The Brighton Gazette* thunders away at us every week," he reported to his friend, Benjamin Webb in September 1856.<sup>71</sup> The Bishop of Chichester remained openly critical of Neale, prompting him to consider relocating St. Margaret's to the diocese of Salisbury.<sup>72</sup> Although the Bishop of Salisbury advised against the move, Neale's reply to him revealed that his frustration about the dual pressures of clerical and public hostilities was at times too much to bear: "I have no wish to leave [Sussex]: although it is not pleasant to be attacked weekly in the Protestant organ of the county, with invective which could hardly be stronger if applied to a felon."<sup>73</sup> While much criticism was directed at Neale rather than the Sisterhood, his close association with the sisters ensured that they too felt its full effects.

Nor were the sisters immune from an altogether different but more powerful form of adversary. Fever was thriving in the Sussex countryside and extended nursing assignments in "wretched cottages" were taking their toll on the Community. One of the sisters, dispatched to "a bad Irish cabin" in Cuckfield in November 1856 to attend an outbreak of scarlet fever, found six children suffering from the disease.<sup>74</sup> Their mother had been consigned to a lunatic asylum leaving them in the hands of their father, a "short tempered"

<sup>71</sup> JMN to Benjamin Webb, Sept 19, 1856, and Nov 8, 1856. Cited in Letters of John Mason Neale. Selected and Edited by his Daughter (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 277, 278.

<sup>72</sup> Bishop of Salisbury to Neale, 21 Feb, 1857. Lambeth Palace Library, (LPL) Neale Papers, MS 2677. The Bishop also cautioned Neale as to the lack of understanding surrounding the sisters' dress and the practice of daily celebrations of the Eucharist, two elements which were at the heart of the character of the religious life but also the focus of opponents' wrath.

<sup>73</sup> Neale to the Bishop of Salisbury, 6 Feb, 1857. SSM Archives. Accession 62.

<sup>74</sup> Vicar of Cuckfield to JMN, Nov 26, 1856. SSM Archives.

Baptist who was also ill. The local vicar recorded the effect of the Sister's arrival: "everything in the house, the man included, became different a very few hours after the Sister made her appearance; and from that time to this, she has never left the house, working incessantly by night and by day."<sup>75</sup> Despite the addition of a second sister to assist the first, two of the children died, and the sisters carried the fever back to the convent at East Grinstead nearly causing Mother Ann's death and leaving three others desperately ill.<sup>76</sup> Neale lamented the situation to Webb: "Our poor Sisters are finding the pestiferous atmosphere of so many and such long fever cases. Six of them are in bed this morning...I might almost as well have an Infirmary to attend to."<sup>77</sup> In an inspirational sermon preached at the end of the year, he attempted to revive the sisters' spirits:

Oh, my dear Sisters, this is my most earnest hope for you all, that wherever God calls you...that you should go not only readily but cheerfully; let it be the lowliest cottage that ever was built, let it be the most loathsome or most dangerous disease that sin ever brought into the world.<sup>78</sup>

While such labour was indeed full of trials, the vicar of Cuckfield felt sure of its ultimate worth, not only to the patients but to the Church itself: "I believe the work is one calculated, under God's blessing to do more to advance the interests of the Church than almost any other now being carried on, appealing as it does so directly to the kind and good feelings of people."<sup>79</sup> Thus, while fever was dangerous, as the vicar's testimonial demonstrated, it was also vital to establishing St. Margaret's reputation and quelling popular

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> S. Gabriel, Doing the Impossible, 17.

<sup>77</sup> MS Book of Letters, Quoted in A. G. Lough, The Influence of John Mason Neale (London: SPCK, 1962), 104.

<sup>78</sup> Sermon preached Dec 17, 1856. Neale Papers, L P L, MS 2677. See also Sermons Preached in a Religious House by the late Rev. J. M. Neale Second Series, Vol 1 (London: J Masters & Co., 1874).

<sup>79</sup> Vicar of Cuckfield to JMN. See also "St. Margaret's Sisterhood" Church Review (1861), 15.

opposition.

Thus it was towards a Sisterhood rife with fever, and prey to external controversy that, with the passing of her thirtieth birthday, Emily Scobell prepared to test her vocation.<sup>80</sup> Letters written to her father during this time reveal a surprising degree of warmth between Emily and her father - perhaps due to the fact that Emily was no longer living at home - and outline her hopes that her identities as woman religious and daughter might co-exist: "My Dearest Papa, I go to East Grinstead next Saturday...to stay till Christmas: when I shall look forward with delight to being at home again with you all...With best love...Your very affectionate daughter."<sup>81</sup> Three days later, on August 15, 1857, Emily was admitted into the Society of St. Margaret's as a probationer for a trial period of three months, as she eagerly embarked upon her new life. Within a month of her arrival at the convent - an unusually brief period - she was clothed as a novice assuming the name Sister Amy. Signing a letter to her father, "Sister Amy," she explained that "I cannot be called by my name, "Emily," here very well, and also I have a feeling myself that I would rather not--so I am called what is short for "Emily."<sup>82</sup> She hoped that her father would also accept her new attire: "The dress is a little peculiar, but it is not bad, and I find it very comfortable. I wish it were not at all peculiar for the sake of those who may dislike it, and most especially for your

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<sup>80</sup> Significantly, despite the early set backs produced by intolerance and fever, by the beginning of 1857, all of the women who were official members of the sisterhood remained at St. Margaret's. Such commitment is impressive especially in light of the low degree of episcopal sanction. Of the ten sisters referred to by Neale, four were professed, three were novices, and the remaining three were probationers. SSM Profession List, SSM Archives.

<sup>81</sup> PH 6265, 13. Emily Scobell to Rev. John Scobell, Dunmore House, August 12, 1857.

<sup>82</sup> Neale Papers, L P L, MS 2677. Sister Amy to Rev. John Scobell, October 1857. Her full name was Emily Ann Elizabeth Scobell. As there were already sisters in the Community named Ann, Emily, and Elizabeth (see The Lewes Riot, 22) Emily chose the abbreviated form of her Christian name. Significantly, there is no record of a Sister Emily at SSM during this time. Perhaps a Sister Emily was a probationer but she does not appear in the sisterlist or in the house diaries at all.

sake."<sup>83</sup> Although she tried to reassure him of her devotion, her father refused to answer her letters from the convent, stung by his daughter's betrayal. While the dress and the change of name no doubt offended her father, the final blow came when Emily declared "There is one thing I wish to say to you my dear papa; I do not ever again wish to give up this life." Days after her profession, in a letter to Sister Alice, Neale expressed his satisfaction with the new recruit, "Sister Amy really exerts herself very much in every way she can: she will be a very good little sister."<sup>84</sup>

By all accounts, Sister Amy was indeed a capable nursing sister. Archdeacon Otter, in whose district she was caring for a cancer patient, was full of praise: "Sister [Amy] has been performing her work of love with great judgement and skill, as well as with admirable self-denial and devotion."<sup>85</sup> So impressed was he, in fact, that he begged Mother Ann to let her stay: "She has won the complete confidence and attachment of the poor woman...we cannot bear to part with her...She is probably a great favourite at E[ast] G[rinstead]."<sup>86</sup> Although Sister Amy was not sent to train at Westminster Hospital like the original sisters, such testimonials suggest that she adapted well to her new vocation.

Upon returning to the convent in early October, Sister Amy discovered that scarlet fever was raging in East Grinstead and the sisters were in great demand. The Community diary does not reveal whether Sister Amy was herself sent out to nurse victims of the fever, or if she contracted it from one

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<sup>83</sup> John Scobell, "A letter to the Rev John Mason Neale, warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead" (London: Nisbet, 1875) L P L, Neale Papers, Sister Amy to Rev. John Scobell, October 1857.

<sup>84</sup> Neale's Journal, JMN to Sister Alice, Sept 18, 1855. SSM Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Archdeacon Otter to SSM, Cawfold, Sept 1, 1857. SSM Archives

<sup>86</sup> Archdeacon Otter to SSM, Sept 20, 1857. Sister Amy was allowed to stay with this patient. A letter of October 19 recorded the Archdeacon's thanks for the granting of his request. SSM Archives.

of the other sisters, noting only that on October 10, she "complained of sorethroat and pains in her limbs and scarlet fever was suspected."<sup>87</sup> Dr. Whyte, the Sisterhood's attending physician, confirmed these suspicions the following day with Sister Alice installed as her nurse. Upon hearing of his daughter's illness, Scobell summoned a doctor from Brighton, who asserted "that her case is one of considerable danger, but that there is every possibility of her perfect recovery - which may God grant."<sup>88</sup> Having witnessed many serious illnesses within the Community over the past year, the other sisters may well have believed in Sister Amy's full recovery. The course of her illness seems to have been rather uneven, with the diary indicating periodic recoveries. By November 5, Neale felt confident enough to inform Scobell "that his daughter is going on well."<sup>89</sup> Scobell too may not have been alarmed, as in 1845 no fewer than three of his children had fallen victim to the same fever and had all recovered.<sup>90</sup>

Despite attentive care from the sisters and three boxes of hothouse grapes from Lady Webster, a friend of the Community, Sister Amy's condition worsened to the point where she was "alarmingly ill with shortness of breath."<sup>91</sup> In the early hours of November 13, Neale came for a final visit and then sent a telegraph to her father advising him of his daughter's weakening state. Mother Ann, who sat with her through the night, recorded her final moments: "her sufferings were very great but she was quite sensible to the last and very patient....She watched carefully for her father till 11:30 and then she resigned her wish to see him. At ten minutes

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<sup>87</sup> SSM House Diary, SSM Archives, Oct 10, 1857. This diary recorded daily events in Community life.

<sup>88</sup> SSM House Diary, Nov 5, 1857.

<sup>89</sup> House Diary, November 5, 1857.

<sup>90</sup> Diary of Caroline Yarde Scobell, 1845. These children were Barton, Frances, and Eliza.

<sup>91</sup> House Diary, November 11, 1857



past two pm she entered into her rest without a struggle resting on the arms of S[ister] Alice."<sup>92</sup> Sister Amy's death was undoubtedly a tragedy for the Sisterhood. The description of the progression of her illness and demise as recorded by Mother Ann in the Community diary is unusually rich in detail and emotion.<sup>93</sup> In the days that followed her death, ironically the calm before the storm, the sisters prepared for the funeral. Laid to rest in her white sister's dress with black girdle and cross, "she looked quite angelic."<sup>94</sup> The poignant inscription on her coffin read "But the Dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto Him into the Ark."<sup>95</sup>

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### **'Disgraceful Scene at the Funeral, Puseyite Demonstration and Violence of the Mob'**

As he was in Brighton, Scobell did not receive news of his daughter's impending death until it was too late. When he arrived at East Grinstead later that afternoon with his daughter Caroline, he was informed that Emily had summoned the strength on her deathbed to prepare her will. This highly-contentious document, whose contents were made public following the funeral, awarded £400 of an estate worth over £5000 as a legacy to the Sisterhood and appointed Neale and the Mother Superior as co-executors.<sup>96</sup> Scobell did not take kindly to this latest development. Funeral arrangements also proved a contentious issue: Sister Amy had requested burial in the vault at Lewes alongside her mother, and her father requested that the service be

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<sup>92</sup> House Diary, November 13, 1857.

<sup>93</sup> For example, compare the detail surrounding Sister Amy's death with that of Sister Elizabeth, who had been a sister for five years when she succumbed to cancer in August 1860. The entry simply records that she died after a protracted illness. See SSM Archives, Accession 3.

<sup>94</sup> House Diary, November 15, 1857.

<sup>95</sup> House Diary, November 15, 1857. Refer Genesis 8:10

<sup>96</sup> Emily Scobell was bequeathed this amount by her mother's estate.

conducted by an evangelical minister "after dark." While these would not have been the wishes of the Sisterhood, Neale and Mother Ann consented provided that all the sisters be allowed to attend.

Although the days preceding Sister Amy's funeral were rife with tension between St. Margaret's and the Scobell family, these problems hardly anticipated the commotion which surrounded the funeral itself. The coffin was accompanied by six of the sisters on the railway to Lewes. From the station, they proceeded to All Saints' Church where the funeral was to be held.<sup>97</sup> The chaos which ensued upon their arrival was remarkable. According to the detailed account recorded by Mother Ann in the Community diary, a mob collected around the churchyard, yelling profanities at the procession. Once inside the church, as Neale and the sisters assembled around the coffin, the crowd began to press, "pushing, talking, and uttering cries of "No Popery."<sup>98</sup> After the service, the sisters and Neale were denied access to the vault, which had been "shamefully desecrated."<sup>99</sup> Once Scobell and family left the church yard, the mob turned violent, physically attacking Neale and the sisters, who, "escaped with great difficulty, and were put by the police into a little public house for safety...[Neale] escaped the back way over three walls, and [some of] the sisters were taken in a Fly by the Police to the Station."<sup>100</sup> Mother Ann and the rest of the sisters took refuge in the school master's house and eventually ran back to the station, followed by the angry mob. As the train pulled out of town, a crowd of between five and six

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<sup>97</sup> Although the church still exists, I could find no evidence of Sister Amy's headstone or of the Scobell family vault. A large monument to Sister Amy stands in the courtyard of the convent at East Grinstead.

<sup>98</sup> SSM Archives, Accession 2, November 18, 1857. A bier is a movable frame on which a coffin rests.

<sup>99</sup> Community Diary, SSM Archives, November 16, 1857. Upon discovering this, the day prior to the funeral Mother Ann travelled to Brighton to inform Scobell to post watch around the vault.

<sup>100</sup> SSM Archives, Accession 2, November 18, 1857.

hundred continued shouting from its vantage point on the bridge.

On the following day, Neale and Mother Ann travelled to Brighton where they gave Scobell "his daughter's dying message of forgiveness" along with a copy of her will. They then proceeded to Lewes with the intention of viewing the vault which had been blocked by the mob. Once again, however, the citizens of Lewes were lying in wait. After being refused a key to the vault, Neale and the Mother Superior faced a considerable crowd assembled at the churchyard. Mother Ann was whisked away to safety in a fly by the magistrate to the White Hart Inn, while Neale was chased all the way to the station by the angry mob who assailed his carriage with "the most insulting language" and a battery of stones which shattered every window.<sup>101</sup> After a wait of over an hour at the station, while hundreds gathered on the platform and continued their litany of invective, the frightened pair boarded the train to return home. Mother Ann recorded how "after they were in the carriage, Mr. Neale placed himself before the window to protect the Mother, and several stones were thrown at him, one of which hit his head."<sup>102</sup> Charles Rooke, responsible for the accurate missile, was charged with throwing a stone at a railway carriage and gained instant celebrity throughout the town.<sup>103</sup>

The timing of Sister Amy's funeral was highly significant to its reception and representation in Lewes. The funeral had been held on November 18, just two weeks after the annual Guy Fawkes' celebrations in which Roman- and Anglo-Catholicism were popularly vilified throughout the town. According to *The Sussex Express*, the 1857 festivities, which attracted a crowd of over fifteen hundred, were particularly successful: "The

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Paine "expounded his revolutionary politics" at the White Hart, which identifies itself as "a cradle of American independence" according to the plaque on the front of the building.

<sup>102</sup> House Diary, SSM Archives November 19, 1857.

<sup>103</sup> *Brighton Herald*, Nov 21, 1857; *Sussex Express*, November 14, 1857.

bonfire and usual exhibitions of Guy Fawkes surpassed anything seen in former years. It was the largest and best fire we ever remember."<sup>104</sup> The behaviour of the crowd at the funeral, and the fervent rhetoric which accompanied Sister Amy's death, thus were influenced strongly by the timing of her death and must be understood in the context of the Fifth of November. Throughout the nineteenth century, as restrictions upon the Roman Catholic community in Britain gradually were relaxed, popular anti-Catholicism increased.<sup>105</sup> The restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, led to a doubling of the number of bonfires in England.<sup>106</sup> Guy Fawkes' festivities contributed to the reinforcement of a British Protestant identity by enabling participants to engage in a socially-sanctioned display of cultural solidarity against the Catholic "Other."<sup>107</sup> Bonfire night provided a legitimate forum for challenging real and perceived threats to the values of Protestant society: after 1850 these included Tractarians and all forms of ritualism in the Established Church.<sup>108</sup> The secrecy of the confessional, the dubious practices of ritualistic priests, and the "unnatural" life within the convent struck at the heart of traditional English religious liberties. Patriotism in a variety of forms constituted an integral element of Guy Fawkes Night's appeal through displays of support for the monarchy and imperialism. Patriotic fervour was reinforced through the burning of effigies of foreign enemies, including that

<sup>104</sup> The Sussex Express, November 14, 1857. The district of Lewes had a population of 25, 719 in 1851.

<sup>105</sup> Anti-Catholic sentiment increased after the Papal Aggression of 1850-51 (at which time Pope Pius IX created 12 bishoprics in England and made Nicholas Wiseman the Archbishop of Westminster) and was manifested in the formation of specific anti-Catholic groups, such as various Protestant alliances throughout Britain. See D. G. Paz, Gerald Parsons, John Wolffe.

<sup>106</sup> Cressy, "The Fifth of November Remembered."

<sup>107</sup> For the role of anti-Catholicism in the formation of British identity in the early nineteenth century, see Linda Colley, Britons: The Forging of a Nation, 1707-1837. For the ways in which Bonfire Night contributed to reinforcing religious solidarity, see David Cressy, The Fifth of November Remembered. For a discussion of bonfire night "as an exercise in defining identity" see David Wiles, 181.

<sup>108</sup> See Robert Storch, "Please to Remember the Fifth of November."

of the Emperor of Russia in 1855.<sup>109</sup> The 'Fifth' was, therefore, instrumental in shaping English identity against a variety of foreign opponents. In his analysis of the Lewes celebrations, David Wiles argues that the Fifth represents a "discourse upon Englishness" and this patriotic element served to highlight "the us/them dialectic...at the heart of Bonfire's appeal."<sup>110</sup> Within this discursive frame, Catholicism, whether Anglo or Roman, could be recrafted as a highly dangerous threat not only to the Church of England, but also to English civil liberties. Thus, exclaims Wiles, "In the discourse of Bonfire, the primary anti-thesis of 'Catholicism' is not 'Protestantism' but 'freedom'."<sup>111</sup>

Bonfire night also served as a venue for the expression of more localised and private social tensions, as David Cressy explains in his study of the Fifth: "It was a time for settling scores, whether personal or socio-economic."<sup>112</sup> By the early 1800s, as Guy Fawkes gradually became a vehicle through which to vilify local figures, bonfire gangs appeared and the demonstrations became increasingly riotous.<sup>113</sup> In Lewes, the celebrations of 1847 had been particularly rowdy: "'Ruffians intimidated respectable householders. 'Bonfire boys' in masks and 'fanatical dress' and armed with bats and bludgeons rolled lighted tar barrels through the streets."<sup>114</sup> In his study of the Fifth at Lewes, Jim Etherington stresses the contemporary nature of the religious issues which concerned Victorian Bonfire Boys, who were largely Church of England adherents.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, as he suggests, the Fifth

<sup>109</sup> Jim Etherington, Lewes Bonfire Night: A Short History of the Guy Fawkes Celebrations (Seaford: S B Publications, 1993), 33

<sup>110</sup> Wiles, The Lewes Bonfire Festival, 183.

<sup>111</sup> Wiles, 188.

<sup>112</sup> Cressy, 78.

<sup>113</sup> See Storch, "Please to Remember."

<sup>114</sup> Cressy, . 79. Sections of this are quoted from a Lewes newspaper report.

<sup>115</sup> Etherington, 67.

had important class dimensions: "During the nineteenth century the celebrations were used as a vehicle to promote religious and political views, providing many who were not enfranchised an opportunity to publicly express themselves on these issues."<sup>116</sup> Thus, as Bonfire Night became imbued with a multitude of meanings, local people also utilised it as an opportunity to seek retribution for perceived injustices and to negotiate a variety of threats to society and the social order.

The hostilities surrounding Sister Amy's funeral manifested precisely the same types of religious and social antagonisms expressed during the Guy Fawkes festivities. St. Margaret's, and Neale in particular, epitomised an array of perceived transgressions against the values of the people of Lewes. The association of monasticism with the Roman Church combined with the novelty of Anglican religious orders in Britain, allowed for these institutions to be refashioned popularly as Roman Catholic and thus, inherently "unEnglish."<sup>117</sup> Not surprisingly, during Sister Amy's funeral the discourse of the mob, both in terms of language and behaviour, was premised on the particular identity it had fashioned for St. Margaret's. Thus, the mob's cries of "No-Popery" and "Remember, remember, the fifth of November" as it clamoured around the funeral vault, represented this form of identification. As they were each November the Fifth, however, the demonstrations against Catholicism at the funeral were largely symbolic. The real threat posed by Neale and the Sisterhood was not against English religious liberties, but rather against the liberties of English families. By allegedly seducing the daughter of an evangelical clergyman to abandon her

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<sup>116</sup> Etherington, 68.

<sup>117</sup> See Michael Hill, Michael Hill, The Religious Order: A Study of Virtuoso Religion and Its Legitimation in the Nineteenth-Century Church of England (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973); and Reed, "The Feminisation of Anglo-Catholicism," for analyses of this association.

family against his will, the Sisterhood had conducted itself in a manner which the people of Lewes refused to tolerate. The thirty-year old Emily Scobell's measured decision to join St. Margaret's was therefore irrelevant in the minds of the public as she became simply the victim of a wicked Tractarian plot. How better to defend the honour of the family and the grieving Scobell than to recast St. Margaret's as a conniving instrument of Rome: in this way the mob was able to draw upon the same rhetoric of anti-Catholicism and anti-ritualism through which it had expressed their solidarity for Church and nation just two weeks earlier during the Guy Fawkes festivities.<sup>118</sup>

While the actions of the mob in Lewes created the scandal and fuelled the animosity between Scobell and the Sisterhood, the Sussex media was responsible for sensationalising events and exposing details of the private lives of its principal actors.<sup>119</sup> Crucially, the press enhanced popular protest toward St. Margaret's by constructing an identity for the sisterhood which embodied the antithesis of Victorian domestic ideology and Protestant values. The Community's identity was refigured around the axes of religion, gender, and nationhood. By representing the Sisterhood as a threefold defiance of Victorian conventions, the press created a discursive framework within which the public could situate its fears toward the religious life, and thus endorse the actions of the crowd at Lewes. The newspapers which reported on the "Disgraceful scene at the Funeral. Puseyite Demonstration, and Violence of the Mob" drew heavily upon the us/them dialectic of the Fifth.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> See David Cressy, "The Fifth of November Remembered," 77. For a discussion of Anglo-Catholic protest and rioting throughout England at mid-century, see John Wolfe.

<sup>119</sup> Kristine Ottesen Garrigan, "Foreword: Decorum, Scandal, and the Press" in Garrigan, Ed. *Victorian Scandals. Representations of Gender and Class* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 24, 1857. *The Times* reported the funeral in a sympathetic manner with regard to the sisters and Neale. *The Times*, November 21, 1857.

The headline is telling: the scene at the funeral was indeed disgraceful, and most Victorians would have been outraged by a vicious attack on a defenseless group of ladies. It was thus crucial to reinforce the outsider status of the Sisterhood. One of the most effective means of accomplishing this was to evoke the notorious Doctor Pusey, the Anglo-Catholic figure most responsible for the revival of female monasticism in the Church of England. Lampooned and emasculated in publications such as *Punch*, Pusey symbolised the most extreme elements of asceticism.<sup>121</sup> Through such an association, the press could publicly legitimate the "Violence of the Mob."

Gossip and rumour played a significant part in the press' representation of St. Margaret's as religiously defiant. When Neale and the sisters had arrived at Lewes for the funeral, the mob was already assembled: somehow they had received word that an unwelcome group of strangers were to appear. According to *The Sussex Advertiser*, "A rumour of what was going on had evidently been circulated throughout the town."<sup>122</sup> *The Brighton Examiner* provided additional details, explaining that reports were circulating about secret meetings between Emily Scobell and a "Puseyite priest in canonical dress" to whom she would confess and receive absolution. The behaviour of the crowd at Sister Amy's funeral was in part a reaction to speculation and rumours and it was from such gossip that it had formed their opinions about the identity of St. Margaret's and Neale. In his pioneering study of sisterhoods, A. M. Allchin explains how rumours shaped popular ideas about their character: "Any rumour, however unlikely, was enough to awaken powerful and unpredictable feelings, and to jeopardize the life and

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<sup>121</sup> On the association of Puseyism with femininity, see David Hilliard, "UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality" *Victorian Studies* 25 (Winter 1982), 181 - 210; and Reed, "A Female Movement."

<sup>122</sup> *Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 24, 1857.



work of these small and unknown societies."<sup>123</sup> Emily Scobell's meetings with the infamous Neale were offensive to the crowd in both form and content: the clandestine manner in which they were conducted together with the practice of confession.

Various newspaper accounts emphasised the sense of religious indignation displayed by spectators at the funeral. When, as Neale and the sisters emerged from the church, the language of the mob reinforced the religious motivations for their anger: "Yells and shouts arose with redoubled fury, 'No Popery,' 'Down with the Pope,' and the Fifth of November cry being among the most prominent watchwords of the mob."<sup>124</sup> In order to reaffirm the sense of difference between evangelical rituals and those of the Sisterhood, *The Brighton Examiner* reported how elements such as the coffin's shape and the presence of a bier, were "very distasteful to the spectators."<sup>125</sup> Thus, *The Sussex Advertiser* could inform its readers that the outburst at the funeral was caused by "an alleged attempt to introduce at an interment, some of the rites and ceremonies adopted at certain Puseyitical establishments of the country."<sup>126</sup> Significantly, although the work of the Sisterhood was directly responsible for Sister Amy's death, the Community's 'Popish' practices provided the medium through which the mob, and subsequently the press, could express its opposition to monasticism.

The religion-based rhetoric of the mob disguised the more fundamental gender anxieties prompted by Sister Amy's alleged seduction and demise. Evangelical Anglicanism occupied a relatively secure position in

<sup>123</sup> Allchin, *The Silent Rebellion*, 98.

<sup>124</sup> *Sussex Advertiser*, Nov 24, 1857.

<sup>125</sup> *Brighton Examiner*, Nov 24, 1857.

<sup>126</sup> *Sussex Advertiser*, Nov 24, 1857.

mid-nineteenth century Sussex.<sup>127</sup> On less secure footing was the patriarchal family and women's position of subservience within it. That the institution which his daughter had joined was Anglo-Catholic merely aggravated Scobell's ire: as his letters to Mother Ann reveal, his real indignity stemmed from his loss of paternal authority and the Sisterhood's apparent disregard for the family. Such a threat was felt deeply not only in England, but also America. In his study of the destruction of a Boston convent in 1834 by a Protestant working-class mob, Daniel Cohen highlights the gendered motives of the rioters.<sup>128</sup> Cohen argues that the mob's outburst may have been motivated by a desire to discipline the nuns for their transgression against domestic ideology. As with the Lewes mob, the Boston rioters utilised "the motif of female captivity" as "a convenient excuse" to critique monasticism; however, their actions, Cohen explains, "may also have signalled a deeper reluctance to acknowledge that American women might actually prefer the unconventional "separate sphere" of Mount Benedict to the patriarchal households in which most of them had been raised."<sup>129</sup> In Lewes, the mob drew upon similar motivations to avenge a father's usurped patriarchal rights. In light of the recent development of Anglican sisterhoods in England, it may also have been sending a stern warning to women who

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<sup>127</sup> For details of the religious complexion of Sussex at mid-century, see John A. Vickers, ed., The Religious Census of Sussex, 1851, Sussex Record Society, 75 (Lewes: Barbican House, 1989) East Sussex County Record Office, Lewes. In 1851 Lewes and district supported 68 Protestant Churches, 40 of which were Church of England. 74. The extent of popular hostility toward Neale and the Sisterhood suggests that few of these churches supported Tractarian ideals. See also Verena Smith, ed., The Town Book of Lewes, 1837-1901, 70, (Lewes: Barbican House, 1976).

<sup>128</sup> Cohen, "The Gendered Motives of the Convent Rioters" in "Miss Reed and the Superiors," 162-163.

<sup>129</sup> Cohen, 163.

defied the family.<sup>130</sup>

In order to justify the infliction of such punishment, the press needed to reconfigure the identity of the sisters as unlike other Victorian women. To do so, reporters drew upon traditional ideas about gender by focusing on the most obvious badge of feminine identity, attire. The townspeople at Lewes would have been unaccustomed to the sight of a group of women religious in their midst. Reporters keenly pointed out the effects of such a sight: "The Sisters of Mercy were attired in cloaks and hoods, presenting an extraordinary contrast to the ordinary fashion of female attire."<sup>131</sup> According to *The Sussex Advertiser*, the appearance of the sisters, coupled with other oddities such as the [chequered] pall over the coffin, "excite[d] an adverse feeling in the minds of the spectators."<sup>132</sup> As the sisters were aware, "the dress adopted by the ladies was one of the obnoxious features; it smacked of a nun's habit."<sup>133</sup> In a public letter to *The Times* defending the sisters, Neale made explicit the connections among gender, class, clothing, and identity during the fracas:

the strangest part of all was, that men, certainly in the garb of gentlemen, could stand by and see ladies dashed this way and that, their veils dragged off, and their dresses torn, and, far from rendering the least assistance, could actually excite the dregs of the rabble to further violence.<sup>134</sup>

This focus on attire indicates the symbolic significance attributed by the crowd

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<sup>130</sup> Attacks by angry rioters upon Anglican sisters in England were not unusual during the formative period of these institutions. For example, in 1850 Priscilla Sellon's order was attacked at the laying of a foundation stone of Community buildings in Plymouth. The sisters and clergy were pelted with potatoes and plates by a drunken mob who were eventually removed by the police. See Thomas J. Williams, *Priscilla Lydia Sellon: Restorer after Three Centuries of the Religious Life in the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1965), 80.

<sup>131</sup> *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 21, 1857.

<sup>132</sup> *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 24, 1857.

<sup>133</sup> Sister Violet, *All Hallows' Ditchingham: The Story of an East Anglian Community* (Oxford: Becket Publications, 1983), 12

<sup>134</sup> *The Times*, November 23, 1857; "The Lewes Riot," 28; and *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 24, 1857.

to the sisters' apparel. Their clothing served to destabilise gender norms in two ways. By assuming such attire, the sisters cast off markers of class distinction and femininity in a form of sartorial socialism that, in the eyes of the mob, stripped them of the protection which ladies would customarily be afforded. Secondly, the sisters' dress seems to have stripped the men of Lewes - both spectators and those in the mob - of masculine propriety. Although sisters were often granted immunity by their dress when working in urban slums, paradoxically in Lewes, the symbolism attached to their costume served as a *carte blanche* for physical violence in a literal attempt to strip away the identity of the sisters by tearing at their clothes.

The assault on Neale, more vicious and unrelenting than that on the sisters, involved a more thorough public disrobing. Mother Ann recorded how "Mr Neale was shamefully treated" by the crowd which chanted "'burn him,' 'tear him to pieces,'" and they actually knocked him over the bier and kicked him, dragged off his gown, and took away his cap."<sup>135</sup> The media sensationalised the post-funeral scene, emphasising the mob's destruction of priestly garments amid the general tumult:

Mr. Neale was hustled from the churchyard into the road, and during the process he was thrown down, and assailed with repeated raps on his collegiate cap...The lanterns were broken and extinguished, the Sisters of Mercy thrown about, the priests had their surplices broken and torn from their shoulders, the graves were trodden down, Mr. Neale was bonnetted and had to fly for his life, being pursued by nearly 1,000 persons, the majority of them tradesmen of Lewes!<sup>136</sup>

Noting that with his cap torn off and robbed of his cassock, Neale "presented a very sad spectacle," *The Sussex Express* delighted in the fact that Neale had

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<sup>135</sup> House Diaries, SSM Archives.

<sup>136</sup> *Sussex Express*, Nov. 21, 1857; *The Brighton Herald*, Nov. 21, 1857.

to borrow a hat and jacket in order to travel back to Sackville College.<sup>137</sup> *The Hull Advertiser*, however, was not impressed with the mob's behaviour: "It is a mockery to talk of the religious liberty enjoyed in a district where the exercise of the right of private judgment by a clergyman in the Church of England subjects him to the indignity of having his clothes torn from his back, his person outraged with blows, and his very life threatened."<sup>138</sup> Devoid of his priestly apparel, Neale literally had to return to East Grinstead a changed man: not only was he divested of his religious identity, but his defrocking also led to his symbolic emasculation.<sup>139</sup> The masculinity of the rioters, conversely, was reinforced by their savage-like behaviour as they attempted to drive out the intruders in their midst and restore order to the community.<sup>140</sup>

As it did during the Guy Fawkes celebrations, costume played an important symbolic role during the riot to distinguish Neale and the sisters as outsiders, and as appropriate targets of aggressive behaviour.<sup>141</sup> Religious garb, could not, however, overshadow the gender politics at work in the minds of the rioters. Although the Sisterhood certainly had played its part in Sister Amy's death, the mob did not launch a critique based on the perils of cottage nursing. Rather, it blamed and sought revenge upon Neale for the tragedy of her death not only because of his surreptitious methods, but also because he was a man. Outside the King's Head, where the reviled priest and four of the sisters took refuge, Police Superintendent Jenner "appealed to the

<sup>137</sup> *Sussex Express*, Nov 21, 1857.

<sup>138</sup> *Hull Advertiser*, November 23, 1857. Lambeth Palace Library, Neale Papers.

<sup>139</sup> On the relationship between Anglo-Catholicism and Effeminacy, see John Shelton Reed, "Giddy Young Men: A Counter-Cultural Aspect of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism" *Comparative Social Research* vol. 11 (1989).

<sup>140</sup> On the varieties of constructions of masculinities, see Michael Roper and Josh Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>141</sup> For the symbolism of attire during the Fifth, see Etherington.

better feelings of the mob outside to allow the Sisters of Mercy to depart unmolested. Voices were heard in exclamation: "We don't want to hurt them, we want the Pope inside."<sup>142</sup> Thus Neale, the Sussex svengali, was positioned as a greater threat to domestic harmony than scarlet fever. Although Mother Ann was responsible equally for encouraging Emily Scobell to join St. Margaret's, she and the other sisters were protected from the brunt of the mob's force by both a reluctance to target women, and by a belief that the women were under the priest's control.

Although one paper claimed that the sisters might have been killed if they had not found refuge at the White Hart Hotel, unsurprisingly, the Sussex press generally played down the assault upon the sisters.<sup>143</sup> *The Sussex Express* announced that "during the melee, the Sisters of Mercy were regarded with compassion by the mob."<sup>144</sup> Neale took exception to this statement in a letter to the editor which attempted to set the story straight: "your readers will probably not gather [from your report] that their veils were torn from their bonnets, their dresses torn, the shawl of the orphan child that was with them torn from her, and they themselves assailed with the vilest language."<sup>145</sup> *The Brighton Examiner* provided a more detailed account, recording that "The ladies, although much frightened, were not much hurt, except from the crowding; some of their dresses, from the same cause were considerably torn." While the article lamented the "disgraceful scenes" at the funeral, it did not find it necessary to condemn the actions of the mob. Rather it explained the circumstances under which Sister Amy had been inveigled from her home by

<sup>142</sup> *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 1857. According to the paper, once in the White Hart Hotel with four of the sisters (the others were in Landsdowne place) Neale treated the patrons to beer.

<sup>143</sup> *The Hull Advertiser*, unlike other papers, was outraged by the behaviour of the Lewes crowd.

<sup>144</sup> *The Sussex Express*, Nov 21, 1857.

<sup>145</sup> *The Sussex Express*, Nov 23, 1857.

"a priestly leader" and concluded that "[w]ith such reports rife in the town, it could hardly be supposed that the curiosity of the people of Lewes would not have been excited on the above occasion."<sup>146</sup> Thus, by exposing "by what stealthy steps and by what subtle system the agents of Tractarianism carry out their objects" the press transformed an attack into "curiosity" and condoned a shameless disregard for Victorian chivalry.<sup>147</sup> *The Hull Advertiser* refused to tolerate such justifications, lamenting that "The sufferers are the minority in the Church, and, therefore, the press is too cowardly to afford them fair play or to claim for them that legal protection which is the constitutional right of every British subject."<sup>148</sup>

Of course, what *The Hull Advertiser* failed to note was that in the discourse of the mob and its supporters in the press, Neale and the sisters were not entitled to such rights because they were no longer identified as English.<sup>149</sup> The religious practices and apparent disregard for family which set them apart assisted in their discursive transformation into foreigners. *The Brighton Examiner* drew these themes together in its condemnation of St. Margaret's:

The family had been greatly persecuted by the Puseyites for some years....which ended in separating [Miss Scobell] from her relations, and inducing her to belong to the Eastgrinstead Institute. This, however, was the work of time, and effected with Jesuitical cunning....I cannot be surprised that such Italian-like conduct should be received with the greatest abhorrence by Englishmen, who like everything fair and above board.<sup>150</sup>

This seemingly flagrant disregard for religious, national, and familial loyalties

<sup>146</sup> *Brighton Examiner*, Nov 24, 1857.

<sup>147</sup> Extraordinary Edition of the *Sussex Advertiser*, Dec 1, 1857.

<sup>148</sup> *Hull Advertiser*, Nov 23, 1857.

<sup>149</sup> See Poovey, *Uneven Developments* for the ways in which representations of women were viewed as critical to images of English national character, esp. Introduction, 6.

<sup>150</sup> *Brighton Examiner*, November 24, 1857.

struck at the heart of the citizens of Lewes: faced with such an “unEnglish” and unscrupulous enemy, the attack was thus legitimated. At a meeting of the Brighton Protestant Association, members blamed the ecclesiastical hierarchy rather than the Sisterhood for the ritual practices surrounding the funeral, but stressed that such ritual was a corruption of true Protestant faith: “The fault lies with the Bishops of the Established Church (applause)--with the ecclesiastical authorities, who have suffered Popery to be introduced into England, and allowed the corrupt faith and practice of Rome to be confounded with the reformed faith of Protestant England.”<sup>151</sup> Mr. Paul Foskett, chairman of the Association, advised parents to be wary of the hidden threat lurking in their midst, reinforcing the notion that Emily had been the unwitting victim of a Popish conspiracy:

Parents and guardians, will you not pluck the young thought-less [sic] one from the deluding priests? Will you suffer the music, the glitter, the sham pomp, the pretended sanctity to mislead your offspring? It matters not whether called ‘Anglican’ or ‘Roman’ --THE THING’S THE SAME.<sup>152</sup>

By equating the Sisterhood with Roman Catholicism, which they saw as inherently corrupt, the press and other critics of St. Margaret’s were able to feed off the rampant anti-Catholicism which thrived in Sussex to fashion a narrative in which Sister Amy’s death could be exploited in order to reveal, as one editor described it, the “secret and mole-like machinations” by which “the agents of Tractarianism carry out their objects.”<sup>153</sup> That Emily Scobell, or indeed her father, might in any way be responsible for the unfolding of events was not considered in such a discourse, rather, the controversy centred on the Sisterhood as a ‘Romish’ institution at odds with the teachings of the

<sup>151</sup> Brighton Examiner, Nov 24, 1857.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in The Brighton Gazette, 26 November, 1857; Emphasis in original.

<sup>153</sup> Sussex Advertiser, Extraordinary Edition, Dec 1, 1857.



Anglican faith.

Defenders of the Sisterhood also utilised Sister Amy's funeral and the riot it spawned to comment on the diverse nature of English civility. Unlike its Sussex-based counterparts, *The Hull Advertiser* took advantage of the scandal to overturn assumptions about Englishness by launching a regional critique. If this outrage, the paper, bemoaned,

[I]nstead of happening near the metropolis of Protestant England, had taken place in Austria, Spain, Naples, or the Roman States, what a hurricane of indignation would be raised throughout every part of the country!...But the brutality which would demonstrate priestly hatred of heretics on the part of a Spanish or Neapolitan mob is glazed over as an imprudent but not practically reprehensible display of evangelical zeal on the part of the Sussex clod-hoppers!<sup>154</sup>

The regional identification of the mob was also singled out in a letter to Bishop Gilbert by a Robert Moorsom of Brighton: "Surely the glorious work which the Sisters did might, one would think, have removed any amount of prejudice. Not however that of the mob at Lewes. Their brutal conduct is a disgrace to the Town and a slur upon the civilisation of England."<sup>155</sup> Significantly, while the press and the mob focused chiefly on the religious identity of the sisters, and thus could justify the violent attack, Moorsom emphasised their identity as nurses, and it was through such an identification that St. Margaret's would eventually gain wider acceptance.<sup>156</sup> Even *The Sussex Advertiser* duly noted that "Whatever opinion may be entertained as to the course of secluded life adopted by the sisters--their devotedness and self-denial...as voluntary nurses...must command due respect."<sup>157</sup>

<sup>154</sup> *The Hull Advertiser*, November 23, 1857.

<sup>155</sup> Neale Papers, MSS 2677, LPL. Robert Moorsom to the Bishop of Chichester, 22 December, 1857.

<sup>156</sup> See Hill, *The Religious Order*.

<sup>157</sup> *The Sussex Advertiser*, Nov. 24, 1857.

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### Feud: Fallout from the Funeral, and the Battle of the Wills

The tissue of misrepresentation with which the case has been surrounded, cannot be swept away without occasioning unhappiness to those whom, for our dear Sister's sake, I would, were it possible, have shielded.<sup>158</sup>

John Mason Neale, *The Lewes Riot: Its Causes and Consequences*

Sister Amy's death and the pandemonium which surrounded the funeral created serious repercussions for St. Margaret's. The Bishop of Chichester, who had provided a modicum of support to the nascent Community, now formally severed all ties. Archdeacon Otter, a former supporter of the Sisterhood who had praised Sister Amy's efforts as a nurse, followed the Bishop's lead, stating that "it is with no common feelings of distress that I declare myself unable conscientiously to continue among the number of your supporters."<sup>159</sup> A host of wealthy patrons and subscribers upon whose financial contributions the Sisterhood had relied also withdrew their support. The sisters were faced with another upheaval when their landlord, a dissenter, issued an eviction notice, stating that his "conscientious scruples forbade his longer retaining them as tenants."<sup>160</sup> In typical style, the comment of the official history of the Community was restrained: "[p]robably the event was merely a very temporary setback but a rather unpleasant one all the same."<sup>161</sup> The loss of a new sister, episcopal backing, and their residence, combined with public ridicule surely must have tested the Community's collective faith. These 'set-backs' happened within the context of a vitriolic feud which ensued between the Sisterhood and Scobell

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<sup>158</sup> *The Lewes Riot*, 5.

<sup>159</sup> W. B. Otter to Miss Gream, December 2, 1857. Cited in "The Lewes Riot," 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Memoir of IMN*, 125.

<sup>161</sup> "The Planting of the Lord," 14.

in the months following Sister Amy's death. The bitter animosity that had long existed between Neale and Scobell erupted into a "war of personalities" as each attempted to expose the wickedness of his rival.<sup>162</sup> In so doing, they helped to polarise the debate about the identity and function of sisterhoods in British society.

Identity politics, already highly evident at the funeral, also became central to the disputes which arose in the wake of the scandal at Lewes. Participants in these debates, particularly Neale and Scobell, attempted to fashion specific identities for themselves and for their adversaries in order to justify their actions and beliefs. Scobell's rival was Anglo-Catholic, of notorious reputation, considerably taller, and twenty-five years his junior. In Scobell's published reply to a pamphlet issued by Neale, the ways in which the feud was constructed as a "war of personalities" was made explicit:

[T]he recipe is this, "Find a self-willed daughter, and an irritable father. If this cannot be had, bold accusation will do as well. Then let any Priest take a Prayer Book into any parish, house, or school-room; let him enter any family, in any guise, and there work his will and pleasure. If any father, husband, brother shall dare complain, denounce him, magnify his demerits, proclaim him to the world."<sup>163</sup>

In the clashes which occurred between St. Margaret's and Scobell, and with the Bishop of Chichester, representations of character both drew upon and challenged Victorian gender ideology. Just as the actions of the Lewes mob toward the sisters and Neale were seen in relation to gender politics, so too in the post-riot discursive feud, the main adversaries utilised ideas about gender and domestic ideology to negotiate the contested terrain occupied by sisterhoods at mid century.

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<sup>162</sup> "A Letter to the Rev John Mason Neale," 4.

<sup>163</sup> John Scobell, "A Reply to the Postscript of the Rev. John Mason Neale," (London: Nisbet, 1858), 12. PH 71164. This document included many letters between the sisterhood and Emily.

The loss of episcopal support came as a severe blow to the Community. Bishop Gilbert's relationship with St. Margaret's had never been easy, but the vehemence with which he terminated it provides one of the strongest examples of the fragile ties between sisterhoods and Church hierarchy. Wishing to exonerate himself from criticism such as that voiced by the Brighton Protestant Association, the Bishop withdrew his association with the Sisterhood in the form of a public letter to Mother Ann just days following the funeral:

Your society....has for some time past submitted itself to the unlimited influence of Mr Neale, a clergyman in whose views and practices, it is well known, I have no confidence. Especially it is well known that I deny that the Church of England sanctions the habitual practice of Confession. She acknowledges it only in rare and exceptional cases, and Mr. Neale is unwarranted in using it in the frequent and regular way in which he applies it. Those who admit such application of it to themselves, manifest thereby the inadequacy of their direct faith in Christ's promises. Their resort to this unauthorised remedy, by a righteous retribution, issues in a continuous increase of weakness, and an accumulation of obstructions in the way of the true influences of grace upon their hearts....I desire, therefore, that henceforth neither you, nor any of your Sisterhood, will state that I approve of, or have any connection with your Institution & Sisterhood of St Margaret's.<sup>164</sup>

This letter must have come as quite a shock to the sisters with its blatant censure of their religious beliefs and practices. The Community diary, however, provides no clue as to their reaction, its entry for November 23 merely states, "The Mother heard from the Bishop of Chichester."<sup>165</sup> While it is unlikely that the Bishop would have been unaware from the beginning of

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<sup>164</sup> SSM Archives, Bishop of Chichester to Mother Ann, Nov 21, 1857. The letter was addressed to the "Lady Superioress." It concluded with "I desire that any Circulars, or printed copies of your Rules, in which my name is introduced, may be cancelled, and not used with my name in future." Reprinted in "The Lewes Riot," Appendix, 36-7. According to Lough, Influence of IMN, the Bishop published this letter.

<sup>165</sup> SSM Archives, House diary, November 23, 1857.

his relationship with St. Margaret's that the sisters confessed to Neale, his realisation that the priest was willing to hear the confession of a woman not yet in the Sisterhood, against her father's wishes, made his continued support of the institution untenable. Significantly, it was the need for confession which had initially established a relationship between Emily Scobell and St. Margaret's, and based on the frequency of this practice the Bishop ultimately withdrew his support.

Mother Ann, however, was not prepared to accept such a rebuke and travelled to Chichester to present her explanation of events to the Bishop personally. He refused to see her. She appealed to him to reconsider his withdrawal, stating that "I have with me documents of so much importance to the private history of Mr. Scobell and his daughter, that I think you will be sorry if you refuse me an interview."<sup>166</sup> However, the Bishop did not wish to be enlightened as to Emily's troubles at home, telling Mother Ann that "I will be no party to any such intrusions of strangers into private and family matters."<sup>167</sup> While he maintained officially that the practice of confession most aggrieved his sensibilities as an Anglican, his public disavowal of the Community in the wake of the funeral suggests that his concerns about St. Margaret's were as much social as they were doctrinal. For Bishop Gilbert, the rights of a father had been abused by an errant priest and he wasted no time expressing his "deep-felt sympathy" for Scobell in a public letter which referred to Neale as that "heartless [and] infatuated man from East Grinstead."<sup>168</sup> In his public letter of rebuke, rather than addressing the thornier issues of parental authority and "private family matters," Gilbert justified his condemnation of St. Margaret's by emphasising its "unAnglican"

<sup>166</sup> Sarah Ann Gream to the Lord Bishop of Chichester, December 3, 1857. *The Lewes Riot*, 37.

<sup>167</sup> Miss Gream to the Bishop, Dec 6, 1857. *The Lewes Riot*, 38.

<sup>168</sup> Bishop Gilbert to the Rev. John Scobell, Nov 22, 1857. *The Lewes Riot*, 36.

identity.

Mother Ann did not hide her disgust at the Bishop's refusal to admit her, noting caustically that "In my ignorance, I had supposed that the door of my Pastor would ever be open to one of the least of his flock, if only she had any trouble or difficulty about which she desired to consult with him."<sup>169</sup> She was not alone in taking exception to the Bishop's reprimand. Pointing out that sisterhoods in England "had the accumulate prejudice of centuries to fight against" yet had made "rapid progress," a supporter of St. Margaret's, Robert Moorsom, complained about the arbitrary nature of the Bishop's censure: "To be cast off by their Bishop...is the greatest blow which could have fallen upon [the sisters]; and surely this heavy penalty should not be inflicted without inquiry, without anything like judicial procedure, without even hearing them in their own defence."<sup>170</sup> To both Mother Ann and commentators such as Moorsom, the actions of the Bishop seemed sharply at odds with those of judicious Christian leadership. Each played upon gendered discourses of female dependency in their attempts to express their disapproval of his leadership. Although she was a determined Superior challenging the head of the diocese, Mother Ann chose to represent herself as "one of the least of his flock" seeking to clear her good name. In Gilbert's mind, however, this performance of femininity held little sway in light of the perceived religious and moral transgressions which the sisters had committed.

Not surprisingly, the strongest condemnation of Gilbert's sanction came from Neale in the form of an open letter to the Bishop of Chichester

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<sup>169</sup> Miss Gream to the Bishop, *The Lewes Riot*, 38.

<sup>170</sup> Neale Papers, MSS 2677, LPL. Robert Moorsom to the Bishop of Chichester, 22 December, 1857.

entitled, *The Lewes Riot, Its Causes and Consequences*.<sup>171</sup> This forty-seven page document, complete with lengthy appendix, served as a vehicle to expose the entire sordid affair to the public. While Neale claimed to regret such publicity, the document sheds light on how he utilised the scandal to recraft the popular identity of St. Margaret's. At once a defence of his own and the Sisterhood's behaviour, this document also attempted to explain to the public the utility and virtue of female religious orders. Incensed with the open manner in which Bishop Gilbert had offered his support to Scobell and withdrawn it from St. Margaret's immediately following the funeral, Neale drew upon a gendered discourse of chivalry to condemn the Bishop's reaction to the behaviour of the crowd at Lewes:

It might appear strange that in neither letter did there occur one word of sympathy for those ladies whom you had hitherto supported, and who had suffered so severely from a furious mob,-- nor one word of reprobation of the unchristian and unmanly violence which called for the reprobation of the civil magistrate, but not, it seems, for that of the chief pastor of the Diocese."<sup>172</sup>

Nor did Neale confine his charge of "unchristian and unmanly" behaviour to the mob, as his explicit rebuke of the Bishop's reaction to the scene at Lewes carried with it an implicit criticism of both his status as a Christian leader and a gentleman. Of the manner in which the Bishop dismissed the Sisterhood, Neale also took exception, noting the lack of justice exercised by Gilbert while emphasising the faithful labour of the sisters:

In withdrawing your name from St. Margaret's, [you gave] not one word of kindness, or sympathy, of gratitude for services rendered to the poor of your own Episcopal charge: not one inquiry on whether the charges on which you condemned the Institution were true: a sentence pronounced without any

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<sup>171</sup> The Rev. John Mason Neale, *The Lewes Riot, Its Causes and Consequences. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of Chichester.* (London: Joseph Masters, 1857).

<sup>172</sup> *Lewes Riot*, 4.

investigation, and without any knowledge on the part of the sufferers of who their accusers were.<sup>173</sup>

In Neale's highly-charged discourse, Bishop Gilbert was effectively emasculated: his lack of protection toward his flock, especially those women who devoted their lives to God, coupled with his lack of judicial propriety was designed to denigrate the Bishop while appealing to the public's sense of fairness. To underscore this character assassination, Neale feigned incredulity toward the Bishop's treatment of Mother Ann: "That anyone, be his rank of station what it may, should thus repulse a lady, whose only object in requesting an interview was to set herself right in his good opinion, I could not have believed."<sup>174</sup> By calling attention to the sisters' devoted work - to their identity as voluntary labourers for the parish - Neale hoped to recast them and the Sisterhood in a sympathetic light.

As they did in the controversy between the Sisterhood and the Church hierarchy, constructions of identity framed the bitter feud which transpired between St. Margaret's and Scobell. Emily's father refused to let his denouncement of the Community subside with his daughter's death; in fact, it provided a springboard from which to launch a multitude of charges against the institution. The perceived treachery of the Sisterhood, and of Neale in particular, was pitted against Scobell's filial rights. Within this discourse Emily Scobell was denied all agency, recast as a helpless pawn.<sup>175</sup> Scobell emphasised these themes in his own account of the episode, the fiendishly-titled, "Painful account of the Perversion and Untimely Death of Miss Scobell, the Stolen Daughter of the Revd. J. Scobell, inveigled from her home, persuaded to become a Puseyite Sister of Mercy, and through threats of

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<sup>173</sup> Lewes Riot, 4.

<sup>174</sup> Lewes Riot, 5.

<sup>175</sup> Scobell, Reply to the Lewes Riot, PH 6265, 3.



eternal damnation to her soul, plundered of her property by a crafty band of Puseyite Jesuits for the support of Popery." "Painful indeed was [Scobell's] position!" declared *The Sussex Express*, "Nay, indeed it was cruel that a parent should be deprived of his rights of his daughter, who, only a few weeks before, had left her home for that of strangers."<sup>176</sup> The most dramatic means by which Scobell could explain his daughter's behaviour was to expose the Community as an instrument of the Pope. As such, Scobell denounced the "crafty band of Puseyite Jesuits," which in his mind, had precipitated her death. In such a discourse, the death of Emily Scobell and the brutal attack on the sisters paled in comparison to the acute threat against patriarchal authority and Protestantism posed by the Sisterhood.

The documents which marked Emily Scobell's death further charted the symbolic progression of the transformation of her identity: the will was signed Emily Anne Elizabeth Scobell, the name on the death certificate was "Amy Scobell," while the inscription on her tomb read "Sister Amy": it was upon the first of these that Scobell's attention first turned.<sup>177</sup> Rather than acknowledging the transformation of his daughter's identity as the result of her wilful independence, Scobell portrayed her as a dependent child who had been manipulated to serve the interests of St. Margaret's. The day after the funeral, Scobell dispatched his eldest son to East Grinstead to inquire of the Community's physician as to "the soundness of Sister Amy's mind when she made her will."<sup>178</sup> "Why were we not summoned?" her father demanded, when her condition worsened on November 12th. Scobell believed that the Sisterhood had deliberately delayed contact to ensure that she had a chance to

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<sup>176</sup> *The Sussex Express*, Nov. 21, 1857.

<sup>177</sup> Neale Papers, MS 2677, LPL.

<sup>178</sup> SSM Archives. House Diary, November 19, 1857. Emily's younger brother was to receive the bulk of Sister Amy's estate.

make a last-minute will before the family could reach East Grinstead.<sup>179</sup> In such a dramatic narrative, Emily's former deceit vanished. Scobell determined that his daughter had been unduly influenced on her deathbed, causing him to dispute the will and involve the Sisterhood in a protracted battle over its legality. Unable to exert his authority over Emily while she lived, he now attempted to do so after her death. At issue was not only the amount of the legacy Sister Amy had left to St. Margaret's, £400, but more significantly to Scobell, that the will was controlled by the Sisterhood. He thus informed Mother Ann that he was willing "to take the administration of his daughter's will off the hands of Mr. Neale and the Mother," but the tenacious Superior stated flatly that "they refused to give it up."<sup>180</sup>

Unsure of how to proceed, the Community sought legal advice from solicitor John Rawlison of Horsham who suggested that based on "courteous gentlemanly and Christian motives," they submit to Scobell's request, in order to "comply with what may be considered in any similar case the natural and proper wish of a father to look after the affairs of his Children, without your being called upon to sacrifice any Principle, or lose any advantage to your Institution."<sup>181</sup> Rawlison also maintained that St. Margaret's would be better served by releasing control over the will to avoid a potentially drawn-out legal battle, and to help create better relations with the public: "If you determine to prove the will....I fear your motives will be misconstrued and your conduct maligned by very many who may be prejudiced by this very act."<sup>182</sup> In the following days, although "sick from worry," Neale and Mother

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<sup>179</sup> The family were in Brighton at the time of Sister Amy's death. She died at 2:10 pm, John Scobell did not arrive until 3:30. He claimed that the will was made at 8:30 am.

<sup>180</sup> As recorded in the Community Diary, December 1, 1857. SSM Archives.

<sup>181</sup> LPL Neale Papers, MSS 2677. John T. Rawlison to JMN, December 3, 1857.

<sup>182</sup> Rawlison to JMN, December 3, 1857. SSM Archives.

Ann decided to maintain their positions as executors.<sup>183</sup> They must have believed that Scobell might not conduct himself according to the "courteous gentlemanly and Christian motives" as laid out by Mr. Rawlison, and were keen to secure their portion of the will. Further, considering as she did that Sister Amy was one of her own children, Mother Ann would have felt an obligation to carry out her dying wishes.

The struggle over the rights to execute the will speaks to the ways in which Sister Amy's death was manipulated by those who sought to deny her the responsibility for her own actions and to vilify the Sisterhood. Scobell maintained that as her father, he should have complete access to the document, while Mother Ann and Neale refused to accede control as they considered Sister Amy one of their own. The newspapers hungrily seized upon details of the will, distorting the truth so that, according to *The Brighton Herald*, Sister Amy left all of her property to Sackville College.<sup>184</sup> Figures were irrelevant to other accounts that highlighted the furtive means by which the money was obtained: one reported "that in her last hours she was induced to sign a document making over her whole property for other purposes. (Shame shame)."<sup>185</sup> In his defence, Neale denied knowledge that Sister Amy had property which she could bequeath and that he procured her to make her will in her dying moments: "How can anyone in their senses believe that, had we really been anxious to secure any property for St. Margaret's, we should not have seized the earliest opportunity of pressing upon her the making this will?"<sup>186</sup> Besides, he argued, the Sisterhood was left only a portion of an estate worth between £5000 and £6000. In such a

<sup>183</sup> SSM Archives, House Diary, November 6 & 7, 1857.

<sup>184</sup> *The Brighton Herald*, November 21, 1857.

<sup>185</sup> From a meeting of the Brighton Protestant Association, as reported in *The Brighton Examiner*. See also the *Sussex Advertiser*, Nov 21, 1857.

<sup>186</sup> *The Lewes Riot*, 26. See also *The Sussex Express*, November 23, 1857.

discourse, Sister Amy's final act of self assertiveness was negated completely.

The dispute over the will was merely one of a myriad ways in which Scobell charged the Sisterhood with usurping his parental authority, and in so doing, rewrote his daughter's independence as weakness. These charges, which had initially been sent privately to the Community, were now laid out in the form of an open letter to Neale for all to witness in an extraordinary edition of *The Sussex Advertiser*.<sup>187</sup> In this statement, Scobell detailed the stealth involved in his daughter's seduction as part of a catalogue of crimes perpetuated by the Sisterhood. In a sermon preached at All Saints on November 29, Scobell described how "This beloved child of mine was beguiled from the purity of the faith and made a tool and victim of party. She has paid with her life the price of her temerity."<sup>188</sup> His audience would have required little imagination to conclude that Scobell, a wronged father, was the innocent victim of a devious Puseyite plot led by a notorious usurper.

In *The Lewes Riot*, Neale responded to Scobell's battery of accusations. However, in Neale's version of events the roles of the primary protagonists were reversed: Emily, distressed and spiritually tormented, turned to Neale for protection and comfort, could he, in all good consciousness, forsake her? Thus, readers discovered how Neale was contacted by a desperate woman, whose "mind, if she were left to herself, might be unequal to the wear and tear of continual suffering,; and that, if the support to which she had a right were denied her in the English, she might probably seek it in the Roman

<sup>187</sup> The Rev. John Scobell, "Statement of the Rev. John Scobell, with letters from the Bishop of Chichester, and the Assistant Wardens of Sackville College; to which is added a sermon preached by the Rev. John Scobell, on the 29th of November 1857 at All Saints Church, Lewes." (London: Nisbet & Co, 1857) PH 511. In case any reader presumed that Scobell acted alone in his criticism of Neale, his statement included letters from the assistant wardens of Sackville College, who bemoaned the "distressing notoriety" brought to the College by the presence of Neale and the sisters, and perhaps, most damningly of all, the Bishop of Chichester's withdrawal of support.

<sup>188</sup> Scobell's statement. Reprinted in *Church Times*, Nov 15, 1957.

Church.<sup>189</sup> Once again, Emily appeared as a damsel in distress. According to this narrative, Neale not only saved Emily from herself, but perhaps more significantly to his readers, from the clutches of the Pope. Such an argument, however, may not have mattered to his readers, believing as they did that Scobell was not the tyrant Neale claimed him to be and that, in any case, Anglican sisterhoods were Roman Catholic institutions in all but name.

In order to disabuse local society of their perceptions of Scobell as a wronged father, and to exculpate himself, Neale included a number of Emily's letters in *The Lewes Riot*, both to Neale and her father, in which she stated the abuse she had faced. Here, laid out for public consumption, were all the details of Scobell's violent temper, the "paroxysms of anger" into which he would on occasion fly, and his ill-treatment of his wife. Having established that Emily feared for her life, and reminding readers "that it is not as if I had been called to deal with a child," Neale undermined Scobell's identity as benevolent patriarch.<sup>190</sup> He denied that Sister Amy had been forced to abandon the name of her baptism, that she had been brought into an infected house, and that news of her impending death had been withheld until it was too late. Rather, Neale informed readers that Scobell came to see his daughter just once during her entire illness "and then he has the unmanly cruelty...to turn round on us who were straining every nerve to bring him on time, and to charge us with negligence."<sup>191</sup> Systematically, Neale's tactic was to challenge his adversary by denouncing the basis of his masculinity - respectable fatherhood.

Scobell's statement and *The Lewes Riot* were followed by a rash of published replies by both parties in which more letters were made public,

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<sup>189</sup> Lewes Riot, 6.

<sup>190</sup> Lewes Riot, 17.

<sup>191</sup> Lewes Riot, 25.

more invective hurled, more lies fabricated. Just as in their narratives both Scobell and Neale portrayed themselves in relation to Emily - as beleaguered father and saviour respectively - they also depicted her primarily in relation to themselves. While her father perceived Emily's decision to join St. Margaret's in terms of personal betrayal, Neale tended to depict it as a desperate act in which only he could serve as her spiritual saviour. Neither seemed willing, in their written texts, to acknowledge the considerable courage required to defy the expectations of Victorian femininity. Although he conceded that Emily was in no way a child when she came to him for guidance, Neale characterised her as a victim throughout his testimonial. He referred to "her crushed spirit, and excessive fear of her father's violence" and of his unqualified need to rescue "this poor, trembling sufferer."<sup>192</sup> In Scobell's words, Emily was "an overwrought, dissatisfied, and disobedient child, yielding herself to [Neale's] undue influence."<sup>193</sup>

Such a characterisation does not sit easily with the personality which emerges from Emily's own letters. Quite apart from the tenacity she displayed in leaving her home to join St. Margaret's, these letters - of which there are dozens reprinted in her father's and Neale's "statements" - reveal an altogether different type of woman. The detailed records left by Emily Scobell of her circumstances and her thoughts in the years prior to joining St. Margaret's do not simplify the task of determining the precise nature of her spiritual crisis, they do, however, reveal her profound strength of character, especially in light of her father's unbearable behaviour. Her letters to Neale between 1855 and 1857 bear witness to this inner resolve to withstand his tyranny: "He terrifies everyone; and though I am also, I am less frightened

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<sup>192</sup> The Lewes Riot, 9, 34

<sup>193</sup> Scobell, Reply to the Lewes Riot, 3. PH 6265.

than anyone else. Weak and wavering as I have been, I am the first who has dared to withstand him at all."<sup>194</sup> Like that of many Victorian women who found themselves in intolerable domestic situations, her courage was fortified by her relationship with God: "I leave the future (as far as I can, without thinking what may be) in the hands of Him, with Whom indeed I may freely and thankfully leave it."<sup>195</sup> Within this relationship, confession played a crucial role, providing yet another example of the duality of Emily's spirit: she was at once fearful yet brave, confident yet uncertain. "My safety is in the *entireness* of my confession," she wrote on New Year's Eve, 1856, "It is one of the blessings coming certainly from one of the most painful things I ever did in my life."<sup>196</sup> The days of "gay bachelors," a remembrance of New Year's Eve past, had gone.

Emily Scobell was driven to become a sister by a complex mix of spiritual and pragmatic factors. That her faith in God was paramount in enabling her to persevere, despite her father's ardent disapproval, cannot be contested. Her letter to a friend, written at the beginning of 1856, underscores this point:

I can in no case get consent to go to a Sisterhood, even for a time, and I cannot go without it; though I am utterly determined, if I have to spend my whole life in waiting, by the blessing of God, no temptation shall make me give up the life I have chosen: and I hope to wait, while I must wait, doing all I can to fit myself for it, and giving up more and more, as far as my station in life will admit of my doing so, wholly and entirely to the special service of God.<sup>197</sup>

Unable to reconcile her obligation to her family - as dutiful daughter - and her desire for "the life I have chosen," in service to God, Emily determined to

<sup>194</sup> Lewes Riot, 15-16.

<sup>195</sup> Emily Scobell to "an intimate friend," New Year's Eve, 1856. A Postscript in Reply to the Rev. John Scobell's Statement, PH 6263, 57.

<sup>196</sup> PH 6263, 57.

<sup>197</sup> PH 6263, 55-56.

sacrifice as much as she could, and to wait as long as necessary to achieve her goal. In a study of female religiosity, Eileen Yeo explains how, paradoxically, sacrifice was often essential to break out from the restraints of Victorian domestic ideology: "For all the Victorian feminists 'the law of sacrifice' was a key conception which, although ambiguous, could be used to ratify women's robust resistance....Most feminists saw the law of sacrifice as the most extreme form of divine calls to love and service which justified all their worldly work."<sup>198</sup> Although the present study has not set out to argue that Emily Scobell can be described as a feminist, it seems clear that her motivations were similar to those of many nineteenth-century feminists who like her rebelled against the gender constraints of their day.<sup>199</sup> Certainly she utilised the Victorian sanction given to self-sacrifice as a way of escaping the tedium and the oppression of domestic life. As her father explained: "to visit the poor and teach the young appeared to be her constant, and I am sure uninterrupted, unquestioned occupation."<sup>200</sup> Her choice to act through the confessional and by caring for the sick as an Anglican sister heightens the potency of her rebellion.

Emily's defiance of patriarchal authority was unacceptable to her contemporaries: she did not simply disobey her father, but wilfully sought out another man in whom to confide. In the minds of Scobell and his supporters, such a flagrant disregard for social convention was an affront not

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<sup>198</sup> Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant Feminists and Catholic Saints," 137. Anne Summers also refers to the idea of self sacrifice in her discussion of Victorian nursing: "the ethic of female service and self-sacrifice permeated initiatives from which many have benefited, but which cannot properly be heralded as emancipatory." "Ministering Angels," 133.

<sup>199</sup> On nineteenth-century feminists' challenges to the home as women's primary sphere of influence, see the collection of essays edited by Eileen Janes Yeo, ed. Radical Femininity: Women's self-representation in the public sphere (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). See also Jane Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the US, 1780-1860

<sup>200</sup> PH 6265, 5.



only to the Church and the family, but also to the nation. As such, rather than blame her exclusively, her father, the ecclesiastic hierarchy, and much of the community in Sussex lashed out against the religious order which they believed perverted the word of God and sought to break apart the bedrock of English society - the family. They refused to accept that a woman would willingly choose to abandon her family, and thus recast defiant women as irrational. To the last, Scobell, in a sermon just following his daughter's death, publicly proclaimed female vulnerability and immaturity: "Let not the promoter of such a work be at liberty, in the seeming prosecution of it, to *creep into our houses, to lead captive silly women, to inveigle young persons who have money at their disposal-- to call them, for the sake of their little patrimony, into offices for which they are unfitted.*"<sup>201</sup>

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In the Community archives there is little evidence to suggest how the sisters responded to the funeral and its fallout.<sup>202</sup> For Mother Ann, in particular, it must have been an incredibly stressful period. Neale, bonnetted and lampooned, was understandably shaken: "I don't think, however, that I ever suffered so much as in these last ten days. However innocent, or rather, however right, one may know oneself to be, it is not pleasant to be posted over England as a rascal."<sup>203</sup> Although supported by such eminent figures as W. E. Gladstone and A. P. Forbes, the Bishop of Brechin, the Sisterhood faced a slow recovery.<sup>204</sup> At Christmas the sisters rallied together and for the first time since the Community was formed, all "received the blessed sacrament

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<sup>201</sup> Scobell's statement, PH 511. Original emphases.

<sup>202</sup> In the months following the funeral, the Community diary focuses on work at a nearby inn, "The Ship" where the sisters provided food, lessons, and spiritual succour to the downtrodden residents.

<sup>203</sup> Letters of IMN, p 299.

<sup>204</sup> House Diary, Nov 1857.

together.<sup>205</sup> Problems with Sister Amy's father did not abate in the new year, as on January 16th Mother Ann recorded that "Mr Scobell is still troublesome about his daughter's will" and on the 19th came a rumour that Scobell had had Sister Amy's coffin opened."<sup>206</sup> Not until June of the following year did St. Margaret's receive the last settlement of Sister Amy's affairs.<sup>207</sup> Not wishing to repeat the experience of a disputed will, the Community altered its policy: "No bequest made by a Sister for the benefit of the Institution is to be accepted if dated less than six months before her death, without the written consent of the heir-at-law."<sup>208</sup> In the Community's official records, the episode is passed over quickly to concentrate on the "recovery" phase.<sup>209</sup> Indeed the Sisterhood did recover, and eventually, flourish, but the years immediately following Sister Amy's death were not borne easily.

Perhaps one of the clearest indications of the ways in which St. Margaret's was affected by the Lewes Riot can be seen by looking at what happened to various sisters in its wake. The statistics are quite dramatic: while the original three members - Sisters Ann, Alice and Ellen - all remained, none of the other sisters who were members at the time of Sister Amy's death stayed in the Community, except Sister Elizabeth, who finally succumbed to cancer in 1860.<sup>210</sup> Although the records do not indicate the reasons why the other sisters left, such a drastic exodus surely testifies as to the difficulties of adjusting to the religious life. The turmoil surrounding the funeral might have strengthened the dedication of the original four sisters, but for the others, it must have contributed to a uncertainty about their

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<sup>205</sup> House Diary, Dec 20, 1857.

<sup>206</sup> House Diary, Jan 1858.

<sup>207</sup> House Diary, June 2, 1858.

<sup>208</sup> "St. Margaret's Sisterhood" The Church Review, (February 1861), 5.

<sup>209</sup> See Doing the Impossible.

<sup>210</sup> Sisterlist, SSM Archives

commitment and identity as women religious.<sup>211</sup> Not until 1861 was the Sisterhood again able to attract and retain a new group of members. Without direct evidence, conclusions as to the exact effects of the scandal must be tentative, but the departures at St. Margaret's do point to a questioning of the viability of religious identity in the wake of such violent public hostility and the unqualified loss of episcopal sanction.

The Lewes Riot illustrates the exact nature of the controversy which surrounded the establishment of Anglican sisterhoods in England. Specifically, the scandal of her relationship with St. Margaret's, and the ways in which Emily's identity shifts throughout this discourse surrounding it, exposes the paradoxes within woman's nature as prescribed by Victorian gender ideology and within the culture of female monasticism.<sup>212</sup> In order to become a sister, the embodiment of female submissiveness and devotion, it was often necessary for a woman to act assertively, to abandon her family, and in many cases, the faith in which she had been raised. Such strong, defiant characteristics were required of sisters, as testified by Mother Ann's active recruitment of Emily Scobell. Incensed by this blatant disregard of Victorian gender conventions, detractors of sisterhoods readily seized upon the "Romish" heritage of religious orders in order to publicly condemn institutions which provided women a degree of independence.<sup>213</sup> While this research focuses directly on the plight of one young woman's struggle to embrace her calling and the ramifications of her decision upon her family

<sup>211</sup> Sister Katherine departed for Clewer. SSM Archives, Sisterlist. 1861 Census. Significantly, Sister Katherine joined another Anglican order and Sister Annie converted to Catholicism. Sister Martha's uncertainty was temporary: she departed at the end of 1860 but returned to St. Margaret's in 1862. Interestingly, Sister Magdalene, the first sister to join after the funeral, was a lay sister who transferred from a Roman Catholic convent in Brompton.

<sup>212</sup> See Joan W. Scott, Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP., 1996); Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>213</sup> See Vicinus, Independent Women; and Reed, "A Female Movement."

and community, it also sheds light on the broader issues of anti-Catholicism, paternalism and women's rights in Victorian England. To the crowd, Sister Amy's death was symbolic of a social disease much more virulent than that which caused her immediate death. The funeral occasioned the ensuing riot, but it was not Sister Amy's death which aroused the wrath of the townspeople. Rather, they protested against a disarming display of female independence precipitated by the presence of a religious order which seemingly held little regard for family, female subjugation or the Protestant faith. The mob utilised a current and socially-sanctioned discourse to justify its hostilities and its fear. In turn, the funeral became part of the text of Guy Fawkes celebrations the following year, with an effigy of "Old Neale" paraded through the streets of Lewes.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Etherington, 29.

### CHAPTER THREE "A Forbidden Theme": Female Vice and the Establishment of the Community of All Hallows

Sin comes to be vested with a certain air of interest, whilst virtue is thought of as almost tame and dull beside the romantic aspect of reclaimed vice.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Wilberforce, *Redemption the Key-note of Labours for the Lost*

In Victorian England, "female vice" was immensely popular: not only did it facilitate opportunities for sex, it also provided the equally valuable service of allowing Victorians of all stripes to explore sex discursively. For leading purity crusader and future Bishop of Grahamstown, John Armstrong, those "fearful forms of vice" which were attacking the nation's vigour could best be stamped out by women whose reputation, while not disreputable, was just as controversial - Anglican sisters.<sup>2</sup> With characteristic aplomb, Armstrong laid out his formula for the future of penitentiary work and the vital significance of such women within it:

Women we want, for women: there is no greater want than an order of women to whom the penitents might be unreserved, and yet so strongly marked with the Cross, so entirely given to the spiritual work, as to gain a spiritual mastery over their erring sisters' minds; we want those who are not merely kind, but holy; not merely sympathising but staid; whose very presence would check all levity, and freeze the very spirit of gossip and familiarity: we speak of a class quite distinct from the race of housekeepers--quite above them in all respects. In short, we want a *Religious Sisterhood*, a little band of devoted gentlewomen, of self-sacrificing daughters of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Samuel Wilberforce] "Redemption the Key-note of Labours for the Lost," in "On Penitentiary Work: Two Sermons preached at the Opening of the Chapel, St. Mary's Home, Wantage" July 1861, 2.

<sup>2</sup> John Armstrong, "Female Penitentiaries," *Quarterly Review*, Sept. 1848, 1. In 1848 he was the vicar of Tidenham. He subsequently served as Bishop of Grahamstown from 1854 -1857.

<sup>3</sup> John Armstrong, "The Church and her Female Penitents," *Christian Remembrancer* 17 (1849), reprinted in T. T. Carter, ed. *Essays on Church Penitentiaries*. (London: John Henry Parker, 1858) Original emphasis, 56.

Armstrong's character sketch of the ideal moral reformer emphasised the extent to which she differed not only from other penitentiary workers, but also from other women. In his view, the ideal rescue worker must be higher, holier, saint-like, capable of imparting grace at a single glance. The oppositional relationship between penitents and such women was also key to Armstrong's vision: differentiated by class, virtue, and above all, spiritual enlightenment, the sin of the former reinforced the purity of the latter. Convinced that such work demanded a type of dedication incompatible with familial or domestic duties, in 1849 Armstrong appealed to women to consider the possibilities of combining rescue work with life within a religious order: "Is it too much to hope that some may be found bravely to lay aside the world, and by their own great mercifulness to lead polluted souls to the mercy-seat of God?"<sup>4</sup>

In response to Armstrong's appeal, a penitentiary was established in Shipmeadow, Suffolk, in the summer of 1854 in order to facilitate the rescue and rehabilitation of "fallen women." By the end of the following year, the women who operated the penitentiary had formed a religious sisterhood, the Community of All Hallows. As with the Society of St. Margaret, All Hallows developed and was legitimated in response to a specific social need. Unlike East Grinstead, however, at which a religious order was founded prior to the commencement of work, All Hallows evolved out of the work of rehabilitation. From its original focus on the moral reform of penitent

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, "The Church and her Female Penitents," 57. For a discussion of the currency of the idea of self-sacrifice among mid-Victorian feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe and Josephine Butler, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant Feminists and Catholic Saints in Victorian Britain," in Yeo, ed, Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998). The first Roman Catholic order to engage in rescue work was the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who established a House of Refuge in 1841 in Hammersmith. See Barbara Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales, 1800 - 1937 (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), 14, and Chapter Three.

women, this Community expanded in purpose to include the care and schooling of orphans, nursing in the hospital it founded in 1873, and eventually mission work in the Canadian West. By the end of the nineteenth century, All Hallows had attracted a substantial body of sisters and gained a reputation for its manifold enterprise toward penitents, pupils and patients alike.<sup>5</sup> Today the sisters, their numbers somewhat reduced, maintain an active ministry from their convent at Ditchingham, surrounded by the visible reminders of the Community's Victorian heyday when saving souls was a serious business.

This chapter investigates the establishment of the Community of All Hallows discursively and in practice. Its genesis was rooted in Victorian discourses of sexuality, gender, and moral reform. At mid century, the work of moral reform depended on the precise fashioning of the identity of the fallen and their rescuers. "Fallen women" and "Anglican sisters" were both constructed identities, and, in the discourse of Christian rehabilitation, the identification of one group relied on that of the other. Moral reformers in support of sisterhoods, such as John Armstrong, utilised discourses of "fallenness" to argue that the fallen would best be restored by these communities.<sup>6</sup> The women of the Shipmeadow penitentiary similarly appropriated such discourses, together with those which emphasised women's moral and spiritual superiority, in order to justify the formation of a religious order, and to build its identity around the rescue of the fallen. Yet, as the public responses to this Order reveal, the ambiguities surrounding the identity of sisterhoods were also utilised by their critics to debate the

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<sup>5</sup> Profession roll, CAH Archives.

<sup>6</sup> On the discourses of fallenness, see Amanda Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

significance of sisters' identities. As these debates reveal, the public regulation of sisters' identities operated as a discursive arena for the regulation of women in Victorian society more widely.

This analysis of the establishment of the Community of All Hallows builds upon that of the Society of St. Margaret but also departs from it in significant ways. In order to justify their existence within a culture deeply suspicious of female monasticism, both sisterhoods relied heavily upon a perceived social need. As at St. Margaret's, the nature of the work at All Hallows presented its own set of challenges, which both facilitated the need for sisters, and impeded the actual success of recruitment. In their capacity as moral reformers rather than nurses, the paradoxical nature of the sisters' identities emerges more strongly, however: to a far greater extent than nursing, rescue work was premised upon a specific dichotomy between the "fallen" and her redeemer. Key differences between the formation of these two orders provide further evidence as to the relationship between monastic culture and gender ideology. Unlike the East Grinstead Order, All Hallows was not dominated by a figure such as John Mason Neale. As such, the opposition which arose toward the Norfolk Community was not refracted through an errant priest. However, All Hallows was by no means free of male domination: from its inception, the penitentiary was governed by a well-meaning but often tiresome council of men which oversaw every aspect of its development. Once the Sisterhood had been established, the relationship between the sisters, particularly its Foundress, Lavinia Crosse, and the council became strained. Yet the sisters' determination to develop their own form of conventual culture testifies to how they utilised religion as a means to achieve self-determination.



The paradoxical relationship among female identity, religion and power in Victorian society forms a central theme of this analysis. The chapter begins by examining the discursive terrain on which ideas about the moral reform of fallen women operated at mid century. The precise nature of the ideal institution to implement this reform commanded widespread attention: female penitentiaries, or Houses of Mercy, as they were often styled, were one means by which this process was imagined; Anglican religious orders was another. The second section charts the establishment of the penitentiary and the subsequent development of the Sisterhood. It analyses the process of Lavinia Crosse's transformation from rescue worker to woman religious. In the final section, the discursive and the material formation of this Community are examined in relation to one another. There existed a considerable gap between the discursive imaginings of rescue work at a house of mercy and its practical application. The actual work of rehabilitation, the type of women who were interested in this work, and the nature of the penitents rarely conformed to idealised versions. The responses to the establishment of All Hallows, both from within the House of Mercy and within wider society, provides further insights into how sisters drew upon and subverted Victorian gender ideology in order to justify and encourage female monasticism.

Historiographically, the Community of All Hallows has not received the academic attention that, due to the presence of John Mason Neale, has been bestowed on St. Margaret's.<sup>7</sup> Nor are the archives at All Hallows as

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<sup>7</sup> Short references to the Community of All Hallows are found in Peter F. Anson, The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion 2nd Ed. A. W. Campbell, Ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1964); A.M. Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities 1845-1900 (London: SCM Press, 1958); Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian England" Ph.D Dissertation (University of Sussex, 1993).

thorough as those at East Grinstead. Although items such as Mother Lavinia's original diary provide invaluable glimpses into the Order's past, details into the individual sister's lives and the day-to-day operations of the House are absent from the archives. In their place, however, exists a wealth of published material which enables the formation of this Community to be documented from a wide range of perspectives. The Community's own account of its history was published in 1983 and contains much useful information.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, due to the novelty of female monasticism in Norfolk, and the controversial nature of the work, regular coverage in the local press was ensured. Collectively, the discourses surrounding the establishment of All Hallows bears witness to the manner in which the relationship among sex, spirituality, and salvation was interwoven at this exotic site.

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#### **"Affectionate Surveillance:" Imagining Penitentiary Work and the Paradoxes of Victorian Identity**

The regulation and reform of "fallen women" - a category which encompassed women who had lost their virtue as well as actual streetwalkers - highlighted the Victorian fascination with sexual deviance.<sup>9</sup> As vulgar

<sup>8</sup> Sister Violet, CAH All Hallows' Ditchingham: The Story of an East Anglian Community (Oxford: Becket Publications, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> On moral and sexual regulation, see Judith R. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980); Linda Mahood, The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge, 1990); John C. Fout, ed. Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Edward Bristow, Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700 (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1977). For a discussion of this relationship and of the voyeuristic element of this discourse, see Judith R. Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) esp. 20-3. On deviance, see Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800 Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989); Frank Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

women purportedly preying on hapless men while in the process undermining the fabric of society, their persecution became the nineteenth-century equivalent of the witch trials from an era less refined. Corralled and prodded for evidence of contagious disease, she was the mad cow of her day. Notoriously immortalised as the victim of Jack the Ripper's wrath, no East End street scene can be imagined without her presence. With the publicity generated by Henry Mayhew's investigations and William Acton's *Prostitution*, published in 1857, concerns about female vice grew increasingly urgent.<sup>10</sup> Through its catalogues of brothels, diseases, and the extent of degeneracy, Acton's treatise was designed to send a shock wave through British society. "The moral injury inflicted on society is incalculable; the physical injury is at least as great," he informed readers.<sup>11</sup> The ready frankness with which Acton approached his subject, coupled with the widespread popularity of his book - the second edition was published in 1869 - testifies to the currency of ideas about the regulation of vice at mid century.<sup>12</sup>

Concern for the rehabilitation of fallen women did not originate with the Victorians: the first Magdalene Hospital in London opened in 1758, the year in which Robert Dingley published *Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes*. In his pamphlet, Dingley envisioned the creation of a 'Magdalen Charity House' in which penitent women would exchange their labour for

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<sup>10</sup> William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities, with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (1857), Edited by Peter Fryer, 2nd. Ed., (NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969). See also [William Rathbone Greg], "Prostitution" *Westminster Review* 53 (1850): 448-506; and William Tait, *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1840).

<sup>11</sup> Acton, 85.

<sup>12</sup> In the preface to the second edition, Acton acknowledged that "Now the mind and the conscience of the nation are awakened" 21. On the "phenomenal upsurge in interest" in rescue work in the mid-nineteenth century, see Frank Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 188.

food, clothing, shelter and reform.<sup>13</sup> The goal of such a scheme was not only to provide redemption from sin, but also to help establish reformed women with employment through which they could achieve self-sufficiency. With the renewed interest on female vice at the mid-nineteenth century, the Church of England began to capitalise on the need for institutions designed to rehabilitate fallen women. While there existed eight such penitentiaries housing 441 women by 1848, Anglican clergymen launched a concerted campaign to encourage interest in the expansion of houses of refuge and to ensure that these undertakings were carried out by devout Christian women.<sup>14</sup>

Anglo-Catholic Archdeacon Henry Manning, in a sermon before the Magdalene Hospital in London in 1844, was among the first to address the issue, calling attention to the publicity surrounding the fallen.<sup>15</sup> The Church was guilty, he declared, of neglecting these women: "how coldly she has turned away from her backsliding daughters, as though they had fallen into an unpardonable sin."<sup>16</sup> He then turned his indignation upon the seducers of these women, directly challenging the hypocrisy of the sexual double

<sup>13</sup> A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton, British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956) 217-18. For details of the first penitentiary, see Henry Mayhew, ed. London Labour and the London Poor. A cyclopaedia of the condition and earnings of those that will work, those that cannot work, and those that will not work (London: Griffin, Bohn and Co, 1861 -1862).

<sup>14</sup> London based penitentiaries included the Magdalen Hospital, and the British Female Refuge. There were also houses of refuge in Bath, Exeter, Dover, and Salisbury. By 1856 the number of magdalene homes had risen to 60. See Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy, 188. See also David Owen, English Philanthropy, 1660 -1960(Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP., 1964) for the argument that penitent women were over accommodated for: "At least one category of metropolitan needy, whose claim always exerted a singular pull on Victorian sensibilities, was adequately, if not redundantly, provided for." 164.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Manning was Archdeacon of Chichester prior to his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1851. He worked tirelessly for both prison reform and female penitentiaries. For details of his life, see David Newsome, The Convent Cardinals: J. H. Newman and Henry Edward Manning (London: John Murray, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> H. E. Manning, "A Speech before the Magdalen Hospital," (1844) in [John Armstrong] "The Church and her Female Penitents" Christian Remembrancer, January 1849, 41.

standard. While women were “wrenched for ever by one act of guilt, one plunge into the stream of sin, from their accustomed seat at home,” he questioned how their partners could “enjoy the blessedness of a godly home, and all the privileges of the Church without sometimes turning back to think of the awfulness of their prospect, and the anguish of their present state who were their companions in these sins?”<sup>17</sup> Manning's appeal depended upon a specific construction of the fallen woman: she was not a hardened prostitute, but a daughter of the Church who had suffered unduly for her “one act of guilt” while her partner avoided the sting of shame. In an effort to connect rather than distance these women from respectable womanhood, he characterised the fallen as domestic creatures. If she was to be saved, the fallen woman first needed to be identified and classified. In her recent study of the discourse of fallenness, Amanda Anderson explains how “some of the most familiar epithets for sexually immoral Victorian women--the “painted” woman, the “public woman,” the woman who “loses her character”--succinctly express the larger informing assumptions about the nature of the fallen state, its failure to present or maintain an authentic, private, or self-regulating identity.”<sup>18</sup>

In a series of articles published in the late 1840s, John Armstrong, the vicar of Tidenham, chastised the Church for neglecting the prostitute yet embracing the needs of other outcasts: “Drunkards, thieves, blasphemers, all have their appropriate tracts; *she* is left out.”<sup>19</sup> An obsession with purity, he

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<sup>17</sup> Manning, 43, 47-8. William Tait made a similar argument in Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1840).

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces. 2

<sup>19</sup> [Armstrong], “Female Penitentiaries” 16. Emphasis in original. He subsequently published “An Appeal for the Formation of a Church Penitentiary,” 2nd Ed. (London: John Henry Parker, 1949). Citing figures of over 10,000 prostitutes in London alone, and similar numbers in the provinces, Armstrong stressed that it was the duty of the Church to rescue these souls, insisting that refuge houses must come complete with chapel, and resident chaplain. 56.

maintained, had led to a social unwillingness to take up the cause of these women's plight. Rather than stressing the sexual nature of the fallen woman's sin, Armstrong grouped her with those who had sinned against God and society. Significantly, he differentiated the sin from the sinner: "We are speaking essentially of a *passion*: when the first burst of that is over, all principle, all conscience, all the movements of the better mind are not gone."<sup>20</sup> Armstrong attempted to demonstrate that women who fell did not, as a result of their indiscretion, lose their identities. Although proscriptive writers often accentuated women's passionless nature, Armstrong acknowledged female passion, albeit to highlight the ramifications of passion left unchecked.<sup>21</sup> Observing the various reasons which led to the fall, such as a broken promise of marriage, he sought to contextualise the plight of the fallen woman, and like Manning, to win sympathy for her among broader society by reinforcing her status as victim.<sup>22</sup>

Anglo-Catholic reformers such as Manning and Armstrong believed that the most effective means by which to rehabilitate such women was through the agencies of Anglican sisterhoods. Such institutions, they maintained, would provide the surest and purest means of procuring the genuine repentance of the fallen. Their appeals coincided with the formation of two Anglican religious orders: the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, at Wantage, near Oxford, and the Community of St. John the Baptist at Clewer, near Windsor. Established in 1848 and 1851 respectively, Wantage and

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<sup>20</sup> Armstrong, "Female Penitentiaries," 9.

<sup>21</sup> On the nature of female passion, see Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," in Nancy Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds. *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); and Robyn Cooper, "Definition and Control: Alexander Walker's Trilogy on Woman" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2: 3 (1992).

<sup>22</sup> On sympathy within Victorian discourses of fallenness, see Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* 40.

Clewer, as contemporaries referred to them, were devoted primarily to the reform of penitents.<sup>23</sup> Unlike other female penitentiaries associated with the Church of England, these sisterhoods were managed directly by the sisters and their spiritual director. Significantly, at both Communities, women played a key role in the development of moral reform. At Wantage, Superior Elizabeth Lockhart was instrumental in determining that the Sisterhood would be devoted to rescue work and was guided by Manning as her "Father Director."<sup>24</sup> The origins of penitentiary work at Clewer can be traced to the efforts of Mariquita Tennant, who began receiving fallen women into her own house in 1849. Two years later, with the arrival of the widowed Harriet Monsell to manage the work, the Sisterhood was founded under the spiritual direction of Rev. Thomas Thellusson Carter.

Drawing upon his experience at Clewer, in 1851 Carter published a spirited defence of sisterhoods' involvement in penitentiary work entitled, *Is it well to Institute Sisterhoods in the Church of England for the Care of Female Penitents?*<sup>25</sup> As did Armstrong's, Carter's advocacy of sisterhoods depended upon the creation of an identity for Anglican sisters which stressed the ways in which they differed from other charitable women. He too believed that for a woman to "really give herself" to the work, she needed to be extricated from the cares of home and thus free from the influence of domestic ideology. His tract was, in large part, not only an appeal to women

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of rehabilitation at Wantage and Clewer, see Susan Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls": The Convent-Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain *Journal of Social History* (Spring 1996). See also See Hope Campbell Barton Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses: Contrasts in Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious Headships in Victorian England," Ph.D Thesis (University of Leeds, 1993), 228. Stone's examination of fallen women deals primarily with Clewer, the CAH is mentioned only briefly.

<sup>24</sup> Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*, 245.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Thellusson Carter, "Is it well to Institute Sisterhoods in the Church of England for the Care of Female Penitents?" Second Edition, Revised (London: Spottiswoodes and Shaw, n.d) [1851]

to consider the life of a sister, but also a plea to parents of potential sisters to acknowledge the validity of such a life:

Why should not the life of a sister be regarded as having in itself a distinct claim on the attention of any woman in choosing how she may best serve God, or why should not a parent give due consideration to the longings of a child whom God may, by His secret inspirations, incline to serve Him in such a vocation.<sup>26</sup>

For Carter, identity was not a peripheral issue, but rather stood at the heart of his beliefs about penitentiary work. His attempt to legitimate the identity of Anglican sisters speaks to the popular trepidation surrounding the religious life yet as well as to the ways in which certain clerics sought to promote this life as personally rewarding and socially useful. Yet, the radical nature of such a life should not be overlooked: Carter's argument for female self-determination, while rooted in Victorian gender ideology and its emphasis on female spirituality, actually subverted this ideal by allowing women the right to choose to forego domesticity in order to serve God directly.

The advocacy of rescue work by sisterhoods espoused by these clerics, coming at a time when female religious orders were novel and generally unwelcome in England, was furthered by crafting a socially-acceptable identity for potential sisters, penitentiaries, and their inmates. As such, these clerics styled the sisterhood penitentiary as a home where mothers and daughters lived in an atmosphere of love and respect. Refashioning the relationship between sisters and penitents as pseudo-familial, Carter noted that "the Sisters will be careful to show towards the Penitents in their manner and speech, etc., such tenderness and pity as would become a forgiving parent dealing with a prodigal child returning home."<sup>27</sup> By crafting the identity of the

<sup>26</sup> Carter, "Is it Well to Institute?" 13.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, *Is it Well?* 4.



institution and its inhabitants in this way, these reformers attempted to situate sisterhoods within current discourses which promoted penitentiaries in a domestic, and thus less-threatening, capacity.<sup>28</sup> As such, Carter's polemic addressed popular concern about the propriety of ladies, whose "purity" might become tainted by living and working with the "polluted souls," of fallen women, by explaining that distinctions of class and virtue would be highlighted through separate eating and sleeping spaces.

Armstrong too envisioned the social dynamics of the penitentiary in familial terms: "a little band of self-denying daughters of the Church, of the upper ranks, who should be formed into a holy fellowship; and then, separating the penitents into little groups or families, live as mothers with their children, or as guardians with their wards."<sup>29</sup> The Sisters of Mercy would give their "children...a *home*, with something approaching the kindness and strictness of good parental rule [with] the division of the penitents into little companies...under affectionate surveillance."<sup>30</sup> Unlike ordinary matrons, who might also have maternal characters, sisters, in Armstrong's opinion, were suited particularly well for rescue work due to the purity of their souls. He drew heavily upon the metaphor of purity and pollution, noting that "it is the greatest mercy to have constant pure air mixing itself with the impure; constant spiritual fumigation, if we may use such a phrase, in so corrupt an atmosphere;...hence the absolute necessity of a sisterhood."<sup>31</sup> This "moral atmosphere" was to be reinforced by a strict

<sup>28</sup> See Mahood, The Magdalenes for an analyses of these discourses and their practical application, primarily in the Scottish context.

<sup>29</sup> John Armstrong, "An Appeal for the Formation of a Church Penitentiary," 7. PH 6242.

<sup>30</sup> Armstrong, "An Appeal," 9.

<sup>31</sup> Armstrong, "An Appeal," 60. On the ways in which purity was used to justify the control of women by women, see Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985) esp. 48; and Frank Mort, Dangerous Sexualities. Mort refers to Magdalen homes as the institutionalisation of the pure and the impure.

moratorium on any reference to the penitents' past lives, and specifically, to the "fall." As Armstrong explained, "no mention of the particular sin should be allowed...not even the faintest nor slightest allusion should ever be suffered to be made to former guilty mode of life. It must be 'a forbidden theme.'"<sup>32</sup> Only "on the most solemn occasions" might the chaplain hear any details about the penitents' past. Silence worked in another way, too, to protect the sensibilities of the sisters: "Many pure-minded women might shrink from offering themselves to a post which might bring knowledge of evil, which might taint their minds, and cause distressing thoughts to haunt them against their will."<sup>33</sup> In order for such a system to operate effectively, Armstrong insisted that the ladies must receive neither knowledge nor wages: the voluntary spirit and devotion of the sisters would thus create a voluntary spirit of repentance among the penitents.

Armstrong's recipe for reform resonates with the rich paradoxes of Victorian identity. Whereas carnal knowledge normally signified the abandonment of childhood, within the text of Armstrong's rehabilitation scenario, the penitents reverted to childlike status after their fall. Nor was the equation of sister as mother of fallen women a difficult one for Armstrong; in fact, the remarkable aspect of his plan was that of a family without the presence of men. Of course he imagined that a chaplain would provide spiritual sustenance, but significantly, the role he created for the sisters was one of managers rather than of workers for the clergy. His insistence that no mention be made of the penitents' past drew upon a firm belief that

<sup>32</sup> Armstrong, "The Church and her Female Penitents," 79.

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong, "The Church and her Female Penitents," 79. Penitents in Ireland were subjected to a similar programme of reform by Roman Catholic religious orders, including the lack of any reference to their past. See Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work in 19th-Century Ireland" in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds. Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1989); and Catriona Clear, Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988).

conversations about sex were taboo among ladies. While in certain respects the sisters would indeed have been ill-equipped to discuss matters of a sexual nature, Armstrong's position highlights the ways in which Victorian men attempted to completely regulate sexual discourse of any kind. Although he presented the penitentiary as a family "dwelling naturally" together "on terms of love," every aspect of his proposal was based on a system of artificial relations: the work of reform depended upon the transformation of women's identities - into sisters and penitents, mothers and children - to procure yet another transformation of character, of which the cause must never be mentioned. Only by completely accepting these new identities could the work of reform be achieved. The prostitute/penitent, made constantly aware of her identity as sinner due to the presence of the devout, must at the same time, disavow this identity, in order to protect both herself and her redeemer. Their identities as penitent and sister depended upon a paradoxical relationship to the sin: its existence not only brought them together and defined them, but its very mention threatened to destroy the dialectic of pollution and purity on which rehabilitation work was based.

The work of moral reform institutionalised with the advent of the Church Penitentiary Association (CPA), formed in London in 1852 to assist in the creation and funding of refuges for fallen women throughout England. With such illustrious patrons as Lord Lyttleton, Earl Nelson, William Gladstone, John Armstrong, and fourteen bishops, the CPA raised over £1500 in its first year of operation and contributed to the establishment of two houses of refuge in London.<sup>34</sup> The administrative council was assisted by

<sup>34</sup> Samuel, Lord Bishop of Oxford, "Christ our Example in Seeking the Lost. A Sermon Preached at St. James' Church, Piccadilly, before the CPA on the occasion of their first anniversary service, Tuesday, April 26, 1853" (London, 1853). Future Prime Minister William Gladstone's concern for prostitutes extended to night wanderings around East London. His wife, Catherine, was one the foremost social crusaders of her day. See Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy.

forty-seven women who worked as fundraisers, staffed penitentiaries, and took reformed penitents into their homes as domestics. Among its tenets, the CPA stipulated that it would only provide assistance to such penitentiaries which were "superintended by self-devoted women, under the guidance, as to spiritual matters, of a clergyman of the Church of England."<sup>35</sup> Both Clewer and Wantage applied to the CPA for grants and in 1853 were each awarded £200, with Clewer receiving an additional £500 to cover the cost of new buildings.<sup>36</sup> By the end of its first year, the Association had welcomed over three hundred associate members and seventy-two lady assistants.<sup>37</sup> The labourers most in demand, however, proved more difficult to recruit, as the CPA exclaimed: "We want more Houses! we want the assistance of self-devoted women to minister in those Houses! We must not be content till both these wants are supplied."<sup>38</sup>

Not surprisingly, with renewed attention drawn toward the plight of prostitutes, and the development of penitentiaries beyond London, other cities reinforced their crusades against vice. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Norwich was experiencing its share of the problems associated with industrialisation. According to the 1853 Report of the Norwich City Mission, the state of public religion and morality in Norwich was in disgrace. Of a population of approximately 72,000, it declared that roughly 40,000 are in "the habitual neglect of public worship." Just as seriously, sexual vice was running rampant: "the prostitution in our City has been painfully proverbial - about 200 houses of ill-fame, (one fourth of which are public houses) swell the

<sup>35</sup> Report of the First Annual Meeting of the Church Penitentiary Association, 1853.

<sup>36</sup> Second Annual Report of the Church Penitentiary Association, 1854, 5. Significantly, the figures for reformed penitents were not given in this report.

<sup>37</sup> These men and women supported the work of reform but did not actually serve in CPA institutions. For a discussion of the growing interest in such work during the nineteenth century, see Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy.

<sup>38</sup> Second Annual Report of the CPA, 9.

dismal catalogue of crime."<sup>39</sup> The city had been concerned with alleviating prostitution since at least 1827 with the establishment of the Norwich Magdalene Home "to receive young women fallen or otherwise."<sup>40</sup> In 1851, the City Mission became involved in this work by forming a special female missionary department. This ladies department, however, was able to hire only one female missionary to rescue fallen women, paying her a salary of £26.18.10. Her report to the mission spoke of "the undisguised prostitution in which mothers and daughters are living in considerable number" and the "scenes of licentiousness and moral feculence which are of too revolting a character" to be described.<sup>41</sup> This intrepid woman visited over 20,000 people in 1852, yet she was able to restore but a solitary prostitute to the "path of virtue."<sup>42</sup> Exhausted and in poor health, the missionary resigned her position at the end of the year. To further exacerbate the woes of the Mission, its wealthiest patron, who contributed £50 annually, passed away, leaving an "Egyptian darkness" to descend upon the city.

At the same time as the Norwich City Mission was taking some tentative steps into the rescue of fallen women, a group of prominent, civic-minded individuals, all male, began its own efforts to purge the city of sin.<sup>43</sup> If prostitution threatened to undermine the moral fabric of their community,

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<sup>39</sup> Annual Report of the Norwich City Mission, 1853. p 7. Norfolk Record Office (NRO) SO 154/2/1. The Report also bemoaned the problems of intemperance and Sunday shopping.

<sup>40</sup> The Norwich Magdalene Home preferred women under the age of 20, who were required to pay according to their means, and to provide a doctor's certificate on entry. They were given an outfit of clothing on leaving. The Home housed 12 inmates and was managed by a committee. Guide to Schools, Homes and Refuges for Girls and Women, 1888 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888)

<sup>41</sup> Annual Report of the Norwich City Mission, 1853. p 8. NRO SO 154/2/1

<sup>42</sup> Annual Report of the Norwich City Mission, 1853. p 5. NRO SO 154/2/1.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the culture of male civic enterprise, see Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (New York: Routledge, 1988); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780 - 1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and Young & Ashton, British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century.

they determined to devise a solution.<sup>44</sup> In the autumn of 1853, these clerics and members of the local gentry met in Ipswich to establish the most effective way to procure the work of moral reform and decided to investigate the subject fully. At a second meeting, on October 17th in Norwich, the committee reconvened to discuss the fruits of research compiled by the Reverend William Scudamore of Ditchingham into a document entitled *A Proposal for the Establishment of a Female Penitentiary in Norfolk or Suffolk, in Connexion with the Church Penitentiary Association*.<sup>45</sup> Addressing the assembly, Scudamore highlighted the seriousness of the situation: "The standard of female morality prevailing among the poorer classes of Norfolk and Suffolk has long been notoriously lower than in most other parts of the country; and, unhappily, it is becoming lower every year."<sup>46</sup> Nor were the urban centres solely responsible for this blight upon East Anglia, for as the Proposal made clear, female migration to the towns was a significant source of the decline in morality: "The state of morals which these facts disclose would lead us to infer the state of existence of a fearful amount of habitual vice and prostitution in the larger towns. Illegitimate births are probably more numerous in the country than in towns; but the miserable women who haunt our streets are for the most part natives of the country."<sup>47</sup> The problem, it appeared, was a severe one.

<sup>44</sup>Inspired by the foundation of the CPA, these men felt an obligation to contribute in a morally significant way. "Philanthropy was the bridge in many cases between their business dealings and their Christian conscience," explain Young and Ashton in *British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Although Scudamore was the principal author of the Proposal, the opinions it contains did not belong to him exclusively but rather to the council more widely. In the foreword to the Proposal, Lord Bayning noted that the initial "Meeting was adjourned, with a view to collect the sentiments of others, and to procure further information on the subject." The document itself contains many reference to outside sources, particularly the works of T T Carter and John Armstrong, and also to various statistical analyses.

<sup>46</sup> "A Proposal for the Establishment of a Female Penitentiary in Norfolk or Suffolk, in Connexion with the Church Penitentiary Association" (Norwich: Charles Muskett, 1853) 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, March 4, 1854. See also, "A Proposal for the Establishment," 4.

The committee's solution was the establishment of a penitentiary designed "to place poor women who shewed a sincere desire to forsake sin under devoted persons of their own sex, of superior qualifications, who might by their intelligent and loving care train them in the ways of penitence and peace, and prepare them, if it pleased God, for their future duties in the world."<sup>48</sup> For reasons of moral and financial support, along with the necessary publicity such an alliance would provide, the committee were eager to align themselves with the Church Penitentiary Association from the outset. Heeding the CPA's guideline concerning women's role as superintendents of houses of refuge, Scudamore noted that the distinctive feature of the new institution would be "its employment of the *unbought* services of self-devoted women."<sup>49</sup> A clerical committee member was quick to point out that "if there are women who, for the love of the Saviour, will undertake such a task as this, we ought not to be wanting to give those ladies an opportunity of doing so."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the ways in which Scudamore and the committee envisioned the penitentiary took advantage of ideas about female moral superiority, self-sacrifice, and volunteer labour which stood at the heart of Victorian gender ideology.

Yet the "self-devoted women" who were to provide their "unbought services" were not envisioned by the Proposal as mothers, and certainly not as religious sisters, as Carter and Armstrong had done, nor was the penitentiary viewed in familial terms. Rather, the "staff" were imagined as "instruments of service" whose mission was to "soothe, rebuke, cheer; to repress the sallies of levity, and appease anger before it has become

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<sup>48</sup> W.E. Scudamore, "A Short Account of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham, in Norfolk" 1879. Reprint of the 25th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1879.

<sup>49</sup> A Proposal for the Establishment, 5. Original emphases.

<sup>50</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, March 18, 1854.

violence."<sup>51</sup> Scudamore's detailed list of the qualities such ladies need possess highlights the paradoxical manner by which the "staff" was imagined:

a knowledge of character, and insight into concealed motives, - a quick discernment and loving appreciation of the good still lingering in a ruined soul, - that gentle but firm touch, which inspires confidence while it gives needful pain, - a faith, a patience, and sustained hopefulness, superior to disappointment and defeat....In a word, we require many great gifts--gifts apparently the most opposite united in the same person...a character at once of elasticity and repose, -- the wisdom of the serpent in happy blending with the simplicity of the dove.<sup>52</sup>

As did Armstrong in his appeal, Scudamore noted that such characteristics were to be found primarily in women "of a higher station in society." He thus maintained that "if we desire success, and especially if we would secure the *best* results, we must call to our assistance *ladies*, women of education and refinement."<sup>53</sup> The description of the women who were considered ideal for this work - part serpent, part dove - illustrates the ambivalent manner by which pious Victorian ladies, women religious in all but name, could be imagined. Significantly, although the class background of the workers was important to Scudamore, the penitents and the reformers were not viewed as morally antithetical: the simple dichotomy of pure/polluted, so redolent in Armstrong's discourse, was absent from Scudamore's. Rather, he emphasised antitheses within the reformers' natures, portraying women "in the know" without actually "knowing" themselves. Such a complex

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<sup>51</sup> Proposal, 6

<sup>52</sup> Proposal, 6 - 7.

<sup>53</sup> Proposal, 7. Italics in original. While Harriet Day, the Superior at Clewer, came from a family of means, the Superior and her Assistant at Wantage, Harriet Day and Charlotte Gilbert, were both working class. As Scudamore had researched Wantage for his Proposal, and may have even known its spiritual director, W. J. Butler directly (Butler was a member of the CPA Council), it is probable that he was aware of the social class of these two women. Scudamore's insistence on the need for *ladies* is somewhat unusual in light of the fact that the working-class Day, unlike her middle-class predecessor who left the Community for the Roman Catholic Church, was an excellent Superior.



characterisation of women, though not morally ambiguous, lurks on the pages of Mrs. Ellis's prescriptive texts, abounds in Tractarian sermons, and reveals just how malleable ideas about "woman's nature" could be.

In order to establish that the penitentiary could be effective, character sketches of the fallen also were imperative. In the Proposal Scudamore divided those in need of rescue into two groups: "Nine years ago it was calculated that there were in Norwich about 600 women who *lived* by sin...and 500 others who had delivered themselves up *partially* to the life of a prostitute."<sup>54</sup> This latter group, whom he referred to as "fallen women," were to be found among "sewing girls, those employed in factories, servants, and even married women." The former, however, were characterised by neuroses rather than occupation: "The miserable victims of habitual sin are generally marked by a peculiar waywardness and excitability, a fitfulness of purpose and of temper, clearly akin to mental disease, and resembling certain phases of insanity in being strongly suggestive of the idea of demoniacal possession."<sup>55</sup> Such women, he believed, were unfit for society: "though full of genuine remorse and horror of the past, they appear notwithstanding to have lost the power of self-direction and control, and to be utterly unable to conform to the quiet routine of a well-regulated household." Subject to violent mood swings, and in need of constant supervision, these women were no longer adults at all: "They are children in all but sin and years, and as children they must be watched, tended, and controlled in everything." Despite this characterisation, Scudamore maintained that these women often had fallen through no fault of their own. As such, a cast of unsavoury

<sup>54</sup> Proposal, 4. Italics in original. See also the Norfolk Chronicle, March 4, 1854.

<sup>55</sup> Proposal, 5. On the links between women and madness in the nineteenth century, see Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture (New York: Penguin, 1985).

characters, responsible for leading these women to ruin, was paraded out: the cruel stepmother, the godless mother "herself living in sin," the ill-tempered father. Due to hunger, lack of employment, and parental abuse, fallen women, he explained, yearned for shelter. As such, Scudamore utilised what Linda Mahood refers to as the "cult of sentimentality" which circulated around the figure of the prostitute at the middle of the century, in order to fashion the identity of the sinner as potential penitent, and thus validate the proposed penitentiary.<sup>56</sup>

Central to this discourse of sentimentality was an assumption that such "children" could indeed achieve repentance. Thus Scudamore presented an impressive array of statistics from various penitentiaries throughout the country. Of a total of 3993 admissions to nine penitentiaries, 1861 women had been "sent to service, restored to their friends, or married."<sup>57</sup> Such figures were interpreted positively as they referred to the "worst class of penitent." Lest concern exist about this sub-fifty-per-cent "success" rate, Scudamore noted that even those women who left of their own accord were often found to be "living respectably." Although statistics provided a scientific and quantifiable measure of the effectiveness of rescue work, statistics were not, however, the surest or even the most significant measure of repentance. For many nineteenth-century reformers, the goal of rescue work was not achieved through respectable employment, marriage, or the restoration of familial ties, instead, it involved a transformation of the soul. Thus, Scudamore emphasised that "the deeply-religious character of the reformation which takes place in very many deserves our especial notice."<sup>58</sup> Basing his conclusions on reports from employers of former penitents,

<sup>56</sup> Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, 56-60.

<sup>57</sup> Proposal, 19. See also, Armstrong, "Female Penitentiaries," 369.

<sup>58</sup> Proposal, 20.

particularly those occupied in domestic service, and on Armstrong's research, Scudamore presented evidence of penitents who had become "positively religious" as a result of their penitentiary experience. In the rhetoric of Victorian moral reform, Christian redemption was a powerful motivation.

The paradoxical elements of rescue workers and their work, as laid out by the committee, emerge most dramatically in the ways the identity of the proposed penitentiary and its programme of reform were constructed. The characterisation of the penitents was central to this identification, as was the association of the house with virtue. As such, it was essential that the house of refuge be located out of the city, "far from the scenes of original vice and temptation."<sup>59</sup> Scudamore was himself a strong advocate of a pastoral location, eloquently espousing its redemptive powers:

Most of these poor women are born in the country, and to them its scenes and occupations will bring a wholesome, if perhaps bitter, thought of their early home and days of innocence. All will derive from the clear sky and open landscape that sense of liberty and independence, which it is necessary to indulge at first, in one way or another, in those who have lived long without restraint or rule.<sup>60</sup>

Lest any feel that Scudamore was suggesting a genuine atmosphere of freedom, he was clear to note that the site at another penitentiary comprised "fifteen acres of freehold, well fenced in and screened by walls and hedge-rows."<sup>61</sup> The benefits of the location were premised on paradox: only through the denial of physical freedom would "that sense of liberty and

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<sup>59</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, March 18, 1854. In favouring a rural setting, the committee again acted upon the guidelines of the CPA, which stipulated that "All sites of penitentiaries, to be aided by grants, must be sufficiently spacious to allow the inmates to have ample out-of-door exercise thereon." Third Annual Report of the CPA, 14. In their arguments for female penitentiaries, Armstrong and Carter also favoured rural settings as being the most conducive to moral reform.

<sup>60</sup> Proposal, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Proposal, 8. Here Scudamore referred to Clewer, a sisterhood whose identity as such, as will be discussed below, remained hidden.

independence" be obtained. The pastoral setting was also justified in relation to the penitents' character, as Scudamore explained, "pure air, refreshing walks, and the gentle labours of a garden, are almost indispensable to the recovery of health impaired by the excitements of vice, exposure to weather, and rapid alternations of excess and want."<sup>62</sup> The creation of a proper environment was key not only for its physical benefits, but also for its psychological effects: the garden of Eden-like setting was designed to reinforce in the penitents' minds their status as children. Through the restorative power of earth and air, the scheme refashioned the sinner as innocent, whose conscience might become as clear as the sky.

The business of rehabilitation involved a structured regime of instruction, prayer, work, and recreation. Central to the programme was the industriousness of the penitents. At other penitentiaries, they were occupied in baking, making butter, bonnets and needlework, and working in the laundry and the kitchen. During this work, it was essential, however, that the penitents must never be permitted to converse among themselves without the presence of supervision by one of the ladies. In this capacity, the ladies' skill at combining "the simplicity of the dove" with "the wisdom of the serpent" was put to the test, as Scudamore explained: "though always watchful, they must not seem to watch. It is essential that the idea of being watched and spied into should be destroyed in the penitent's mind."<sup>63</sup> This subtle system of spying was designed as well to ensure that the reason the penitents were at the house was never alluded to. As such, Scudamore heeded Armstrong's warning that, "no surer means could be used to

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<sup>62</sup> Proposal, 12-13. Here, Scudamore cited Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet, who published his massive statistical analysis of prostitution, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* in 1836. His work was highly influential in England, particularly upon William Acton. He argued that prostitution was a transient occupation.

<sup>63</sup> Proposal, 14.

convince them of the exceeding sinfulness of their sin than thus to treat it as something too horrid even to be alluded to in the most indirect and distant way."<sup>64</sup> That the sin of sex remain hidden reveals how in the actual daily operations of penitentiary work the paradoxes of Victorian identity were at play. Although houses of reform existed, and the identities of the penitents and the ladies were constructed as a result of sexual digression, sex was to be sublimated within the atmosphere of purity at the house.

Sex was not the only aspect of the proposed penitentiary to be hidden within the discourse of the Proposal. This document drew explicitly on the writings of the Armstrong and Carter and on the models provided by the houses of mercy at Wantage and Clewer in fashioning the identity of the proposed penitentiary, yet nowhere in its twenty-six pages occurred any mention of a sisterhood.<sup>65</sup> Rather, Scudamore's document disguised the identities of Wantage and Clewer and imagined the proposed penitentiary as a religious institution, but not a religious order. Although both Wantage and Clewer were Anglican sisterhoods, the committee did not want its penitentiary to be associated with monasticism: the anti-Tractarian sentiment which abounded in the distinctly evangelical region of East Anglia, and which existed within the committee prevented such a development.<sup>66</sup> At a

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<sup>64</sup> Proposal, 15.

<sup>65</sup> In order to demonstrate the validity of rescue work, the Proposal presented accounts of the histories of the penitentiaries at Clewer and Wantage, both controlled by sisterhoods. Significantly, however, while Scudamore wrote assiduously about the founders, growth, and successes of these Communities, he made no mention of the religious life whatsoever. Of Carter's involvement at Clewer, the Proposal noted only that "under his care this true house of mercy was speedily developed into a well-organized Penitentiary." The sisters were referred to only as "ladies moved by a Christian pity for the fallen of their sex," and the mother superior as "Mistress of the Penitents." Although the other members of the committee were no doubt familiar with Carter, and would also have been aware that Clewer and Wantage were Anglican sisterhoods, their refusal to acknowledge the religious life bears witness to their reluctance to associate the proposed house of mercy with monasticism at all.

<sup>66</sup> Norfolk was a strongly evangelical region: Unitarianism was popular and there existed a strong Quaker community as well.

public meeting in Norwich in March 1854, committee members raised concerns surrounding the spiritual complexion of the penitentiary and were anxious to reaffirm that it be organised along non-sectarian principles. Specifically, there was a feeling among the group that the institution must not fall into the hands of the followers of Tractarian principles, who constituted "some of the chief promoters" of the proposed work.<sup>67</sup> Scudamore thus stressed the catholic nature of the undertaking, "begg[ing] most distinctly to deny that [these Tractarians] had evinced any desire to act as a party."<sup>68</sup> Committee member Lord Bayning also attempted to put concerns about a religious order to rest, assuring members that "such apprehensions [were] utterly groundless, and that had I thought [the contrary], I would not have joined this undertaking."<sup>69</sup>

Such fears reflected the trials which faced early sisterhoods. Clewer had met with public prejudice by those who believed that the penitents should be supervised by paid matrons under the charge of a committee of male managers.<sup>70</sup> As well, no doubt the embarrassment of the conversions at Wantage heightened suspicions that sisterhoods were merely stepping-stones to Rome: in 1850, Wantage Superior Elizabeth Lockhart left the Community for the Roman Church, taking another sister with her and leaving only two to continue the work.<sup>71</sup> The conversion of Archdeacon Manning, Wantage's

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<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the Tractarian threat at mid-century, see D. G. Paz, Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England (Stanford: Stanford UP., 1992). Roman Catholic religious orders for women did not arrive in East Anglia until the 1870s. See Barbara Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales, 76.

<sup>68</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, March 18, 1854.

<sup>69</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, March 18, 1854. The paper provided a detailed account of the meeting.

<sup>70</sup> Seeking and Saving: a monthly journal of home mission and penitentiary work, vol 1, no 2 (June 1881).

<sup>71</sup> See Allchin, The Silent Rebellion. The work at Wantage was taken up by Harriet Day, who became the Community's Mother Superior, and Rev. W. J. Butler. (Butler initially wanted education work, Manning wanted a penitentiary)

spiritual advisor, only reinforced this link. The Proposal's disguising of the actual identities of Wantage and Clewer - the former, in its fifth year of operation as a religious order, was referred to as "the Home" - testifies to the extreme public prejudice which existed toward the idea of an Anglican sisterhood in this part of the countryside.<sup>72</sup> Like that of sex, the idea of a religious order was to remain "a forbidden theme."

Rather than a sisterhood, the proposed house of mercy was to be modelled on the system at Bussage, a house of refuge in the Cotswold Hills, which had been established in 1851 under the control of a committee of men.<sup>73</sup> Along these lines, a council was established to manage the affairs of the penitentiary, under the chairmanship of Lord Bayning, whose members would provide financial services, legal advice, medical assistance, and spiritual guidance. The council included local members of the clergy, together with prominent civic and business leaders from Norwich and across England.<sup>74</sup> A quiet house was found in the village of Shipmeadow, located about twelve miles south of Norwich, just over the Suffolk border. Rev. M. S. Suckling of Shipmeadow offered his services as Chaplain to the house, with Scudamore as Secretary. Suckling's willingness to serve in this capacity was propitious: his own brother Robert had worked as the chaplain at Bussage, until his untimely death late in 1851.<sup>75</sup> The final resolution of the meeting - which placed sole control of the finances and general

<sup>72</sup> There were no other Anglican religious orders in East Anglia at this time. In 1877 a Benedictine Roman Catholic order was established at East Bergholt, Suffolk. A group of Benedictine nuns had been established in Bungay, neighbouring Ditchingham, in 1160 until the dissolution. The remains of the priory can still be found in Bungay. See White's 1845 Norfolk, 427.

<sup>73</sup> All Hallows Centenary, 1855 - 1955. (n.p., n.d.) Scudamore had referred to the penitentiary at Bussage in the original Proposal.

<sup>74</sup> A complete list of the membership in 1860 is given in the 6th Annual Report of the House of Mercy.

<sup>75</sup> Proposal, 10. Bussage had been established by a committee of men in April 1851 and was subsequently funded by the CPA. The inmates of the house of refuge had been taken from the "black ward" of the local workhouse.

administration of the penitentiary in the hands of the council - left no doubt that although women would superintend the work, men would ultimately be in charge. As they set out to begin, the support received from existing penitentiaries was cautious: "It is their earnest advice to us that, if we begin at all, we begin quietly and on a small scale."<sup>76</sup>

The only task remaining in the establishment of the penitentiary was the most important: finding women to manage the work and those to be rescued. That there existed many who desired repentance, the council was sure. John Armstrong, in attendance at the Norwich meeting of March 1854, explained: "There was a remarkable peculiarity in those establishments -- persons actually applied of their own free will to be confined in them! This was a proof of penitence--for when did they find thieves seeking voluntary imprisonment?"<sup>77</sup> The chairman concurred: "But how inadequately this duty has been carried out, is too plain from the number of unhappy women who are unable to gain admission within the walls of those institutions which have been established for their refuge and restoration."<sup>78</sup> Surely, a council member trusted, "ladies could be found to leave the glare and glitter of this world" in order to help their fallen sisters.<sup>79</sup> The task of finding women to work in the institution was to prove far more difficult than the council might have imagined. One such woman, however, Lavinia Crosse, who according to the Community's historian attended this public meeting, was moved by the council's appeal.<sup>80</sup> Crosse's involvement with the work was pivotal: not only would she assume control of the penitentiary at

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<sup>76</sup> Scudamore, Proposal.

<sup>77</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, March 18, 1854.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Sister Violet*, All Hallows' Ditchingham, 4.



Shipmeadow, but she would also be responsible for its transformation into the Community of All Hallows, much to the outrage of many of the original council members for whom female monasticism was anathema.

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### **The Formation of the Community of All Hallows at the Shipmeadow Penitentiary**

The Shipmeadow Penitentiary officially opened its doors on May 6, 1854 under the temporary superintendence of Miss Cozens, who had previously worked at the house of mercy at Clewer.<sup>81</sup> The farmhouse's location, away from the main road but only a few minutes' walk to the parish church and surrounded by pleasant grounds, provided an ideal setting for a retreat. The Church Penitentiary Association registered its support of the institution "which, being founded in connection with this Association seems to call for special thankfulness on the part of all connected with it."<sup>82</sup> While the CPA could offer £75 for furniture and adapting the property, it could not provide what the institution most required - a woman to lead the work on the permanent basis. Thus, it appealed to the public: "the time is drawing near when the lady at present in charge will be obliged to retire; and another is much wanted to undertake its superiorship in her place....Is there no one who will come forward and devote herself to this good service to Christ and His lost ones?"<sup>83</sup>

In mid-June, guests were invited to participate in a celebration of the home's foundation. Presiding over the Eucharist was the Reverend F. C. Blomfield, son of the Bishop of London, whose impassioned sermon reinforced the absolute necessity of rescue work. Following the service, guests

<sup>81</sup> See Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses," 228.

<sup>82</sup> Second Annual Report of the CPA, 1854.

<sup>83</sup> Second Annual Report of the CPA, 1854.

were invited to a tour of the penitentiary. London-based newspaper, *The Penny Post* presented an eye-witness account of the scene:

The four penitents then inmates of the establishment were walking up and down the gravel path as we entered the great gates, but they immediately retreated, and were seated in their class room when we were introduced into the house. They were attended by one of the ladies, - a young, sweet-looking creature, - and were modestly dressed in lilac prints, and, if I remember rightly, neat white caps. We were requested not to look at them, however, but to pass forward into the adjoining room, a pretty little apartment for the use of the lady superintendent. The bedrooms were judiciously arranged in compartments, each containing a bed, chair, and small washstand, and all so disposed as to be under supervision of the different ladies' apartments, which were furnished with equal plainness and simplicity.<sup>84</sup>

This description of the house and its inhabitants - sweet, neat, pretty, and plain - would no doubt have been pleasing to readers of *The Penny Post*. It was intended not only to elicit their support both spiritually and financially, but also to encourage faithful women to devote themselves to the work. The idea of these women living together, in a home, helped to domesticate and bring respectability to an institution rooted in sexual indiscretion. Historian Eileen Yeo explains how the discourse of home was utilised by women as a means of practising social motherhood: "A new way of extending the idea of home, mid-century feminists created a residential institution, often called a 'home' where virgin mothers could care for children and especially for young women in sexual danger."<sup>85</sup> *The Penny Post* reinforced the power dynamics of home with well-behaved children, who retreat from the garden, sit quietly at desks, and even while sleeping, are under the watchful eye of superiors.

For one of the guests that afternoon at Shipmeadow, the tour of the

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<sup>84</sup> "Shipmeadow Penitentiary" *The Penny Post*, Sept. 7, 1855 (vol 5).

<sup>85</sup> Yeo, "Protestant Feminists and Catholic Saints," 134.

penitentiary had particular meaning: it was to become *her* new home. Sarah Lavinia Crosse was born to a prominent Norwich surgeon and his wife at the end of 1821.<sup>86</sup> One of eight siblings, she had a well-rounded childhood, enjoying music, literature, and riding. Yet as a devout member of the Church of England, she was imbued with a sense of duty to help those less fortunate than herself.<sup>87</sup> No doubt inspired by the work of prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, who had lived nearby, in 1847 Crosse became involved in mission work in the parish of St. Peter's Mancroft, a poor district in the heart of Norwich's city centre, which exposed her to society's outcasts. The incumbent at St. Peter's, Charles Turner had been involved in the penitentiary from its inception and through this connection, Crosse became aware of the proposed rescue work. Turner remembered her as "singularly gifted with a quiet, preserving, kindly way of dealing with difficult people." Apparently, she had no desire for marriage, for she "determined to remain single." Nor did Crosse's parents deter her from the work: her father had died in 1850, and her mother, whose health was often poor, did not require Lavinia at home.<sup>88</sup>

Excerpts from Crosse's diary provide an invaluable glimpse into the earliest work at the penitentiary and the genesis of the Community of All Hallows. Crosse's first visit to the penitentiary on the occasion of the open-house left her not nearly as impressed as *The Penny Post*: "[I] walked with Mr S[cudamore] to the House of Mercy - I was rather disappointed with the size of

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<sup>86</sup> Her father was Dr. John Crosse, her mother was Dorothy Anne Bayly, from Stowmarket.

<sup>87</sup> On the politics of female public devotion, see, for example, Jane Lewis, Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1991); and Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes.

<sup>88</sup> This paragraph is informed by the account of Lavinia Crosse in Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 18-20. For a related discussion of the motivations behind women's charitable enterprise in this period, see Anne Summers, "A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century" in Sandra Burman, ed., Fit Work for Women (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

the house and with its general appearance - the bed rooms too small."<sup>89</sup> Despite the fact that the council rejected a religious order in connection with the work, it is clear that Crosse felt otherwise, as on the drive home with Suckling, she recalled that "I had a great deal of conversation with him. Sisterhoods etc." As she moved into the house the next day, her thoughts were decidedly High Church: "Had a very long talk with Mr. Scudamore, walking in the garden, Dr Pusey, Ascetics, Manning, Wilberforce on the Eucharist, etc... all was bright, for the house was lighted up - and preparations were made for evening prayers. My own room was nicely and comfortably prepared."<sup>90</sup> She wasted no time gathering information about the religious life, spending her first day with a Miss Campbell, learning about the Sisterhood at Clewer, where Campbell had been involved in the work of moral reform.

As the earliest entries in her diary make clear, Lavinia Crosse imagined the house of mercy as a religious order even before she had taken up residence. Yet, eighteenth months passed before this transformation took place and she became a sister. The first few months at Shipmeadow were ones of adjustment as Lavinia Crosse tried to adapt to a way of life very different from the one she had previously known. Days were filled by consoling, instructing, and dining with the penitents, and attending chapel. Evenings were often spent engaged with Pusey's sermons. Her first weekend in the house was particularly eventful, as her diary entry for Monday recorded simply, "What histories I might write of the events of the last two days." Yet she did not feel that she could properly comment on these events,

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<sup>89</sup> Lavinia Crosse's diary, June 12, 1854. CAH Archives.

<sup>90</sup> Crosse's diary, June 13, 1854. Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, set out his ideas for penitent reform in "On Penitentiary Work. Two Sermons Preached at the Opening of the House of Mercy, Wantage" (Oxford: JH & Jas. Parker, 1861). Wilberforce was the Bishop of Oxford, 1845 - 1869.

choosing rather to replace her words with a code of symbols to refer to the penitents and their behaviour: "How strange...[symbols]...It is difficult to conceive how such a state of things...[symbols]." <sup>91</sup> Either she could not bring herself to write what she had experienced during this time, or self-awareness that her diary may one day become public prevented her from recording her private thoughts. Her use of code literally symbolised the extent to which her new life differed from that of her previously comfortable middle-class existence.

As she adjusted to her new life, Crosse endeavoured to balance the demands of rescue work with her own personal anxieties. Her diary entries from this time reveal the extent to which her faith sustained her, allowing her to envision the possibility of establishing the religious life at the penitentiary. At the end of her first month, bedridden with a cold, Crosse contemplated her work, her soul, and her future:

I was unwell in the night, very feverish. I have had a great deal of time to meditate and the result has been, that I see my way clearer now - I have dared to face the thought of soon having the least nothing between me and my dear friend. It is a trial to me, but I have had so much of giving up lately that it quite surprises me how much less difficult it is to bear these things, when they quickly succeed each other. To rely upon the hand that orders each event, to trust the love and wisdom of the care of the Almighty Friend, brings peace and resignation. I think I am becoming to live alone with God, as it were. I seem to have nothing to cling to, and belong more to the One above than to any one on earth. I thought this morning, that if fever were coming and I was brought to the threshold of a Sisterhood, and was then to die, that I would depart with willingness for nothing satisfies me here below, and I often long to be in the presence of my God, at rest in Paradise, with those who have died in the Lord.

To night I seemed to have clasped my cross afresh - I seem to see what my work will be like here - and the thought has cheered me, because if it happens as I think, I must throw

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<sup>91</sup> Crosse's diary, June 19, 1854.

myself heart and soul into the work of this house and that is just what I want to do. There will be enough to satisfy me that I am not wasting time here, if all should happen as I think.<sup>92</sup>

Worth citing in its entirety, this passage, more than any other document in the All Hallows archives, illustrates the transition of Lavinia Crosse's identity from worldliness to Christ. She seems to have been recording a moment when she decided that her future lay with God, and his work, rather than with her "dear friend." Like Emily Scobell, Crosse thoughtfully contemplated what she would be giving up, and how her life would be enriched through monasticism. Clearly, her relationship with God gave her strength and the courage to embrace change. She was well versed in Tractarian theology, and despite the pressures of the household, felt eager to commence the religious life. Above all, she believed that through self sacrifice and devotion to God, her life would find purpose and meaning.

Despite the initial trials she faced, Crosse soon settled into a routine. By July, Miss Cozens had departed and Crosse was assisted in the work by three other women, the experienced Miss Campbell among them.<sup>93</sup> The tone in her diary during this summer was decidedly upbeat, as she recorded on July 28th that "I am very happy here. I like my work. It is interesting to have to manage the Penitents."<sup>94</sup> She also found great support from Scudamore, with whom she discussed "religious celibacy" as well as the proposed Rules which would govern the Sisterhood: "I do enjoy talking with him so very much. What great blessings God bestows on me."<sup>95</sup> The work of "manag[ing] the penitents," however, was difficult. The dynamic between reformer and

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<sup>92</sup> Crosse's diary, June 28, 1854. CAH Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Cozens had never intended to stay on, but only to help get the house started. The other women who assisted Crosse were Miss Allsopp and Miss Brittingham.

<sup>94</sup> Diary of Lavinia Crosse, July 28, 1854.

<sup>95</sup> Crosse's diary, July 1854.

penitent, based as it was upon the tenuous link among class, virtue, and sexual purity, was fraught with tension. In her diary, Crosse depicted the relationship between "pure" and "fallen" women as essentially that between teacher and petulant pupil. There was no move a penitent could make, no sound she could utter, that was not subject to careful scrutiny. Thus, the process of transformation, of repentance, was met at every turn with disobedience and rebellion as the penitents attempted to maintain a modicum of control over their caged existences. Outside communication was carefully guarded: "It has come out that Rachel has sent four letters away from this House unknown to us - She confessed it all to me - and has owned herself very sorry - She has chosen her own punishment."<sup>96</sup> The cycle of transgression, repentance, punishment, and forgiveness was central to the rehabilitation process at the penitentiary. Historian Frank Prochaska explains that, "This indoctrination had one overriding aim--to break down deceit and pride and replace it with guilt...By instilling a sense of shame, or criminality, in their charges, [reformers] prepared the ground for conversion and reformation."<sup>97</sup> At the Shipmeadow penitentiary too, the practices of Victorian social reform were deeply embedded in Christian teaching: sin, confession, redemption.

Throughout the penitentiary's formative period, Crosse never lost sight of her original goal to establish a sisterhood at Shipmeadow. While gaining experience in the work of moral reform, she was also considering the ideal type of women to join her at the penitentiary. The taxing nature of the work created tensions among the lady volunteers. These women were frequently overworked and spent time away from the house, leaving Crosse

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<sup>96</sup> Crosse's diary, July 1854.

<sup>97</sup> Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy, 156.

understaffed and over extended.<sup>98</sup> These early trials - with penitents and workers alike - no doubt steeled her resolve and impressed upon her what advocates such as Armstrong and Carter had been insisting: the work of moral reform required the right kind of reformers, ideally, Anglican sisters. For just as the penitents must devote themselves entirely to the process of redemption, so too must those who sought to procure it. The ways in which Crosse imagined the identity of an Anglican sister were shaped by the insights of council member James Davies, the vicar of Abbenhall. In a letter he wrote to Suckling, which Crosse copied into her diary at length, Davies set out an explicit character sketch of the ideal penitentiary worker. His characterisation boldly exposes how an imagined identity was riddled with contradiction. The vicar explained how penitentiary work often attracted the wrong type: "they come out from society and take a part in Retreats from some depression or disappointment ....Often they are in such a state of mind as to lack rather than lend aid - to need rather than form a house."<sup>99</sup> In contrast, ideal penitentiary workers should be "full of health, strength and spirits." Such women, he maintained, must possess an extreme elasticity of character: "They must assume all shapes and sizes - expand, contract, bound, rebound, rise high, bend low - adapt themselves to all moods, manners, tempers, caprices and yet recover their own form, weight, height, stature and character the instant the pressure is taken off." The extremes of character must abide in each soul, at once "great ladies," yet also the "kind friend" and "the low servant, almost the slave for Xt's sake [sic]."<sup>100</sup> As to relations among the women, he suggested an egalitarian model: "their chief character must be that of Sisters- they must

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<sup>98</sup> See Lavinia's diary entries during this period for comments on the unreliable nature of volunteers.

<sup>99</sup> CAH Archives, Lavinia Crosse's diary, July 27, 1854. Extract from James Davies to Suckling, n.d.

<sup>100</sup> Davies to Suckling, Crosse's diary.



be alike yet different - They will effect much more by keeping up amongst themselves a sense of diversity than a sense of superiority." Davies was careful to note, however, that such women should not consider themselves in any way superior. Their work must be performed in humble devotion to God, and their identities must be performed in a similar manner:

They might attain through such willing works that almost perfection in holy women namely a high degree of saintliness combined with their natural degree of gentleness. They may be lifting low souls from the mire and the clay and setting them upon the Rock that is higher than the highest things of earth and at the same time holding them and themselves in daily domestic duties in feelings and tempers and tastes rather above nor below true amiable English womanhood.<sup>101</sup>

Davies positioned these women, like Christ himself, as both "divine and human." He fashioned their identities in relational terms, highlighting their personal dynamics, as well as those with Christ, each other, the penitents, and other English women. Although whether Davies envisioned these women as women religious is not definite, his emphasis on self-sacrifice, egalitarianism, and the importance of freedom from domestic ties for women who chose this type of work, suggests that the identities he crafted were monastic. Certainly his concern that these "holy women" not consider themselves superior to "true...womanhood" reveals an awareness of the tension among constructions of Victorian women and that of women religious.

As early as the autumn of 1854, Crosse began travelling to other houses of mercy, including those at Bussage, and at the Sisterhoods at Wantage and Clewer.<sup>102</sup> She read Carter's advice on sisterhood penitentiaries, and began

<sup>101</sup> Davies to Suckling, Crosse's diary.

<sup>102</sup> Crosse's diary, Sept 1854. At Bussage, she was quite taken with "the lively Mrs. Poole." According to Sr Violet, she also travelled to French convents to learn more about the religious life. At Clewer she learned much from Sister Ellen, the Assistant Superior whom also advised the sisters at East Grinstead.

devising the Rule which would govern her own. At the beginning of 1855, Crosse offered her services as superintendent of the penitentiary, and under Scudamore's recommendation, was accepted by the council.<sup>103</sup> The extreme devotion crucial to rescue work at the fledgling penitentiary was tested shortly thereafter with the death of one of the penitents.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the low-lying Shipmeadow site was deemed "unsuitable on health grounds" for rescue work by the medical attendant who also advised that the number of penitents be reduced from twenty-five. The death at the house meant that the health warning needed to be addressed immediately. A change was indeed necessary for financial reasons as well, as CPA grants were given only to buildings with freehold sites. The CPA's annual report noted that "it is already found necessary to enlarge and place upon an independent basis the House of Mercy at Shipmeadow in Suffolk."<sup>105</sup> Plans commenced to secure a new site and designs for a complex of buildings were prepared.<sup>106</sup> By the summer of 1855 Crosse felt prepared enough to approach the council, stating her "intention of framing regulations for the government of their own society."<sup>107</sup> Crosse was deliberately vague as to the precise character of this "society," however, as she addressed the council, which agreed to consider her plan on the condition that three of its members oversee the statutes. At the end of the year, despite lacking the assent of the council to establish a religious order, Crosse felt ready to proceed.

<sup>103</sup> Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 11. Lavinia was appointed lady superintendent at a Council meeting, January 9, 1855. Unfortunately, the Council Minute books no longer exist.

<sup>104</sup> Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 11. There is no evidence as to the identity of the woman who died or the cause of her death.

<sup>105</sup> Third Annual Report of the CPA, 1855.

<sup>106</sup> Borrowing from Clewer's model, the site was to be "fenced in by a ditch and hedge with two rows of white thorn spring." Cited in Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 19. Scudamore explained that only in the following months did the women decide "upon the form and arrangement of their future life." 20.

On the Eve of the Circumcision, the last day of 1855, the Community of All Hallows was formed in a quiet ceremony at midnight, officiated by Scudamore and Carter. In her diary, Lavinia Crosse recorded the momentous event:

Our Sisterhood was formed - Mr. Carter came to us - we had a service in the Chapel about 10 - I was first admitted to the office of Superior - promised obedience to the rule of the Community and received these ...together with the key of the House - Both clergymen retired for a short time after this service - Miss Taylor, and Miss [illegible] were then received as sister Probationers....it was just New Year's when the service was over.<sup>108</sup>

The creation of the Sisterhood testifies to Crosse's determination, as the Community's historian exclaims: "It was owing to the drive and strong will of this woman that the Shipmeadow Penitentiary developed into the Community of All Hallows."<sup>109</sup> As her diary makes clear, the establishment of a religious order was a part of Lavinia Crosse's plan from the beginning of her association with the house of mercy. It may also have been a part of Scudamore's, who, despite his earlier promises to the council, seems to have endorsed the creation of the religious order. The proliferation of appeals, such as that of the Bishop of Grahamstown, for women to devote themselves as sisters to the cause of fallen women, must have hit a powerful chord with Crosse. Perhaps she had even met the Bishop in person at the public meeting

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<sup>108</sup> Crosse's diary, Dec 31, 1855. CAH Archives. The identity of the third woman is somewhat of a mystery. The name in the diary is hard to decipher: it reads like Bonelds. In her history of the order, Sister Violet claims that the two novices were Adele Taylor, and Sister Frances, who left the Community in 1869. Sister Violet, p 13. Nowhere in the Community archives, or in census reports does the last name of Sister Frances ever appear. Nor does she appear in the census reports for 1861 at all. As such, Sister Frances may indeed have been one of the original probationers. The Rule derived from the Convent of the Visitation in Bruges; additions from the Rule of St. Augustine were later incorporated.

<sup>109</sup> Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, Chapter Three, for details of Crosse's life prior to joining the sisterhood.

in Norwich.<sup>110</sup> The influence of T. T. Carter, the assistance of Miss Campbell, and the successes at Clewer and Wantage reinforced in her mind the possibility of establishing a religious order in connection with rehabilitation work. Although she was no doubt cognizant of the trepidation of the council toward religious orders, significantly its views did not deter her from establishing a sisterhood. Rather, Crosse and her two colleagues determined their own course, refusing to be influenced by a group of men who sought to control them, and by public sentiment, which, invariably, would label them foolish.

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**"Two faces under one [sister]hood": Responses to the establishment of the Community of All Hallows**

The transformation of the penitentiary's identity generated substantial controversy among the council members. Nor was the public pleased at the discovery of a religious order in its midst. Concerns about the fate of the house of mercy reveal the ways in which the council, and the public more broadly, viewed the nature of the religious life within the Church of England, and women's place in society. The concerns raised by opponents of sisterhoods, and the arguments put forth by their defenders, demonstrate how questions of identity, specifically about gender, were at the core of the debate about these institutions. None questioned that the work was valuable and necessary. Rather, the ways in which the women in sisterhoods identified themselves and were identified by others caused the greatest threat

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<sup>110</sup> She was certainly impressed with the Bishop of Natal, whom she met in August 1854, declaring that "were I not here I do believe I would have wished to go with him to Natal." Crosse's diary, August 1854.

to Victorian gender ideology.<sup>111</sup> Although religiously-based grievances were expressed frequently about the Sisterhood, many council members also used such arguments as a way of screening deeper concerns about female self-determination which was brought to centre stage by the surreptitious establishment of All Hallows.

The council's reaction to the formation of a religious order, while not one of universal animosity, was nevertheless a portent of how the relationship between it and the sisters would develop. In his support of the sisters, Scudamore, now the Community Warden, maintained that the decision to form a religious order was beyond the council's scope: "the changes of which we are speaking affected immediately none but the ladies themselves, and therefore, came only *indirectly* within the province of the Council."<sup>112</sup> Naturally, the council expressed concern that the penitentiary was now in the hands of a Sisterhood regulated by its own statutes. At a meeting in April 1856, council members presented their formal reaction to the Sisterhood, stating that

while they gratefully acknowledge...the devoted services of the Ladies at the Penitentiary [they] most reluctantly express their regret that they should have formed themselves into a 'Sisterhood' without having previously consulted and obtained the sanction of the Council [and that] the Council cannot recognise the Sisterhood.<sup>113</sup>

Demanding that the Sisterhood's rules be submitted to it for inspection, the council reacted sternly to the independent initiative of the women at Shipmeadow. Over the following months, however, it gradually realised

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<sup>111</sup> See Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in mid-Victorian England (London: Virago, 1988) for a thoughtful analysis of the instabilities within discourses of gender.

<sup>112</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 20. Original emphasis.

<sup>113</sup> Council minute book. As cited in Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 12.

that, once formed, the Sisterhood was not going to dissolve. It therefore offered tentative acceptance of All Hallows "upon the distinct understanding that the sole power of confirming and altering its rules should be with the Council."<sup>114</sup> Not content with such an arrangement, the sisters decided to ask council members and a wider body of supporters - 166 persons in all - if they were willing to continue their patronage of the House of Mercy with the establishment of the Sisterhood. Apart from the council, which voted at a meeting, the other votes were received by mail, with the understanding that a failure to reply would indicate a vote in support of All Hallows. One hundred and thirty-four voted in favour of the Sisterhood, thirty-two voted against it.<sup>115</sup> The sisters, who had been allocated fifty votes, declined to use them. The results of the vote forced the council's hand and led to the resignation of several of the chief architects of the penitentiary, including Sir John Boileau and council chairman Lord Bayning. Of even greater significance to the sisters was the resignation of their Chaplain, M. S. Suckling.<sup>116</sup> While such overwhelming support must have buoyed the sisters' spirits, they must have felt the loss of these influential men keenly.

Concerns raised by council member Rev. William Edgell shortly after the vote illustrate the power dynamics between council members and the new Superior. At All Hallows, the sisters were uniformly clad in black dresses with simple black crosses around their necks. Edgell reacted adversely to the manner in which the sisters represented themselves in life and in

<sup>114</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, November 22, 1856. Letter to the Editor from Wm. C. Edgell.

<sup>115</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, November 4, 1856. Letter to the Editor from W J Utten Browne. See also Scudamore, "An Account." He notes that of the 116 who responded, 98 supported the sisterhood.

<sup>116</sup> According to Sister Violet, Suckling may have been displeased with the general lack of support displayed by the council toward the sisterhood. 12. Other council members included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord John Manners, and the Bishop of Oxford, whom, according to Sister Violet, gave "tacit support." 17.

death, disapproving of their distinguishable dress, and "the erection of a tombstone 'bearing an inscription unusually placed in churchyards.'"<sup>117</sup> Although elsewhere Edgell acknowledged the value of Anglican sisters' work not only in England but also under Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, in privileging functional over symbolic aspects of sisters' identities, he refused to condone their right to self-determination.<sup>118</sup> Edgell's concerns were taken seriously by the council, which summoned Mother Lavinia to answer his complaints. Unfortunately, while the records of this meeting no longer exist, the council's subsequent request for Edgell's resignation implies that the Superior found no difficulty standing her ground.

Significantly, the Bishop of Norwich, Samuel Hinds, apparently took no part in any of these proceedings. According to the Community history, Hinds "virtually refused his sanction in a non-committal reply to a request for recognition."<sup>119</sup> Although it is unlikely that the Bishop would have openly blocked an Anglican sisterhood in his diocese, Hinds was preoccupied with matters of a more personal nature. In 1856 the widowed Bishop caused scandal of his own by marrying his cook. Within a year he resigned the see, becoming the first bishop to do so, citing ill health and relocating to London.<sup>120</sup> The lack of interference from the Bishop probably worked in the favour of the Sisterhood's early development. While at East Grinstead the Society of St. Margaret often faced a difficult relationship with the Bishop of Chichester, the sisters at Shipmeadow were, initially at least, freed of any obligations to the diocesan hierarchy. Conversely, however, they were also deprived the

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Sister Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, 17.

<sup>118</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, To the Editor from W C Edgell, December 1, 1856.

<sup>119</sup> Sister Violet, 17. Bishop Hinds (1849 -57) died in 1857 and was succeeded by Henry Pelham (1857 -1893).

<sup>120</sup> See W. Gibson, "The Resignation of Bishop Hinds of Norwich" Norfolk Archaeology 41: 3 (1992), 358 -360. There is little mention in the press concerning the role of the Bishop at this time. As well, Hinds' successor, Henry Pelham, showed little interest in the Community.

approval which a supportive bishop would provide.

While the Bishop may have felt apathy to the existence of a religious order in his diocese, news of the Sisterhood leaked to the press in the autumn of 1856, making its existence a matter of public debate. The editor of the *Norfolk Chronicle*, whose anti-Tractarian views were well established, seized upon the popular association of Anglo-Catholicism with Roman Catholicism, inquiring, "Is the Shipmeadow Penitentiary to be Roman Catholic or Not?"<sup>121</sup>

Readers were informed that the house was to be organised on

a system which approaches very nearly to certain customs of the Roman Catholic Church. We hear that at one of these meetings rules and regulations were read, in which it was ordained that the young ladies who had joined, or should join, as assistants, should wear a peculiar dress, like a Sister of Mercy, and that their admission should be accompanied by a religious ceremony.<sup>122</sup>

Lest any be unsure as to the exact problem, the editor explained that "the main and objectionable part of this whole enterprise is the foundation of a species of religious order." The article maintained that a public meeting should have been called in connection with the penitentiary and that "when secrecy is thought to be necessary in the formation of an institution whose assistants are intended to be young ladies, and where clergymen are to take a very prominent part," the public had every right to be concerned. Why, the editor exclaimed, would any respectable clergymen lend their names "to an institution, in which anything of the Sellon or *id genus* school is intended."<sup>123</sup>

By evoking the name of Priscilla Lydia Sellon, whose sisterhood at Devonport had attracted widespread notoriety due to its ritual practices and its

<sup>121</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, October 1856. CAH Archives, newspaper clippings file. See, for example, an article of December 15, 1855 in the *Norfolk Chronicle* celebrating the defeat of Tractarianism in two London parishes: "The only safe plan is for a clergyman to avoid extremes."

<sup>122</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, October 1856.

<sup>123</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, October 1856. Emphasis in original.



association with Dr. Pusey, and of whose exploits Norwich readers clearly were aware, the editor created a context of scandal in which All Hallows could be situated.<sup>124</sup> He concluded with an objection which illustrated that the crux of the debate concerned the ambiguity surrounding Anglican sisterhoods: "we do object to a plan which appears to be under one form of religious belief but which is to be, to a certain degree, imbued with the forms of another creed. Our objection is to the two faces under one hood." In this discourse, the editor used the ambiguity of the Sisterhood's identity as a means of raising public protest. Yet, his argument masked a more significant objection which concerned the public regulation of women who acted independently, and without public sanction, to establish their own religious order.

Detractors and defenders of the Sisterhood utilised the local press as a vehicle in which to negotiate discursively the identity of All Hallows. Word of the Community spread to London, prompting a brief article in *The Times* under the heading "Alleged Puseyite Proceedings in a Penitentiary."<sup>125</sup> The following day, a letter to the editor of the *Norfolk Chronicle* from council member William Utten Browne, who supported the Sisterhood, set out to challenge the image of it in current circulation. He explained the orderly manner in which the penitentiary was being conducted, hoping to reach those who thought the institution was being "abused by certain crafty persons, who, under the specious pretext of rescuing souls from perdition, are really seeking to propagate Romish error."<sup>126</sup> In order to dispel this view, Browne listed six primary objections to the Sisterhood. He began by calling attention positively to its identity: "I would ask those persons--not few in number--

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<sup>124</sup> Refer to the Introduction for a brief discussion of the scandal which surrounded Sellon's Society of the Most Holy Trinity.

<sup>125</sup> *Times*, November 7, 1856.

<sup>126</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, November 8, 1856. To the editor from Wm. J Utten Browne.

whom the bare utterance of this word "Sisterhood" afflicts with a kind of spasmodic horror, have they never heard of the great establishment of Sisters of Mercy at Kaiserwerth, in the bosom of the Evangelical Church?" By referring to Kaiserwerth, the site of a community of Lutheran deaconesses in Germany, popularised by 1855 by its association with Florence Nightingale, Browne recrafted the public identity of All Hallows by giving it a Protestant air and associating the penitentiary with the work of social reform rather than Roman ritual.<sup>127</sup>

The wider significance of Browne's appeal, however, was the manner by which he connected female religious devotion and social utility with self-determination:

Why should those among [the Church's] faithful daughters, to whom God has given the opportunity and the will, be debarred from associating together as a sisterhood, in order that by united and well-regulated labour they may reclaim to the ways of righteousness and peace, unhappy wanderers who have forsaken the Guide of their youth and strayed far along the path which leads to eternal ruin? Is it because Rome has nunneries? That mind must be strangely constituted which would admit the validity of such an objection.<sup>128</sup>

By arguing that emphasis should be placed on the function rather than the form of the institution, Browne defended women's rights to choose a path other than domesticity. He then justified their attire, explaining that "the Shipmeadow costume is plain and suitable," how inappropriate would it be for those "devoted women had they exhibited themselves to their erring sisters fluttering in the gaudy plumage of fashion, and glistening with its toys." Their dress, he noted, was "not nun-like, but grave and sober." Issues

<sup>127</sup> See Michael Hill, The Religious Order: A study of virtuoso religion and its legitimation in the nineteenth-century Church of England (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), concerning Kaiserwerth's popularity in Britain by this time, 144.

<sup>128</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, November 8, 1856. To the editor from Wm. J Utten Browne.

three, four, and five dealt with the celebration of a religious service to receive a new member into the Community, the novitiate, and the "supposed vow." Browne explained each in turn, pointing out that the novice is free to leave if "urgent causes require her presence elsewhere." The final objection, of "the whole system as being an experiment," was summarily dismissed by pointing to the continuing success of the work. Browne thus attempted to create an identity for the Community and its members which emphasised the differences between these women and Roman Catholic nuns. This he achieved by highlighting the personal liberties of Anglican sisters and their right to fashion their own identities according to the needs of their profession.

Browne's defence of the sisters fostered a lively debate in the press. This discourse reveals the ways in which constructions of gender were central to the controversy surrounding religious orders. The issue of the personal liberties of the women of the Shipmeadow Sisterhood - significantly, no one actually referred to "The Community of All Hallows" by name - figured prominently within the rhetoric of critics as well. Opponents such as the editor of the *Norfolk Chronicle*, who adamantly maintained that the Sisterhood "would go Roman Catholic," feared the loss of female liberty within such institutions, complaining of "the harshness of [the] prescribed rules or modes of punishment."<sup>129</sup> Unlike the editor, whose grievance toward All Hallows stressed the loss of sisters' liberties, other critics bemoaned the ways in which women in religious order used their status to take liberties denied to other women. This rhetoric berated the sisters directly, highlighting the artificiality of their lives and their identity. One critic took particular exception to the ways in which their attire literally and figuratively

<sup>129</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, Editorial, November 1856.

cloaked the sisters most unnaturally:

There is something dramatic and romantic in this dressing up--something, (between you and I, Mr. Editor, rather childish also)--perhaps too, there is mixed up with it a little vanity; for it is a mark of distinction, of power and place. It may look like humility to foreswear silk and lace, velvet and ribbon, but ragged garments have covered the proudest hearts, and many a gentle heart, conscious of its own shortcomings, has throbbled with sympathy beneath a rich robe...with even greater effect than from the formalist garb of a Sister Agnes or Sister Bridget, appointed to reprove and reform.<sup>130</sup>

At issue was not the sisters' actual garments, but the ways in which they transformed the wearers in a hypocritical manner: although ostensibly donned to display humility before God, in practice, the symbolic effect of the sisters' dress ensured their power over the penitents and appeared to mark them spiritually superior to other women. The liberties Anglican sisters took with their appearance thus was perceived as an affront to middle-class womanhood. By not looking like other Victorian women of their station, the sisters threatened to destabilise ideas about femininity, and in so doing, erode patriarchal authority.

A critique by George Stacy of Lakenham firmly demonstrates the perceived threat of sisterhoods in relation to Victorian domestic ideology. Stacy was outraged at the persona adopted by the sisters, arguing that "These Tractarian women who are trumpeted forth as so much more devout than others, refuse the quiet humble usefulness of home to make a noise in the world."<sup>131</sup> Women, Stacy proclaimed, should not tamper with the identity which society had prescribed for them: "Let so-called churches on the continent do as they like, but let Englishwomen be as the apostle says they ought to be, 'keepers at home, obedient to parents,' let them, 'guide their own

<sup>130</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, November 1856. To the editor. (writer's name is unknown).

<sup>131</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, November 22, 1856.

houses, whilst they are fruitful in every good word and work.'" Thus, because sisters devoted their entire efforts to philanthropic work beyond the home, and practised a lifestyle not governed by parental authority, Stacy positioned these women as a threat not only to domestic ideals, but also to those of Englishness. The unsanctioned "liberties" taken by women who transgressed from ideals of Victorian womanhood, through their dress and by making "a noise in the world," provided an effective means of public rebuke. Such a characterisation of the sisters as artificial and ostentatious stood in sharp contrast to the ways in which supporters of the Sisterhood - such as *The Penny Post* - attempted to depict the demure, plain character of the house of mercy and the social value of the sisters' work.

The politics of identity at play in the public discourse surrounding the Shipmeadow penitentiary operated in two ways. As at the Society of St. Margaret, matters of physical appearance and of national identity stood at the heart of the debate. One aspect of the argument involved the religious identity of the Sisterhood: was it headed toward Rome? In this respect, the issues raised by opponents reflected concerns about the insurgency of the Roman Catholic Church, the potential loss of devoted women into its fold, and indicate the anti-Catholicism which formed an essential part of English Protestant identity.<sup>132</sup> Another aspect, however, centred on issues of gender identity and was expressed primarily through comments on the attire of the sisters. Although Sisterhood supporter Browne noted that the garb of the sisters was not "nun-like," it was not their resemblance to Catholic nuns that seems to have infuriated opponents, rather, they reacted against the ways in which "Tractarian women" appeared to be assuming an identity at odds with

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<sup>132</sup> See, for example, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707 -1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

that of Victorian womanhood. The adoption of the sisters' dress, they argued, created the illusion of superiority, redolent with mock vanity and conscientious ostentation. In effect, by removing the sartorial markers of class difference in order to don plain dress, the sisters created artificial distinctions which distinguished them not only from the penitents, but also from other Victorian women, whom, detractors claimed, required no similar rejection of fashion in order to assert their virtue. These two strands were united demonstratively in the opinions of the *Norfolk Chronicle* editor: "Depend on it, the ladies attached to such establishments, and who so readily adopt the Novitiate, the Vow, the peculiar garb, the wearing of a cross, etc, are not likely to have their Protestantism improved."<sup>133</sup> If the threat of the Sisterhood was purely religious, opponents would have taken issue with the fact that the sisters looked like Catholic nuns. The fact that they did not, demonstrates that the real problem surrounding the creation of the Sisterhood involved issues of feminine identity, self-determination, and the public regulation of women.

At a meeting of November 29, 1856, the council formally gave its recognition to the Community of All Hallows. The Community's rules were to be made public and printed with the statutes of the penitentiary.<sup>134</sup> To the sisters, this recognition represented a significant achievement: they had won the right to determine the identity of the penitentiary on their own terms. Yet this victory had not been achieved without cost: the sisters lost the backing of several of their most influential supporters, and were without a chaplain; they also needed to find a new home. Moreover, whereas prior to the inception of the Sisterhood, the work had been undertaken by lady

<sup>133</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, December 3, 1856.

<sup>134</sup> Original copies of the Rule and Statutes of the Community no longer exist; the amended Statutes of 1867, however, are available in CAH archives and will be discussed below.

volunteers, now it depended on the recruitment of women willing to dedicate their entire being to the rescue of penitents. Since only two of Crosse's assistants at the penitentiary had decided to join her in becoming members of the religious order, the work was now greatly understaffed. As was the case at East Grinstead, despite the eloquent pleas of advocates such as Armstrong, candidates for the religious life at Shipmeadow were not readily forthcoming. Even those women interested in the work may well have been deterred by the council's ambivalent reaction to the formation of a religious order, coupled with the extent of local opposition displayed in the press.

In attempts to quell the controversy that surrounded the penitentiary, Lavinia Crosse and William Scudamore published separate accounts of the house of mercy at Shipmeadow in 1857. These documents provide further insight into why the Sisterhood was formed and how the penitentiary work was affected by the formation of a religious order. Both writers used their accounts to craft specific identities for All Hallows to the public, taking pains to emphasise the loyalty of the Community to the principles of the Church of England. Of even greater importance, were their explanations of how and why a religious order had been established to govern the House of Mercy. This institutional transformation was justified in terms of the nature of the work and the characters of the women involved, not only the fallen, but, most significantly, the reformers as well. Thus, while Crosse maintained that the function of the work determined the form of its government, Scudamore exposed the power dynamics which operated among the middle-class women volunteers at the penitentiary, and how these dynamics necessitated the formation of a religious order. He revealed that, in practice, the regulation of middle-class women - as opposed to that of fallen women - was one of the

primary reasons behind the Sisterhood's establishment. Ironically, just as the regulation of the women who worked at the penitentiary formed the central discourse within which opposition to the Sisterhood operated, the regulation of these same women was also utilised by the architects of All Hallows to publicly legitimate its existence.

According to Crosse's account, the establishment of a Sisterhood to manage the penitentiary derived primarily from the need for obedient workers under an established authority figure. In practise, it seems that the work of the house was hindered by tensions between Crosse and her fellow volunteers. She thus explained how the creation of a religious order had smoothed out such difficulties:

When the House at Shipmeadow was first established, the labourers there were only united to each other as fellow helpers in the same work of mercy; but since then the constitution of their Society has been settled, its tone has been raised, and the regularity and efficiency of their work greatly promoted by their formation into a duly organized Sisterhood.<sup>135</sup>

Significantly, Crosse justified the creation of All Hallows in functional rather than religious terms: emphasis was placed on the productivity of operations rather than on the spirituality of the women involved. She explained that a written law was necessary in order to regulate the labours of the house, and that "a recognized power to wield and apply that law was essential."<sup>136</sup> Within this framework, she noted, "you have nothing more or less than a Sisterhood." Thus, the Sisterhood was formed because the lady volunteers had been too unreliable and unruly a work force. That the number of volunteers had substantially decreased with the creation of a religious order

<sup>135</sup> [Lavinia Crosse] "The House of Mercy of Shipmeadow, near Beccles," (Oxford and London: J. H. & J. Parker, 1857), 5.

<sup>136</sup> [Crosse] "House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 8.



was not made explicit in the Superior's account.

Scudamore's account provides an even-more provocative picture of pre-sisterhood dynamics among the women at the penitentiary. Although statutes had been drawn up which placed Lavinia Crosse in charge of her co-workers and which outlined that they "act under her instructions, and assist her in the discharge of her duties," problems of authority between the superintendent and these women frequently broke out.<sup>137</sup> Difficulties arose when the ladies tried to negotiate their work with their private lives, leaving the house during the day and visiting friends, but failing to give Crosse the advance notice she required. While Scudamore's vision of relations at the house "was that of a family of sisters, whose household arrangements and daily tasks are superintended by the eldest....It was far otherwise with the ladies associated in our work of mercy" he candidly admitted.<sup>138</sup> The work too, he explained, was 'laborious and exciting, and therefore especially calculated to bring out and to stimulate the native qualities of the individual-that moral and spiritual idiosyncrasy which never lies far below the surface in a true-hearted and genuine woman."<sup>139</sup> Here, then, lay a significant setback to the work: unlike the penitents, whose every glance and utterance was regulated, the ladies who worked at the house of mercy could not be similarly controlled. Arguments would break out, and the volunteers would simply leave the house. A more-regulated system, with women who would keep their opinions to themselves was necessary: "In a word" Scudamore explained, "it became evident, that the body required definite rules, and a distinct organization to enable it to carry on its work with comfort and

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<sup>137</sup> W. E. Scudamore, "An Account of the Penitentiary at Shipmeadow. In a Letter to James Davies, vicar of Abbenhall, Gloucestershire" (London & Norwich: Rivingtons, 1857), 19.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

effect."<sup>140</sup>

According to Scudamore, who now served as the Community's Chaplain, one of the most significant means by which the workers were regulated was in their attire. Although the volunteers initially believed that their personal attire should be left to their own discretion, "it was found that no two persons had the same standard of plainness, and consequently that such a liberty [of dress] would lead to consequences hurtful to the penitents."<sup>141</sup> Scudamore explained how individual style, even of a minimal nature, was detrimental to the concentration of the penitents: "Personal vanity, and an excessive regard to appearance, are generally marked features in their character. Their fancy is easily caught by anything new or tasteful in attire, and the danger is, of course, greater in a situation which supplies them with few objects of notice." The uniform dress, he noted, "did much to correct the evil." The penitents, he noted, were able to learn by example: "they see in it a proof of indifference to worldly show...The effect can not be wholly lost on any [as] it materially strengthens some against a temptation that is sure to assail them on their return to the world."<sup>142</sup> Once the Sisterhood had been formed, Scudamore commented that the uniform dress signified "a mark of membership in the community. It is a suitable emblem and expression of that unity of purpose by which its wearers are bound together in one fellowship and family."

Thus, in Scudamore's account, the significance derived from the sisters' religious attire, which symbolised their own personal and collective identities as women religious, was recrafted as a propitious side effect of the primary reasons that a uniform dress had been adopted: in response to the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 17.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

foibles of female fashion, and the imagined vanities and weaknesses of fallen women, easily transfixed by a shiny bauble or bit of lace. Since the sisters' clothes had attracted such attention in the press, Scudamore creatively justified "the adoption of an uniform dress by the ladies" in terms of the character of the penitents and the reform workers, and its effect upon the success of reform. Apparel was refashioned as purely functional for the work and while it served the purpose of reinforcing the virtue of the sisters, according to Scudamore, it was not originally intended to elevate their status in relation to other middle-class women, but to regulate the workers and the fallen.

While the uniform attire created regularity of appearance among the volunteers, it could not regulate their behaviour. Thus, to ensure discipline and order in the house, it was essential that they all occupied the same relationship to one another and to the superintendent, Lavinia Crosse. Upon too many occasions, Scudamore explained, Crosse did not have the absolute authority she required: petty squabbles would erupt, in which "the Lady Superintendent" would have "her judgment overruled by her less experienced colleagues," and the effectiveness of the work suffered as a result. It had, therefore, been decided to form a religious order, with Crosse in command.

Scudamore's account of the establishment of the Community - as a direct result of the nature of the work and the nature of the workers - stands in sharp contrast to the account presented in Crosse's diary, which reveals her intention of forming a religious order prior to her actual involvement at Shipmeadow. While there is no doubt that the factors described by the Chaplain encouraged the advent of a religious order, it is significant that only

two of Crosse's fellow workers decided to join her as sisters - a fact not mentioned in Scudamore's account.<sup>143</sup> The number of women who decided not to join is unknown - the Chaplain spoke of 'some...but few [who] deemed it right...to withdraw.'" Only two women, during a period of eighteen months, however, could be found to join All Hallows, perhaps indicating that part of the reason for its slow emergence lies in an unwillingness or an inability to subject oneself to a system of complete regulation. Both Scudamore's and Crosse's omission of this detail bears witness to the importance they attached to portraying the religious life in a positive light. It is surely significant, however, that the Chaplain's characterised the formation of All Hallows not as a coming together of exceptionally devout women, but rather as "the only permanent and effectual escape from all their difficulties."<sup>144</sup>

Despite the unequal power relations on which the Sisterhood was based, Scudamore was careful to assert that its formation lay not in the dictatorial will of one woman, but in the mutual recognition by the ladies that they must be placed under her command: "Such an authority could in fact only be given by the ladies themselves; and this they have now given her by placing her at the head of their own community."<sup>145</sup> The class-based identity of "the ladies" was central to how the new community was legitimated. Scudamore maintained that since the house had been formed along the guidelines of the CPA, in which self-devoted women worked under the spiritual direction of a clergyman, only women of status came forward: "one inevitable result...is that the labourers in our field occupy a higher social

<sup>143</sup> For comparisons with the interest generated by Roman Catholic religious orders, which were not constrained by clerical opposition within the Church, for new recruits throughout the nineteenth century, see Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales.

<sup>144</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 20.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

position, and come to their work with far other qualifications, than the matrons and assistant matrons of the older penitentiaries. They will be gentlewomen of education and refinement." As such, he noted, "a body thus composed could not be ruled by precedents drawn from a system so very different." In other words, pious well-to-do ladies should not be expected to adhere to a similar system than that which governed the "common matrons" of traditional penitentiaries. By emphasising the superiority of the women involved specifically in terms of status, Scudamore countered critics who opposed the assumed moral superiority of such women. He shifted the roots of the Sisterhood from the conflict which had existed among the women, to the natural and harmonious relations shared by "gentle-women of education and refinement." In so doing, he managed to validate the Sisterhood, the types of women involved, and their attire, all in terms of the vital work of moral reform.

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Inspired by genuine concern for the plight of fallen women as well as a desire to witness the revival of female monasticism in England, Christian reformers drew upon the widespread fear of prostitution within society together with Victorian gender ideology in order to argue for the necessity of women religious to the success of penitentiary work. These reformers utilised a variety of ways of imagining fallen women and Anglican sisters in order to legitimate their vision. Fallen women were viewed as lost sheep, desperately in need of Christian compassion. Primarily as children, rather than sexual pariahs, their identity was chiefly constructed. Although this characterisation was based on a refusal to acknowledge their "sin," the sexual element of their identity was essential in serving to distinguish the fallen

from pure, iconic Victorian womanhood. Anglican sisters were defined in relation to these women and also to gender ideology. They were imagined as mothers, as workers, as serpents, as doves; humble in the eyes of some, haughty to others. The ways in which their identities were fashioned speaks to operations of power in Victorian society, specifically those designed to regulate women. Throughout the establishment of All Hallows, supporters legitimated it, and the identities of the women engaged in rescue work, in terms of their function to society, specifically, the moral regulation of fallen women. Although detractors of the religious life positioned their opposition in terms of the unnatural state of monasticism within the Church of England and the unnatural character of its adherents, such criticism masked a deeper concern about the independence and self-determination that women attained through the creation of a lifestyle deemed a threat to domesticity and patriarchal control.

While this chapter has focused primarily on the discursive construction of identity, Anglican sisters were, of course, also active in the creation of their collective and individual identities. These women drew upon the rhetoric of class, gender, and social responsibility in order to fashion radical new identities. The establishment of All Hallows derived from the faith and tenacity of the original sisters. Lavinia Crosse and her colleagues utilised the transformative power of religion to defy gender convention and become women religious amid controversy and contention. They drew upon their collective identity as moral reformers in order to imagine and implement a sisterhood in East Anglia in defiance of the men who sought to regulate them and their work. In so doing, however, they too engaged in the practices of regulating women's behaviour and perpetuating social and moral

inequalities among women. Crosse's relationship to nineteenth-century feminism exposes the paradoxes of female identity within monastic culture: while her position as Mother Superior depended on the regulation of both her fellow middle-class sisters and the fallen women in their care, by creating a space through which women could achieve a lifestyle at odds with that prescribed by Victorian culture, she contributed to women's self-determination within a religious context and provided a means of defying patriarchal power. In the following chapters, the extent of this contribution - for both sisters and penitents alike - reveals the inherent radicalism of monastic culture.

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## CHAPTER FOUR *"Semper orantes, semper laborante"*: The Dynamics of Power and the Politics of Philanthropy<sup>1</sup>

The East Anglian countryside is unspectacular: it rolls and plunges occasionally, but is, for the most part, unrelentingly flat. The area to the north of the village of Ditchingham, located approximately fifteen miles southeast of Norwich, is no exception but for a singular dramatic feature. As you approach from any direction your gaze is drawn upwards to the piercing spires and stately rooftops of the convent of the Community of All Hallows. Although cleverly disguised by thickets of trees and a recessed elevation, this complex of buildings bears witness to nineteenth-century monastic life in all its Gothic splendour. The magnificent chapel which stands at the heart of the Community testifies not only to the centrality of spirituality in the sisters' lives, but also to the material power which this Order wielded by the latter part of the century. While these buildings were not the original site of the Sisterhood - a modest farmhouse in nearby Shipmeadow, today known as "Nunnery Farm" - collectively, they represent the successful expansion of All Hallows and the enterprising spirit of the Foundress of the Order, Lavinia Crosse. For it was during Crosse's tenure as Mother Superior that the convent, chapel, house of mercy, orphanages and schools were erected. The Foundress' presence continues to be a spiritual force for the sisters in all parts of the convent and its houses, and is reinforced in tangible ways as well: her portrait hangs in the refectory, its gaze fixed upon the sisters as they partake, silently, in the gifts of their Lord. And when the sisters join communally for prayer in the spectacular chapel, several times daily, they pass under the simple inscription, "Lavinia, Mother Foundress, 1855-1890."

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<sup>1</sup> Motto of the Community of All Hallows: "Always praying, always working."



This chapter investigates the physical and spiritual evolution of the Community of All Hallows from its establishment in 1855 to the 1880s. It argues that the discourses of moral reform at the Sisterhood's House of Mercy were as central to the growth of the Community as they were to its foundation. All Hallows did not prosper as a result of an influx of devoted women to the religious life, but rather as a result of the ways by which the sisters capitalised on these discourses in order to justify its continual - and costly - expansion. Ideas about the nature of the identities of both sisters and penitents were crucial to the success of this institutional development. These identities, often presented in a paradoxical manner, were based upon a precise relationship between personal devotion and public utility. As the Community motto, "always praying, always working" expressed, the balance between prayer and work was central to the culture of All Hallows. As outlined in the previous chapter, the publicly-sanctioned work of rehabilitating the fallen led to the evolution of the penitentiary at Shipmeadow into a religious sisterhood; it also facilitated and justified the individual evolution of rescue workers into religious sisters. Yet these transformations could not have been accomplished without a strong sense of the value of the religious life to the work of moral reform. This analysis focuses on how the sisters at All Hallows used the public sanction on rescue work in order to craft diverse forms of monastic identities. The ways in which these women negotiated Victorian identity politics in their own lives demonstrate the extent to which female monasticism capitalised on rather than rejected class and gender norms in its regulation of working-class

women and the fallen.<sup>2</sup> By utilising their collective moral authority as reformers, however, the sisters defied male control over their lives and carved out a wider sphere of female power, both spirituality and materially, suggesting the subversive potential of monastic culture in Victorian society.

As at the Society of St. Margaret, initial growth at All Hallows was slight. Part one of this chapter analyses how monastic identities and the religious life were imagined as the Sisterhood attempted to attract new members. Utilising a similar technique as at St. Margaret's, where the architects of the religious life emphasised its functional, rather than spiritual, aspects, at All Hallows recruitment was strongly determined by an emphasis on the diverse nature of both work and monastic identities available within the Sisterhood. While the actual practices of rescue work, and their impact on fallen women will be analysed in Chapter Five, this section addresses how middle-class women were being appealed to as workers in relation to monasticism. The performance of these diverse monastic identities forms the subject of part two, which examines the long-term growth of the Community and the dynamics of convent culture. The sisters manipulated discourses of class, gender, and domestic ideology in order to create a hierarchy within the Sisterhood which legitimated sisters whose lives were

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<sup>2</sup> The actual practices of rescue work will be analysed in Chapter Five. For related studies of the reform of fallen women in conventual establishments, Anglican and Roman Catholic, see Susan Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls": The Convent-Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain," *Journal of Social History* (Spring 1996); Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds. *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1989); Catriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, Ltd., 1988); and Hope Barton Campbell Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses: Contrasts in Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious Headship in Victorian England," Ph.D Thesis, University of Leeds, 1993, esp. Chapter Six.

devoted primarily to prayer rather than active service.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, they defied public attitudes that justified Anglican religious orders on the basis of their social function and developed more-devout forms of female religiosity. The final section examines how the sisters wielded temporal power. It analyses the institutional relationship between the sisterhood and the penitentiary, focusing specifically on how the sisters negotiated the material economy of these institutions in order not only to expand and develop, but also to wrest financial control of the penitentiary from the male council in charge. The fashioning of identity was highly significant to this process: the success of All Hallows relied upon a self-representation which defied assumptions about female subordination and dependency not only as they related to the sisters, but to the penitents as well.

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#### **"O Sister, where art Thou?" : The Discursive Creation of Monastic Identities**

There is such a chattering and noise here [in England] about 'fields' wanted for women's work. Yet every training institution with one voice tells the contrary tale; of applications innumerable for trained women to fill responsible posts, of few to fill them, of living materials wanted, situations and 'fields' being never wanted; of workers needed, not work.

Florence Nightingale, *Death of Pastor Fliedner*.<sup>4</sup>

From its inception, the most difficult problem facing the new Community was the need for sisters willing to engage in the work of moral

<sup>3</sup> See Nancy Bradley Warren, Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) on the politics of medieval monastic culture and the creation of diverse forms of monastic identities created by women religious in this period.

<sup>4</sup> Florence Nightingale, "Death of Pastor Fliedner," Evangelical Christendom (1864). Fliedner founded the Institution of Lutheran Deaconesses at Kaiserwerth, Germany. Cited in Michael Hill, The Religious Order: A Study of Virtuoso Religion and its legitimation in the nineteenth-century Church of England(London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), 181.

reform. As the previous chapter set out, the establishment of a religious order at Shipmeadow resulted in the departure of several of the volunteer workers, and the Community began with just three members at the end of 1855. Two years later, both the sisterhood's Superior, Lavinia Crosse and its Chaplain, the Reverend William Scudamore, published separate accounts of the penitentiary, referred to as the House of Mercy, both aimed primarily at encouraging women to join the Order. Crosse's twenty-three page pamphlet entitled *The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow* outlined precisely how the Superior imagined the identity of the Sisterhood and the women who would become its members. The pamphlet addressed itself to the task of recruitment by inquiring if there were not some women who were willing and able to "leave houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or lands, for Christ's name sake?"<sup>5</sup> Issues of class figured strongly in Crosse's appeal for sisters: "we believe it is no mere vision, to look for the necessary devotedness among the middle walks of life."<sup>6</sup> She imagined her fellow sisters as "ladies of education," whose labours would be protected and regulated by laws of the the Community.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than focusing on the details of the religious life, however, the Superior's appeal depicted the diversity of the work of the institution. She noted that a sister had already begun a small home for the reception of sick children, that district visiting and a school were underway, and, of special

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<sup>5</sup> [Lavinia Crosse], *The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow, near Beccles* (Oxford and London: J H & J Parker, 1857), 7. The costs of printing were covered by the Bishop of Durham.

<sup>6</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 14. At Wantage, Chaplain William Butler made a similar appeal for sisters at the opening of the new House of Mercy at Wantage in 1861: "I am convinced that to give these institutions fair play, to thicken and strengthen them, it is the great middle class to which we ought to look...These women...have greater concentration of purpose and far greater continuity and certainty of operations," than women of the upper classes, he claimed." Cited in "On Penitentiary Work. Two Sermons preached at the Opening of the Chapel, St. Mary's Home, Wantage, July 30, 1861." Preface by WJ Butler (Oxford: JH and James Parker, 1861), vi -vii.

<sup>7</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 8.

appeal, "is a large factory, within the parish, which of course, with its peculiar temptations, and the various classes of its workers, would itself be a most fruitful and interesting field of labour."<sup>8</sup> Such work, she explained, helped to alleviate the daily strain of working with penitents. Crosse even provided a reading list for those unfamiliar with but interested in the work of sisterhoods. Her titles included the Bishop of Brechin's *Plea for Sisterhoods*, T. T. Carter's *Is It Well to Institute Sisterhoods in the Church of England, for the Care of Penitents*, and Anna Jameson's *Sisters of Charity, Abroad and at Home*.<sup>9</sup> By positioning the religious life in this active capacity, Crosse drew upon the concept of what historian Ellen Jordan terms the 'strong-minded woman,' in operation between the 1830s and the 1890s, who "reacted against the inactivity and boredom that the pressures of gentility and femininity had created, and...gradually established...a range of acceptable activities not focused solely on the family and its welfare."<sup>10</sup>

In addition to regular sisters, the Superior sought women who were willing to support the order from within as well as externally. In seeking those to perform the more menial tasks of the house she again targeted the middle class - women of refinement, but not necessarily means:

a want is felt of young persons of the middle classes...to be prepared for the Sister's life. These would be received without means, and be clothed and maintained in return for their services. They would chiefly undertake the management of the household labours, besides in many ways assisting the Sisters in their lower and more mechanical branches of their

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<sup>8</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 12. St. Ann's Home for girls began in May 1857. The factory was a silk mill, erected in 1832, employing about 500. See White's 1845 Norfolk, 425, 798.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Penrose Forbes. A Plea for Sisterhoods (London: Joseph Master, 1849); T. T. Carter, "Is It Well to Institute Sisterhoods in the Church of England, for the Care of Penitents?" (London: John Henry and James Parker, 1851) and Anna Jameson, Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant, Abroad and At Home (London: Longmans, 1855).

<sup>10</sup> Ellen Jordan, The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain (London: Routledge, 1999), 87 -88.

work.<sup>11</sup>

Unless they had utilised the penitents as domestics, the sisters would have expected and required a staff of servants to help run the house. Although the precise composition of the house at this stage is uncertain, it is possible that the sisters did employ servants and that, like the ladies who assisted in the reform work before them, these servants refused to dedicate their entire lives to the Community and be governed completely by the sisters.<sup>12</sup> As such, the recruitment of middle-class women to manage the household as sisters was not only economically beneficial, but also designed to create a loyal, permanent work force. Significantly, nowhere in her appeal did she refer to the possibility of working-class women joining the Community as domestic workers. For those women reluctant or unable to actually join the Community, Crosse outlined the position of "External Associates": "ladies whose circumstances in the world do not allow them to come and labour in the House of Mercy" yet who retain an interest in its works.<sup>13</sup> Associates would provide support to the House through prayer and the collection of annual donations. Crosse appealed to "educated and accomplished women" to take up pen, pencil, and needle thus, "filling up a void and blank in their

<sup>11</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 14.

<sup>12</sup> See Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink, and Katherine Holden, The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960 (London & New York: Longman, 1999) for an analysis of the place of servants in middle-class homes.

<sup>13</sup> Such philanthropic appeals were directed frequently at unmarried women of all ages, see Bridget Hill, Women Alone: Spinners in England, 1660-1850 (New Haven: Yale UP., 2001); and Anne Summers, "A Home from Home": Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century," in S. Burman, ed. Fit Work for Women (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), esp. 38. Contemporary texts such as A. O. Charles' The Female Mission to the Fallen (London, 1860) also encouraged women to take up rescue work. On women's philanthropic work refer to Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), esp. 156-193. On the significance of sewing in women's lives, see Frank Prochaska, The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain (London: Faber & Faber, 1988): "At the heart of female culture in the nineteenth century, sewing was crucial to women's philanthropy. Vital to the domestic economy, it merged with female piety and signified those feminine ideals of home, family, and respectability. It suggested love for others." 42.

existence, of which so many own themselves conscious."<sup>14</sup> Associates also were encouraged to assist rehabilitated penitents by locating suitable situations, or occasionally providing training, room and board in their own homes in exchange for six-months of service.<sup>15</sup>

Crosse's widespread appeal for support reflected the current needs of the Community. Although portrayed in her account as a going concern, in 1857 the Sisterhood numbered only one professed sister, Lavinia Crosse. In her efforts she was assisted by Adele and Frances, both of whom were still novices, and several lady volunteers.<sup>16</sup> There may also have been probationary sisters working at the house, but Community records provide no clues as to their existence.<sup>17</sup> Her vision of the future sisterhood was not classless in structure, however, but hierarchical: she drew upon the models presented by other Anglican orders, as well as by men such as Rev. Thomas Carter, who was involved with a rescue home at a sisterhood in Clewer, and by moral reformer, John Armstrong, the Bishop of Grahamstown.<sup>18</sup> In her characterisation of the Community, Crosse took pains to stress its legitimacy, commenting that although the "work is strange, the ground untrod....Ours is no visionary experiment."<sup>19</sup> In light of contemporary fears surrounding sisterhoods, the Superior was careful to craft an identity for All Hallows

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<sup>14</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 17-8.

<sup>15</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 21. As the House of Mercy progressed, the support received from this group of women proved to be highly influential in securing its growth. Women such as Miss Cozens, the original superintendent at Shipmeadow, were invaluable not only in fundraising, but also in spreading word of the sisters' work among their wealthy acquaintances, thereby increasing patronage.

<sup>16</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow." Crosse did not mention how many of these volunteers were involved with the penitentiary.

<sup>17</sup> The community membership roll at All Hallows lists only the probationers and novices who joined the sisterhood. As such, probationers and novices who decided to leave are not recorded.

<sup>18</sup> For details of Carter's work at Clewer, see A M Allchin, The Silent Rebellion: Anglican Religious Communities, 1845 -1900 (London: SCM Press, 1958). Armstrong was Bishop of Grahamstown from 1854 until his death in 1857.

<sup>19</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow," 22, 23.

which emphasised its function to society. She appealed to potential sisters and associates in their capacity as workers rather than in spiritual terms, and placed a decidedly genteel stamp on the Community's character. In her willingness to advertise publicly the work and the Sisterhood in order to promote expansion, her own identity as Mother Superior was performed with confidence and only a hint of guise: her publicity pamphlet was authored "by a Lady."<sup>20</sup>

Scudamore's plea for sisters positioned the character of these women as Christ's devotees to a far greater extent than that of the Superior, yet it too stressed the practical elements of sisterhood life. Admitting that the impact of the departure of some of the ladies upon the establishment of the sisterhood was deeply felt, the Chaplain explained that the sisters "are overtasked."<sup>21</sup> As such, he hoped that "[Christ] will move the hearts of Christian women, living in ease and honour, to compassionate these outcast daughters of shame and misery."<sup>22</sup> He stressed that an aptitude for the work would develop from a sense of dedication to the religious life, as he listed the characteristics which this lifestyle required:

There are thousands among the daughters of the Church, with time and gifts but half employed, or wasted in desultory action, who would gladly embrace a life of rule, and of definite work for Christ...It is probable that most would only *grow up* to a fitness for the duties of a Sister. They do not, indeed, require great abilities, or great attainments, but they do require some firmness and some discretion, habits of self-control, of regularity and order, a desire to do the work effectually and well, and humility to be guided by the experience, and to submit to the authority of another.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On the performance of identity, see Jo Burr Margadant, ed. The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26. Emphasis in original.



Scudamore's plea was directed at middle-class women's sense of Christian duty. Significantly, as did Crosse, Scudamore alluded to and utilised the notion of middle-class women's collective sense of *ennui* in his efforts to solicit recruits to the sisterhood.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at the House of Mercy, women formerly "living in ease and honour" could find the opportunity "to do work effectually and well." By emphasising the potential for industriousness, Scudamore utilised contemporary gender ideology, but his advertisement for the job of sister also emphasised less conventionally-defined female traits, such as firmness and managerial skills.<sup>25</sup> The notion of self-control also served to position women religious in opposition to their charges at the penitentiary. As historian Amanda Anderson points out, "to 'fall' is, after all, to lose control."<sup>26</sup> In his creation of this specific identity, Scudamore drew upon popular discourses of fallenness by stressing the order and discretion which governed a sister's character.

The ways in which the Superior and Chaplain at All Hallows designed identities for sisters presented a significant departure from the rhetoric of many clerics as discussed the previous chapter. Purity crusader John Armstrong, for example, crafted a discourse of purity and pollution in his appeal for sisters to work with fallen women in a series of articles at mid century.<sup>27</sup> Incorporating this rhetoric, Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, speaking at the opening of the House of Mercy at the Community of St. Mary the Virgin at Wantage in 1861, explained, "We need the

<sup>24</sup> See Summers, "A Home from Home" for the ways in which this argument was utilised to attract women to charity work, see esp. 38.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of how women's work was being refigured after 1850, see Jordan, The Women's Movement.

<sup>26</sup> Amanda Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, John Armstrong, "An Appeal for the Formation of a Church Penitentiary" 2nd. Ed. (London: John Henry Parker, 1849) and T. T. Carter, ed "Essays on Church Penitentiaries" (London: John Henry and James Parker, 1858).

combination of an intense hatred to, and shrinking dread of, sin with an unwearying, sympathizing love of the sinner. We need a purity which, like the sun's rays in the most contaminated atmosphere, can pass unpolluted through pollution."<sup>28</sup> While, in their collective attempt to attract women into the rescue work at sisterhoods, Crosse and her clerical contemporaries all drew upon the tenets of Victorian gender ideology and its emphasis on female piety, they did so in significantly differing ways. Armstrong and Wilberforce envisioned such women in paradoxical relationships to the fallen, and positioned their imagined sisters on a spiritual pedestal. Scudamore's appeal, while grounded in the rhetoric of Christian duty, placed emphasis on the nature of the work rather than on the spiritual rewards of the religious life. To a greater extent than any of her male colleagues, however, Lavinia Crosse knew, even as early as 1857, that the best, most effective sisters were those who entered the religious life under no illusions as to their own self-importance. She thus abandoned the rhetoric of female spiritual superiority in her pamphlet to explain that the House of Mercy required women who were capable of and prepared to engage in work not necessarily appropriate to their station in life. Her approach was at once the most practical and the most idealistic, for although she realised what type of women were needed, such women were in short supply.

Despite widespread appeals, women remained reluctant to profess themselves to the religious life in the Church of England. Although the demands of middle-class women, married and single, for useful, productive lives grew increasingly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, perhaps no more than a thousand accepted the life of an Anglican sister

<sup>28</sup> Bishop of Oxford, "On Penitentiary Work," 9. On the ways in which purity was used to justify the control of women by women, see Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), 48.

during this period.<sup>29</sup> The work was exhausting and the lifestyle controversial. At All Hallows, initial growth was exceedingly slow. According to the profession roll, during the first five years of the Community, only Adele Taylor was professed as a sister, in 1858, and if any was received as a novice during this time, none joined the Community as a sister.<sup>30</sup> Few details survive to provide backgrounds for the two women who joined Lavinia Crosse at the Community's inception.<sup>31</sup> Adele Taylor, born in Orbe, Switzerland, was twenty-five when she became a sister. She remained until her death in 1896, succeeding Mother Lavinia as Superior upon her death in 1890. Even less is known of Sister Frances, including her last name, where and when she was born, and why she left All Hallows in 1869.<sup>32</sup> During the 1850s, few women committed to the religious life and many who thought they might enjoy such a life discovered themselves mistaken.<sup>33</sup> The slow growth at All Hallows and many of the other original Communities does not support one historian's recent assertion that "Women flocked to them, attracted by the prospect of joining a group of other like-minded women....It is likely that many of those who so enthusiastically joined the sisterhoods were seeking to escape the frustration suffered by so many single women confined

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Mumm considers the number of Anglican sisters in her dissertation, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy' : Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian England," D. Phil. (University of Sussex, 1993). She notes that there were approximately 1,000 sisters in Anglican orders at the end of the nineteenth century. By comparison, Roman Catholic orders were far more successful in attracting women at this time. For the Irish and English context, see Mary Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales, 1800-1937: A Social History ((Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> The Community records are frustrating in this sense. As the profession roll only lists those who were actually professed, novices who departed before profession are not recorded. Sister Frances's profession was delayed until 1862. This may indicate that she was a lay sister.

<sup>31</sup> According to an obituary of Lavinia Cross, either Adele Taylor or Frances had previously considered joining Clewer prior to becoming a member of All Hallows. See the Guardian, July 2, 1900.

<sup>32</sup> The profession roll records her departure but provides no details as to why she left All Hallows.

<sup>33</sup> As the case of Emily Scobell reveals, even women who longed for such a life faced many obstacles.

to the parental home."<sup>34</sup> As Lavinia Crosse was aware, however, an unfulfilling home life served as a poor credential for the demands of life in an Anglican sisterhood.

The caution which surrounded the establishment of All Hallows, from the refusal of the council to sanction a sisterhood, to its delayed formation, and the lack of willing recruits, speaks to the ways in which, despite Crosse's claim to the contrary, the religious life was indeed a "visionary experiment." That its architects were aware of the experimental nature of the Community is evident from the language which framed its Rule and Statutes.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, these rules were designed to facilitate the process of recruitment by emphasising the potential impermanence of the religious life. Prepared by the sisters themselves, the rules set out the duties of those associated with the Institution, including the warden, council, superior, and sisters.<sup>36</sup> In his published account of All Hallows, intended to attract women to the Order, Scudamore drew attention to issues relating to the admittance and release of sisters. Two classes of sisters existed, he explained: "those who are fully admitted, and Sisters probationary."<sup>37</sup> Probationers required the written consent of their parents if under the age of thirty and tested their vocation during a residency of two years in the House.<sup>38</sup> Scudamore was careful to establish that permanent vows were not a feature of All Hallows, rather "all admitted into the Sisterhood are required to promise obedience, *so long as*

<sup>34</sup> Bridget Hill, Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660 - 1850 (New Haven: Yale UP., 2001), 158. For a similar argument in the Roman Catholic context, where a boom in the number of nuns did occur, see Gloria McAdam, "Willing Women and the Rise of Convents in the Nineteenth-century England" Women's History Review8:3 (1999).

<sup>35</sup> Although the council had repeatedly requested that the Community's Rule be made public, as of 1857, this had not been achieved. Scudamore maintained that this delay was based on insufficient membership at the council meeting due to inclement weather. "An Account," 21 (n).

<sup>36</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 22.

<sup>37</sup> Refer Statute 19, Statutes of the House of Mercy (Bungay, 1867, amended). CAH Archives.

<sup>38</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 22. In order for a probationer to be accepted into the Community, she had to be elected by a majority of the fully-admitted sisters.

they remain members of it."<sup>39</sup> He stated expressly that "this promise is not to be construed into a vow of perpetual obligation...any sister shall be at liberty to leave the Institution, if she think fit." Such disclaimers as to the irrevocable nature of monastic vows reinforced the general concern regarding the nature of the religious life throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

Within such a context, the identity of the Community of All Hallows was fashioned in such a way as to ensure its survival: the lofty rhetoric of purity and pollution of those who imagined sisterhood-run penitentiary work in theory was exchanged by the Order for a more practical discourse which stressed the functional aspects of the work and the capabilities of the women who would labour in the house. Yet, as the formative period of this Community reveals, few women were actually willing to commit themselves to God, and to transform their identities into women religious. Such a transformation required formidable self-sacrifice and personal faith. As the responses of the council and the wider public outlined in Chapter Three demonstrate, All Hallows' inception was viewed by many as an affront to the tenets of the Church and a challenge to domestic ideology. The lack of formal episcopal backing from the Bishop of Norwich may also have deterred potential sisters from joining All Hallows as it did at other sisterhoods.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 22. Emphasis in original.

<sup>40</sup> Vows were not sanctioned by the Anglican hierarchy. On the nature of the controversy, see, for example, T. T. Carter, "Vows and their relation to Religious Communities," in Orby Shipley, Ed., The Church and the World: Essays on Questions of the Day (London: Longmans, 1866). The question of lifelong irrevocable vows in sisterhoods had generated controversy from the inception of these communities in England. At issue was the legitimacy of such vows, the notion that they subjected women to clerical control, and their implied permanence. See, for example, the concerns raised by A. H. Wratishaw, "A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London and the Subscribers of the CPA on the use of Religious Ties Equivalent to Vows in Church of England Sisterhoods." (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1854), 7. Wratishaw worked at Feltstead Grammar School, Essex, and later became a subscriber to the House of Mercy. See also the objections voiced by Frances Power Cobbe, "Female Charity - Lay and Monastic," Fraser's Magazine 66 (1862).

<sup>41</sup> See Allchin, The Silent Rebellion for details of the recruitment difficulties at Clewer and Wantage.

While supported by the local clergy, the sisterhood at Clewer, for example, had to contend with Bishop Wilberforce's refusal to sanction vows, explaining in part why so many women left the Community while in their novitiate, and the fact that by 1858, it had only nine professed sisters. The difficulties associated with reform work were no doubt also responsible, as by 1861 there were only seven professed sisters at Wantage, by then in its thirteenth year of operation.

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### **"O Sister, who art Thou?": The Performance of Identity within Convent Culture**

Unlike the Society of St. Margaret, where it is possible to gain a sense of the individual identities of the founding sisters and their personal relationships with one another, it is all but impossible to do so for the personal histories of the earliest sisters of All Hallows. The official history of the order refers only to Mother Lavinia's personality and experiences, and considers the other sisters collectively.<sup>42</sup> The Community magazine, *East and West*, highlights the individual anonymity of sisters, noting retrospectively in 1890 that "It has, from the first, been the rule among the writers in *East and West*, whether they are telling the story of work accomplished, or explaining the need of work yet to be done, to say as little as possible of the workers themselves."<sup>43</sup> The Annual Reports of the House of Mercy, devoted to providing details of the penitentiary work, barely acknowledged the existence of the sisters at all. Apart from being listed - as "Sister of Mercy" - in the donation and subscription lists of the House, their presence was guarded carefully. As *East and West* implied, the invisibility of

<sup>42</sup> See Sr. Violet, *All Hallows, Ditchingham: The Story of an East Anglian Community* (Oxford: Beckett Publications, 1896).

<sup>43</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1890. Significantly, *East and West* referred to the sisters as workers.

the sisters was not only intentional but was also an implicit facet of their public identity.

Census reports, however, provide a snapshot of the House of Mercy on a specific day and serve as the best illustration of the complexion and growth of the Community together with providing clues as to how identity was fashioned within the sisterhood. In 1859 the penitentiary had relocated to the village of Ditchingham, a few miles northwest of Shipmeadow, to more-suitable accommodation surrounded by spacious grounds.<sup>44</sup> The move allowed for an increase in rescue work: one hundred and thirteen penitents were received at the House of Mercy between its inception in May 1854 and 1862. By this date, the Community also operated an orphanage, two schools, and attempted to recruit and train additional sisters. On census day in 1861, four "sisters of mercy" are listed: Mother Lavinia and Sister Adele, along with Sarah Walsh, age 20 and Rachel Cooke, age 21, both from Essex.<sup>45</sup> Both of these women were, in fact, novices and neither remained with the Community for long. Sarah appears to have left the sisterhood as a novice while Rachel died in April of that year. Listed in the parish records as "a serving sister in the House of Mercy," Rachel would have been involved in the domestic duties of the household.<sup>46</sup> While her background is unknown, her burial in Ditchingham cemetery suggests humble origins.<sup>47</sup> Her status as a "serving sister" at this early stage of the sisterhood's development, indicates that an internal hierarchy was already taking shape. Together with the five sisters - Sister Frances, one of the original sisters, must have been absent

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<sup>44</sup> The move to Ditchingham will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>45</sup> Census of 1861. NRO 1230/48-73. Sister Frances' name does not appear on the census for 1861. She may have been away from the Community at the time.

<sup>46</sup> NRO. Ditchingham Parish Records MF 721.

<sup>47</sup> Her small, wooden cross in the cemetery at Shipmeadow contrasts with the impressive granite ones belonging to the other sisters.

during the census -the household consisted of two young women listed as "visitors," probably probationers testing their vocation as sisters. Neither joined the Community. Two women, ages 19 and 20, were employed as servants, and four "scholars," girls ranging in age from three to twelve, resided with the sisters.<sup>48</sup> Sixteen penitents occupied the House of Mercy.

By the year of the next census, 1871, the Community of All Hallows had expanded remarkably. New wings were added to the main building in 1864, and in addition to the House of Mercy and St. Ann's House for poor orphan girls, the order now operated a school for girls of "the Upper or Middle Classes who were wholly or partially orphaned" and who were trained to become governesses.<sup>49</sup> Nine women had been professed, including two lay sisters. Although an increase of just under one sister per year does not indicate substantial interest in the religious life, for the Community, a total of eleven professed sisters by 1871 represented a significant gain in its work force.<sup>50</sup> These sisters were accompanied by five novices of whom two became lay sisters and one a choir sister. The ages of the sisters ranged between eighteen and sixty; all but two had been born in England. At the House of Mercy sixteen penitents were in residence while the orphanage housed nineteen scholars ranging in age from three to eighteen. In addition, were five "industrials," a lodge keeper, a needle woman, and a two year old, all female. Thus, the community had more than doubled in size and now numbered fifty-seven in total.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Katie Cunningham, born in Jamaica, may have been left with the sisters when her parent[s] returned abroad, while "Patience Paddington," from Paddington, was likely an orphan. See Census reports.

<sup>49</sup> Sister Violet, 25.

<sup>50</sup> These sisters were Mary Turner, Mary Wade, Helen Martha Noad, Marianna Rodwell, Elizabeth Barter, Catherine Rotch, Elizabeth Alice Wade, Matilda Dixon and Martha Rudd. Significantly, they were all professed between 1867 and 1871. By comparison, the sisterhood at East Grinstead, also established in 1855, had attracted 28 sisters by 1870; this number had risen to 40 by 1875.

<sup>51</sup> All the material in this paragraph is taken from the 1871 Census Report. NRO.



Ten years on, in 1881, All Hallows was thriving. New convent buildings, after three years of construction, had been completed in 1879. The sisters had opened a small but vital hospital in Ditchingham in 1872 and the schools were gaining in popularity. Grange Farm had been purchased in 1879 which enabled the sisters - assisted by several cattle on forty-four acres - to produce their own milk and butter. In addition to seventeen professed choir sisters, the Community numbered nine professed lay sisters and at least three novices.<sup>52</sup> The sisters were distributed among the Community House, the House of Mercy, the schools, and the Order's other operations.<sup>53</sup> Twenty-three penitents occupied the House of Mercy. With over one hundred residents, of all ages and social ranks, many nationalities, and diverse occupational backgrounds, the Community was indeed a microcosm of Victorian society, except, of course, for one significant detail: there were no men. As school teachers, nurses, instructors in morality and religion, caretakers, housemistresses, domestics, farmers, and administrators, the sisters represented the diversity of vocation open not just to upper- and middle-class women, but to working-class women as well. For the first time, the census listed the sisters as "workers" rather than "sisters of mercy."

Census reports also provide significant details of the individual and collective identities of the penitents. In the 1861 census, the first penitent was listed by name - Christina Stiffel, age 18 from Bethnal Green - thereafter, their names were replaced by their initials. Whether the change was instigated by the Superior or the census taker is unclear, but significantly, someone thought to shield their identity. In future census reports, however, names again appeared. The ages of these women ranged from fourteen to thirty-

<sup>52</sup> CAH Archives -from sisterlist. Not all of the records provide details for each sister.

<sup>53</sup> As only fourteen of the twenty-six sisters were in residence on census day, not of all of the sisters' whereabouts can be accounted for.

seven; most were in their early twenties. Geographically, their origins were diverse. In the 1861 group, just over half the women were born in London and only two were originally from Norfolk. In the 1871 and 1881 groups, however, the majority of the penitents came from regions outside the capital. Increasingly, the origin of the penitents at the House became more localised: by 1881, fourteen of twenty-three hailed from Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>54</sup> Under the heading "rank, profession, or occupation" in the reports for 1861 and 1871, the column beside the penitents' names was left blank. In 1881, however, details suddenly appeared. Prior to arriving at the penitentiary, these women had been employed in glove making, factory work, tailoring, hosiery, boot making, and weaving crepe. Just over half of their number had worked in domestic service.

The census information reveals several significant features of All Hallows. It provides significant detail concerning patterns of recruitment, which was often internally-based, as several pupils at the orphanage schools went on to join the Community as sisters. For example, in 1861, Patience "Paddington," age six, was listed as a "scholar" at the House of Mercy. Ten years later, she appeared as Julia P. Bodington, from Middlesex, a scholar at the orphanage. By 1881, she had become Sister Patience, a lay sister from Soho, assigned to the orphanage school, probably as a teacher. Sister Patience remained a member of All Hallows until her death in 1919 at the age of sixty-four. According to the Community's profession roll, she became a novice in 1872, at the age of seventeen, and was professed five years later.<sup>55</sup> She thus

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<sup>54</sup> As will be discussed below, the diversity of their geographical backgrounds was important to the Community's identity as a national institution.

<sup>55</sup> Census Records of 1861, 1871, 1881. NRO 1230/48/-73. The increments of age of this woman (listed as 6 in 1861, 16 in 1871 and 26 in 1881) together with the similarities in her name and place of origin, strongly suggest that these records all refer to the same person. See also CAH Archives, profession roll.

spent her entire adult life as a sister, and virtually her entire life in their company. Although her devotion to God enabled this woman to fashion her identity - from orphan to teaching sister - her social class dictated her role within the order and the ways in which she viewed herself in relation to the other sisters.

Most strikingly, the picture that emerges is the overwhelmingly female character of the community: by 1881, more than a hundred women and girls were living and working together under the auspices of religion and self-improvement. In an environment not structured by gender difference, how were identity politics constructed? Recall the words of moral reformer John Armstrong, who envisioned the House as "a little band of self-denying daughters of the Church, of the upper ranks, who should be formed into a holy fellowship; and then, separating the penitents into little groups or families, live as mothers with their children, or as guardians with their wards."<sup>56</sup> By virtue of their piety, devotion, and self-sacrifice, sisters recrafted domestic ideology to suit the needs of convent culture. The Sisterhood provided an alternative to conventional family life, which was both spiritually rewarding to the sisters and functional within wider society.<sup>57</sup> In her analysis of the contested nature of motherhood, historian Eileen Yeo explains how women utilised this rhetoric: "Side by side with the ideal of the domestic married mother, they set up a new icon of a virgin or moral mother doing sacrificial work with the poor and needy in the public world and

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<sup>56</sup> John Armstrong, "An Appeal for the Formation of a Church Penitentiary," 2nd. ed. (London: John Henry and James Parker, 1849).

<sup>57</sup> On alternative ways of imagining the family, see Davidoff et. al., The Family Story. For a discussion of the relationship between the convent and the patriarchal family, see Susan O'Brien, "Terra Incognita: The Nun in Nineteenth-Century England," Past and Present 121 (1988), 136.

introducing a home influence into it."<sup>58</sup> Not only was this domestic alternative conducted publicly, but unlike many families, the Community operated largely without the direct interference of men. Although the all-male council initially administered policy, and the chaplain played a crucial role in spiritual matters, the actual day-to-day operations of the House remained within the purview of the sisters. Thus, while the female community at All Hallows drew upon the Victorian domestic ideal, its artificial nature allowed for the subversion of this ideal, particularly as it affected the operations of gender.

By utilising the moral and spiritual power attributed to motherhood, the sisterhood derived both social legitimacy and loyalty from its members. During its first twenty-five years, the most remarkable feature of the Community's development was its relative stability: only one professed sister, Sister Frances, an original sister, left the order.<sup>59</sup> Of the first twenty-five professed sisters - all of whom were professed by 1881 - only six eventually departed.<sup>60</sup> These statistics indicate a devoted group of women in a well-managed Community. While it could be argued that such low attrition might be evidence of pressure within the sisterhood to fulfil one's vocation, or of a lack of possibilities for unmarried women, including ex-nuns, beyond the convent, these figures seem rather to signify that for the few

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<sup>58</sup> Eileen Janes Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750 -1914," *Women's History Review* 8:2 (1999), 215. Like their Roman Catholic counterparts, Anglican sisters capitalised on this iconography in order to gain social legitimacy for their work.

<sup>59</sup> Whether she departed voluntarily or was asked to leave is uncertain. It is possible, however, that the sisterhood's profession roll has omitted other sisters who left the Community. Not all sisters listed in the census reports are listed in the roll. For example, the 1871 census refers to Maria Long and Rosa Carrington as sisters of mercy at the Orphanage. Neither of these women appear in the roll. Likely, they were novices who left prior to profession.

<sup>60</sup> Again, the records do not indicate if these sisters left of their own accord, or were asked to leave. The date of departure for only two of these sisters is listed (1869, 1885) rendering it difficult to make connections between departures and events in the Community's history.

women who felt "the call" to God - a total of one per year by 1881 - such dedication was intended for life. Significantly, as the profession roll only records the names of professed sisters, there is no indication of how many women left as novices or probationers.<sup>61</sup> Even if there were many such women, it is important that they, or the other sisters, decided against a lifelong commitment prior to profession.

Internal divisions might help to explain why stability was a prominent feature of the early history of All Hallows. Community dynamics were shaped not from the similarity of the sisters' identities, but rather from their differences, which were expressed both socially and spiritually. As in any Victorian family, identity politics at the Sisterhood were fashioned by power relationships. Specifically, upper-and middle-class women relied on the labour of domestic servants in order to regulate their households. At All Hallows, such labour practices were vital to the operations of the Community. In addition to hiring servants, the Sisterhood recruited working-class women as lay sisters to perform domestic tasks without financial remuneration. Sister Rachel reveals the advent of serving sisters as early as 1861, but not until the end of 1867 was a new order of lay sisters formally introduced into All Hallows.<sup>62</sup> In order to be distinguished from the choir sisters, women of education and means - who wore black attire - lay sisters were outfitted in blue. They functioned within the Community primarily as domestics, although may also have served as teachers, nurses, and mission workers.<sup>63</sup> Significant spiritual distinctions existed between lay

<sup>61</sup>The census provides some clues: for example, in 1871 fourteen sisters were listed in the census - only three of these women did not become professed sisters, that is, they departed as novices. Census 1871.

<sup>62</sup>CAH Archives, Chapter Minutes, Fifth Chapter, December, 1867.

<sup>63</sup>Community records place lay sisters at all of the various works. The presence of domestic servants in addition to lay sisters at these works suggests that lay sisters did not work exclusively in service.

sisters and their choir counterparts. The latter were expected "to persevere in a deeper work of interior holiness, lest there should be a profession without practice" the Community Rule explained.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the rich devotional lives of choir sisters, lay sisters followed a "less arduous" rule of prayer.<sup>65</sup> Not only did such a distinction conform to contemporary class and gender ideologies, which held that uneducated women were not the spiritual equals of their social superiors, but it also provided a convenient mechanism to ensure that lay sisters had more time to perform their physical labours.

By 1881, a 2:1 ratio of choir to lay sisters existed at All Hallows.<sup>66</sup> This ratio, which seems unusually high relative to contemporary Anglican sisterhoods and Roman Catholic orders, indicates the significance of such women within the Ditchingham community. In her appeal for extra workers in 1857, Lavinia Crosse had asked for middle-class women to devote themselves to the "household labours" at the House of Mercy.<sup>67</sup> While it is indeed possible that middle-class women responded to this call, and that they became lay sisters, this prospect seems unlikely. More plausibly, working-class women - as they did in other monastic communities throughout Britain - joined All Hallows to devote their lives to the service of Christ.<sup>68</sup> That they were assigned domestic tasks and were accorded lay status would not have seemed in any way unusual. While there is no doubt that convents did offer working-class women certain practical advantages which may not have been

<sup>64</sup> CAH Archives, Chapter Minutes, Fifth Chapter, December, 1867.

<sup>65</sup> Sister Violet, 16.

<sup>66</sup> In her analysis of lay sisters in English convents (Roman Catholic) in the second half of the nineteenth century, Susan O'Brien has found that approximately one-third of the sisters were lay. As O'Brien points out, it is difficult to determine the "line" which divided choir and lay sisters. Most lay sisters were of working-class origins, but it is impossible to tell just how this status was determined in the Community of All Hallows; Susan O'Brien, "Lay Sisters and Good Mothers: Working-Class Women in English Convents, 1840-1910," *Studies in Church History* 27. (1990), 455-456.

<sup>67</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow."

<sup>68</sup> See Susan Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy," for an analysis of lay sisters in sisterhoods.

available in other settings, the very existence of lay sisters points not only to a desire for the religious life among such women, but also to a desire among middle- and upper-class sisters to utilise their social inferiors for undesirable labour. Thus, in terms of Community dynamics, a combination of choir and lay sisters, in part by replicating the social division of labour in well-to-do Victorian homes and institutions, helped to reduce tensions which may have arisen in the absence of a clearly-defined hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> Class figured prominently in how the identity of the members of the Order was differentiated.<sup>70</sup> The different classes of sisters were distinguished by their social position in relation to each other and their lives were shaped accordingly. This manufactured community operated as a microcosm of Victorian society by reinforcing the real and symbolic value attributed to social standing. The hierarchy of the Sisterhood affected how monastic identities were both understood and performed as lay sisters' presumed social, intellectual, and spiritual inferiority shored up that of the choir sisters' superiority.<sup>71</sup>

The development of a more-pronounced spiritual hierarchy further complicated the social differentiation of sisters' identities, exhibiting the ambivalent relationship between hierarchy and stability within the Order. A year after the formal establishment of the lay order, an additional division occurred within the Sisterhood. Some sisters wanted to differentiate their

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<sup>69</sup> See Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) for a discussion of the ways in which "deployments of the domestic ideal helped depoliticize class relations at mid century." 9.

<sup>70</sup> On the place of class in the construction of identity, particularly in relation to the British middle classes, see the Introduction in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940 (Manchester: Manchester UP., 1999).

<sup>71</sup> The health of these working-class sisters could also have been inferior to that of the choir sisters. The first lay sisters, Rachel Cooke and Martha Rudd, both died at a young age. Not until 1882 did the death of the first choir sister occur at All Hallows: this was Sister Elizabeth, who succumbed to scarlet fever at the age of 60. NRO. Ditchingham Parish Records, MF 721.

spiritual dedication not only from lay sisters, but also from the other choir sisters. These sisters were interested in a life of prayer rather than of active service, wishing to "adopt a higher rule of devotion and mortification."<sup>72</sup> They sought "greater austerity and retreat," within a formally distinguished collective identity. On the eve of Advent Sunday, 1868, the Companions of the Love of Jesus was formed with two sisters.<sup>73</sup> In order to distinguish themselves titularly from the rest of the Community, these women used the prefix "mother" rather than "sister." They followed a distinct Rule, and in addition to the regular three vows, took an extra vow of charity "indicating their personal love of their Lord and Master, and of his command to love their neighbours as He did."<sup>74</sup> The Companions were further set apart by the adoption of a sparser diet, less recreation, and a distinctive dress, composed of a cap and tuffet to be worn with a veil indoors. Within their black cross a white ivory one was inlaid. The outward symbols, devotional practices and modified behaviour of the Companions exemplifies the paradoxical nature of monastic piety and humility in relation to Victorian gender ideology. Companions practised a stricter form of asceticism than the other sisters: their fourth vow, additional prayers, and special cross clearly marked them as spiritually superior. The power associated with their special status, however, threatened the stability of the Sisterhood and may have contributed directly to one sister's departure.<sup>75</sup>

The advent of this spiritual order was not initially well received. Unusually, Mother Lavinia introduced the Rule for the Companions without

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<sup>72</sup> CAH Archives, Chapter Minutes, Sept. 1868.

<sup>73</sup> The Chapter Book, November 1868 refers to their formal dedication into the Community.

<sup>74</sup> Sister Violet, 16. Sr. Violet remarks that "It must be remembered that these women lacked the devotional aids of their Roman Catholic counterparts."

<sup>75</sup> On the operations of power within monastic communities, see Bradley Warren, Spiritual Economies.



consulting the other professed sisters.<sup>76</sup> As only she and one other sister were eligible to meet its requirements, the Superior reported that "the proposition was not received with hearty approval except by one among the others - two were dejected by it."<sup>77</sup> Although both Sisters Adele and Frances met the length of profession requirement, significantly, only Adele was classified as eligible and subsequently became a Companion, along with Mother Lavinia. Minutes from meetings of the professed sisters, a group referred to as the "Chapter," record that issues of deference preoccupied the sisters during this period. Toward the end of 1868, and despite previous opposition, the Chapter voted unanimously that "the Companions should take precedence of the other sisters in Chapel and the Mother House...in the discharge of all religious duties."<sup>78</sup> As well, numerous acts of deference to Mother Lavinia were instituted at this time.<sup>79</sup> This brief glimpse into the operations of power at the Community demonstrates the extent to which spirituality was utilised to fabricate transformations of identity and to increase personal authority.

The controversial formation of the Companions of the Love of Jesus signifies that sisters imagined and performed their monastic identities in diverse ways. For some, this new order facilitated a desire to practice monasticism in a contemplative manner; for others, it may have represented a departure away from the Sisterhood's original mission to rescue the fallen. The Companions represent the paradoxes which were central to monastic identity at the Community of All Hallows. While originally represented by

<sup>76</sup> In the Chapter minutes she explained the unusual nature of this practice.

<sup>77</sup> Chapter Minutes, Sept 1868. The Rule stated that Companions must be qualified and had been professed for at least 5 years.

<sup>78</sup> Chapter minutes, Nov 1868. The Chapter was composed of the professed sisters, Lavinia Crosse plus five others.

<sup>79</sup> Although the reasons that Sister Frances left All Hallows several months after the establishment of the Companion order are not explicit, perhaps she found both her exclusion from this group and the rigid hierarchy that was developing within the sisterhood not to her liking. It is of course possible that Sister Frances was a lay sister.

themselves as well as others in terms of their public identity as workers, these sisters carved out for themselves a sphere of spiritual elitism. They utilised their faith, and the power which they derived from it personally and collectively within the Sisterhood, to structure and perform their identities through prayer, rather than the work of moral reform. Significantly, these sisters relied upon the physical labour of their lay counterparts, for it was surely no coincidence that the Companions were established in the wake of a body of sisters designed specifically to perform the domestic work of the sisterhood. Thus, the public success of the Sisterhood, in rescuing penitents and attracting lay sisters, rather than the public recognition of female spirituality, allowed for the further development of the religious life. Moral reform operated in a paradoxical relationship to the development of monastic identities: it both facilitated the establishment and acceptance of sisters in their capacity as reformers, yet in so doing, ultimately facilitated the advent of Companions, whose lives were dedicated to prayer. Although, the Community motto, "Always praying, always working" expressed the sisters' lives and the culture of the sisterhood, the internal stratification at All Hallows, specifically as it was manifested spiritually within its various categories of sisters, reveals the extent to which the balance between working and praying among these women was decidedly uneven.

Collectively, the All Hallows' sisters present a compelling example of the ambiguities of Victorian identity when filtered through the lens of monasticism. In her research into Roman Catholic orders, Susan O'Brien has found that the experiences of lay sisters, and the manner in which they were represented, often mirrored that of other working-class women in the nineteenth century: they were seen as "full of simple, earnest piety" and

"saintlike" yet were responsible for the tasks of domestic drudgery.<sup>80</sup>

According to O'Brien,

Internal convent dynamics in this period show that an all-female organization could and did mirror both the status difference and the sexual division of the larger society, in which the 'feminine' works of domestic labour and devotional ardour were simultaneously lauded and accorded lower status.<sup>81</sup>

At All Hallows, the rigid hierarchy illuminates the oppositions inherent in O'Brien's findings. Its monastic culture both subverted and borrowed heavily from Victorian domestic ideology: although the Sisterhood provided an alternative domestic arrangement, it utilised the class-based division of labour as found in middle-class homes in order to allow choir sisters and Companions to free themselves from domestic labour.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, monasticism drew upon ideals of gender identity in order to reinforce the validity of female spirituality. However, unlike in wider society, at the Sisterhood such validation did not imply a gender-based social inferiority. Lavinia Crosse and her fellow "Companions" dictated their spirituality on their own terms by capitalising on rather than rejecting Victorian gender ideals, and in so doing, created innovative monastic identities which were both reactionary and progressive.

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<sup>80</sup> O'Brien, "Lay Sisters and Good Mothers," 460.

<sup>81</sup> O'Brien, 460.

<sup>82</sup> Of course, the division between choir and lay sisters existed prior to the nineteenth century. The emphasis, however, on female spirituality within Victorian domestic ideology, particularly in relation to middle-class women, may have heightened such women's sense of spiritual superiority within monasticism. Mumm considers the class-based politics of Anglican orders in "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy." For the medieval context, see Bradley Warren, Spiritual Economies: and for class dynamics in Roman Catholic convents in Ireland, see Mary Peckham Magray, The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion, and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750 - 1900 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. Chapter Three, "Convents, Class, and Catholic Identity."

## **"A City of Refuge": The Power of Expansion/The Expansion of Power**

Day after day brings to the doors of the House of Refuge, some poor fallen woman, anxiously yearning to leave their life of sin and misery, and to enter upon the path of penitence and virtue; and day after day sees them returning back, despairing and heartbroken, to their abodes of guilt, because the houses already established are too small to receive them.

First Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1855.

From its inception at the end of 1855, the Community of All Hallows owed its existence to the work of rescuing fallen women.<sup>83</sup> Without the fallen, and the imperative for their redemption within Victorian culture, Lavinia Crosse's inspiration to establish a Sisterhood may never have come to fruition. Through its "success" in rehabilitating these women, this Order thrived and was recognised as contributing in a meaningful way to society. As institutions, the relationship between sisterhood and penitentiary, however, depended as much on material economies as on those of spirituality and morality. To a significant extent, the spiritual infrastructure of rehabilitation relied upon the physical infrastructure of the Community. All Hallows could not have sustained a steady growth rate - of sisters, penitents, and pupils - without a concomitant extension in its premises: dormitories needed to be constructed, workrooms set up, a new chapel erected, gardens and grounds embellished. Infrastructure played a key role not only in the functional lives of the women of All Hallows, but also in their spiritual development. This type of establishment was costly: "this cannot be a cheap charity," the 1861 Annual Report of the House of Mercy

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<sup>83</sup> On the politics of rescue work in the nineteenth century, beyond that undertaken by religious orders, see Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990); Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*; and Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*. On prostitution and its regulation, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

exclaimed.<sup>84</sup> So how did a small group of Anglican nuns in the East Anglian countryside manage to prosper?

Victorian philanthropy was a serious business and its success depended on a carefully constructed discourse of social and moral obligation.<sup>85</sup> The business-like nature of the reports of the House of Mercy, as the penitentiary was styled, had a substantial impact on how the identity of All Hallows was framed. Unlike the private house diaries of the Society of St. Margaret, which provided a more individual and personal account of sisterhood life as seen in Chapter Two, the public annual reports at All Hallows are comparatively prosaic, resulting in a Community identity which is decidedly corporate in nature. They also demonstrate clearly the nature of the relationship between the Community of All Hallows, a religious order, and the penitentiary, a reform society: because the reform of the morally "corrupt" generated greater public interest than the support of the morally "pure," the public identity of the latter became subsumed under the former. Not only did the sisters help to craft this identity, but they also exploited it to their favour. As the excerpt from the First Annual Report of the House reveals, expansion was fashioned through a precise orchestration of discourses of Victorian philanthropy in which the material needs of the Sisterhood and its operations were met by appealing to the assumed needs of the fallen. By framing all appeals in terms of the potential benefit to the penitents, and by maintaining a low public profile, the sisters utilised the spirit of Christian duty not only to create a

<sup>84</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1861, 8.

<sup>85</sup> On Victorian philanthropy see Anne Summers, "A Home from Home"; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780 -1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ellen Jordan, The Women's Movement; David Owen, English Philanthropy, 1660 -1960 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Lee Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850 -1914 (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973); Prochaska, The Voluntary Impulse: ibid., Women and Philanthropy, esp. "In Streets and Dens of Vice," where the author notes a "phenomenal upsurge in interest in the mid-Victorian years" in rescue and Magdalen homes, 188.

flourishing enterprise, but also to subvert some of the dominant ideologies of the time concerning the relationship among women, power, self-determination, and virtue.<sup>86</sup> The work of rescuing and rehabilitating fallen women was used not only to justify and legitimate the existence of the religious order at All Hallows, but also the expansion of Community facilities and, in turn, the expansion of the sisters' corporate power.

The financial operations of the House of Mercy were controlled by an all-male council which had overseen its establishment, as discussed in the previous chapter. Annual contributions from the Church Penitentiary Association (CPA), to whose guidelines it was expected to adhere, were critical to the House's initial success.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the primary source of funding, however, stemmed from donations and annual subscriptions to the penitentiary. Donations to the House were sent to the council, not the sisters. This source of income accounted for over seventy-five per cent of the institution's revenue and derived primarily from the fund-raising efforts of the sisters, associates, and local clergy, the latter of whom periodically would raise special collections for the sisters in their parishes. The active work of philanthropy was a gendered process: men sat on committees, women's involvement was hands-on.<sup>88</sup> Although the

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<sup>86</sup> See Poovey, Uneven Developments for a discussion of the operations of virtue in the development of middle-class identity. For contemporary discussions of virtue, see John Angell James, Female Piety: or the Young Woman's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865) [1853]; Mrs. [Sarah Stickney] Ellis, The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits (New York: J. & H.G. Langley, 1843); Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, Thoughts on Self Culture. Addressed to Women (London: William Crosby and H. P. Nicholls, 1850); Sarah Lewis, Woman's Mission (Boston: Wm Crosby & Co., 1840).

<sup>87</sup> The CPA was established in 1852 as an organisational body to oversee the work of moral reform. It also provided funding for the penitentiaries at Clewer and Wantage, which, with All Hallows, were the principal sisterhoods devoted to this work.

<sup>88</sup> See Jane Lewis, Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991), 10. See also Family Fortunes, esp. Chap Three, "Improving Times."

council may not have been experienced in institutional administration, Victorian gender ideology determined that the finances of the House, though not the actual work of operating it, was under the purview of men. According to historian Frank Prochaska, "the running of a philanthropic society could be compared to the running of a family: men were to provide the intelligence and direction, women 'the better heart, the truer intuition of the right' and not least the unflagging industry that kept the institution together."<sup>89</sup> Part of the "intelligence" provided by the men involved ensuring that the All Hallows penitentiary did not accrue debt. Here, they failed spectacularly. As such, supporters of the institution were engaged in a continual battle to solicit financial contributions which would ensure the penitentiary's success.

Successful fund raising at the House of Mercy depended on fashioning the identity of the institution within the discourses of philanthropy, fallenness, and gender ideology. The Annual Report for 1862, which included a special account of the expenses involved in the actual work of moral reform, reveals how the politics of philanthropy operated at the House. Annual expenses for each penitent, including the cost of food, clothing, and fuel, were all itemised. Expenses were directly correlated with success: as each departing penitent received a new outfit and transportation to her new place of residence, success in rehabilitation brought increased costs. In an effort to combat the assumption that the penitentiary was a local institution, the report noted the geographical diversity of the backgrounds of the women who received rehabilitation, emphasising the national character of the work. A chart demonstrated that since the start of the work, just over half the

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<sup>89</sup> Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 17. Internal quotation, as cited by Prochaska, is from Theodore Parker, *A Sermon on the public function of Woman* (Boston, 1853).

penitents had come from Middlesex, nearly a quarter hailed from Norfolk, while the remainder were distributed throughout the country. The report announced that "There is no part of the country, therefore, to which we are not fairly entitled to look for support, and it is earnestly hoped that this claim will be more fully recognised, especially by the charitable inhabitants of London, from which city so large a proportion of our inmates is derived."<sup>90</sup> Nor could the House rely on the continued munificence of the CPA. "Oppressed by the increased number of the objects of its bounty," it had to decrease the amount of its annual grants, the report explained in 1862.<sup>91</sup> With this diminished support, the following year the sisters announced that applicants for reform were being rejected.

As spokesman for the House of Mercy, Scudamore was required to be a tireless yet creative fund raiser. As Prochaska points out, "Innovation, audacity, and personal flair have always been the hallmarks of charitable money making and never more so than in the nineteenth century."<sup>92</sup> In his sermons, pamphlets and public letters to friends, Scudamore never missed an opportunity to engage the collective consciousness of would-be donors and patrons. Nor did he shy away from explicit accounts of the finances of the House, stating that "The moral effect of a false economy in these matters would obviously be very bad."<sup>93</sup> From the outset, his appeals always were framed in terms of the benefits which would accrue to the penitents - and thus to society - as a result of expansion. Specifically, he drew upon Victorian's sense of Christian duty to the helpless to create a relationship between the infrastructure of the House of Mercy and the welfare of its

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<sup>90</sup> 8th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1862.

<sup>91</sup> 8th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1862.

<sup>92</sup> Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse*, 60.

<sup>93</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1871.



inhabitants.

The relocation from Shipmeadow to Ditchingham provided both the sisters and the penitents with homes of their own. Moreover, in contrast to the small Shipmeadow house, the new convent at Ditchingham allowed the sisters to develop their own monastic culture. Significantly, however, Community accounts of the move emphasised how the new location benefited the work of moral reform, rather than the culture of monasticism. In his published appeal of 1857 for funds to facilitate the move, Scudamore utilised discourses of fallenness to situate the need for relocation in terms of the health of the penitents. Such women, he explained, "require a pure and invigorating air to repair their shattered health."<sup>94</sup> Thus, the purification of souls depended upon the provision of pure air.<sup>95</sup> As the "imperfect ventilation and inconvenient construction" at the present house restricted the number of penitents to a maximum of fifteen, the quality and the quantity of the work suffered, and a new house on a "healthy site" was required. Unless nearly £1000 was raised, he explained, "to build a new house on a healthy site," the work would soon be forced to stop. With the publication of William Acton's *Prostitution* that same year, announcing the thousands of women in London alone in need of reform, Scudamore's readers may indeed have been impressed by his appeals.<sup>96</sup> The relocation of the penitentiary, however, was an arduous process: construction was plagued by defective tiling, smoking chimneys, and frequent flooding. CPA donations

<sup>94</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 23. Lavinia Crosse's account of the work was also published at this time. Proceeds from its sale went to the house of mercy building fund.

<sup>95</sup> Fresh air, a good diet, and "bodily relaxation" were essential to the rehabilitation process: "ask ourselves, how we should like to be confined to a walk round the largest square of London?" John Armstrong inquired. Armstrong, "The Church and her Female Penitents," 73.

<sup>96</sup> William Acton, Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities, with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils (London: John Churchill, 1857).

decreased in the wake of the Indian Mutiny as the penitentiary received only £70 for the maintenance of inmates in 1858. The following year, however, the sisters were granted £200 for their new home allowing construction to continue. In total, almost £2500 was raised to complete the project.

On St. Michael's Day, September 29, 1859, the new House of Mercy was officially opened, representing a significant achievement for the Community. The opening ceremonies included an address by the Bishop of Ely and a collection of over £200, an indication, according to Scudamore, of "the strength and genuineness of those feelings by which the whole assembly appeared influenced and affected."<sup>97</sup> Supporters of the House were no doubt affected by the sermon which Scudamore had prepared especially for the occasion entitled "She Hath Done What She Could." Gazing upon the solid red-brick structure, in which the forces of purity battled those of sin, he rhapsodised on all that had been done, and all that was yet to be achieved:

A City of Refuge has been built, to which, as we may humbly hope, for ages yet to come, many a poor conscience-stricken sinner will flee from safety from the avenger of her sins. This is "the crown of our rejoicing." "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad," exulting in hope over the dead who shall be alive again, over the lost who shall be found.<sup>98</sup>

Scudamore's sermon celebrated the coming together of the pure and the fallen, the triumph of good over evil at the penitentiary. In so doing, he solidified the relationship between sisterhood and penitentiary: "we believe that a Sisterhood composed of earnest women, who, subject to God's will, have no desire or aim on earth beyond the work which they have chosen,

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<sup>97</sup> 6th Annual Report of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham, 1860, 3-4.

<sup>98</sup> W. E. Scudamore, "She Hath Done What She Could." A Sermon preached at the opening of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham, on S. Michael's' Day, 1859 2nd ed. (London & Oxford: J H and J Parker, 1860), 4.

affords the best human agency for the conversion and Christian training of the female sinner."<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the maternal discourse used to introduce the sisters during the House of Mercy's formative stage, depictions of these women now emphasised their non-maternal, nature. As such, both Scudamore and the *Norwich Chronicle*, which seemed to have lost its earlier venom toward the Sisterhood, took pains to characterise the sisters primarily as workers. The newspaper spoke of "an organised community of women not bound by any promise of perpetual service, but freely devoted to their work, and looking for nothing beyond it."<sup>100</sup> This promotion of non-maternal female roles, particularly in a Christian capacity, reveals the potential for alternative discourses of womanhood within Victorian gender ideology. Ideals of motherhood were indeed hegemonic, but they were not exclusive: those who could not, or would not, be mothers, were sanctioned as workers. The identity of the sisters was legitimised through their public function to society: because these women were positioned as seeking nothing beyond their work, the tension between women's commitment to family and charity which generated controversy throughout the century was negated.<sup>101</sup> Significantly, however, while Scudamore positioned the sisters as tools of God, the *Norwich Chronicle* stressed the liberty of the sisters' lifestyle. The sisters' identity thus was fashioned upon the paradoxes of Victorian gender ideology: women's private submission to God was translated into a publicly-condoned sphere of independence.

Both the religious life of the sisters and the work of moral reform benefited from the new buildings and surrounding grounds. However, in public accounts of the new site, these benefits were positioned primarily in

<sup>99</sup> Scudamore, "She Hath Done," 13.

<sup>100</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, October 8, 1859.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of this tension, see Anne Summers, "A Home from Home," 58.

relation to the work and the penitents. Thus Scudamore explained that the effects of the new site were "found not only to conduce to the greater comfort of the inmates, but are also...to facilitate discipline and promote order."<sup>102</sup> His sermon at the opening of the Ditchingham House of Mercy rejoiced at the fruits of subscribers' generosity by demonstrating the blessings of the new facilities. The new House of Mercy was mapped out as a spiritual landscape for the practices of moral rehabilitation, in which "a desert under the withering breath of sin might bloom as Eden, the home of innocence, the 'garden of the Lord!'"<sup>103</sup> While the effects upon the penitents were immediately obvious, those which accrued to the sisters were presented only as they affected their work. Thus the site, complete with garden, would be a place of spiritual refreshment for the sisters: "It is good that they should be able to rest under the shadow of their own trees, and at times to turn their eyes from faces marred by sin to the beauty of the herb and flower."<sup>104</sup>

This correlation between the physical structure of the House of Mercy and the well-being of the penitents reveals itself most dramatically in reference to the spiritual aspects of rescue work. Although functional, secular buildings could not instill the type of reform which was perceived as most conducive to the penitents' ultimate rehabilitation: for this a house of worship was required. After all, as Scudamore declared, the penitentiary was ultimately "a school of spirituality." By 1862, the lack of a proper chapel was proving to be harmful to the work of reform. As the report for that year explained, "the crowded and close chapel in particular has an effect

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<sup>102</sup> 7th Annual Report.

<sup>103</sup> "She Hath Done," 19.

<sup>104</sup> "She Hath Done," 16. On the restorative powers of gardening, see Barbara T. Gates, Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). "It is a place to which we can repair to restore ourselves," 189.

detrimental to the spiritual as well as physical welfare of the inmates."<sup>105</sup> Two years later, after a concerted campaign raised over £1000, the completion of the chapel completed the needs of the House: "the inmates assemble in a Chapel deserving of its name, beautiful in proportion and design, spacious in dimensions, and suggestive in every feature of the high purpose for which it has been erected and adorned."<sup>106</sup> That same year, a "License to Celebrate Divine Service in the Female Penitentiary or House of Mercy" was granted by the Bishop of Norwich for the chapel.<sup>107</sup> Unsurprisingly, the annual report for that year noted that the effects on the spiritual welfare of the penitents were immediate: "One happy result has been a marked increase of reverence and devotion in the penitents; and, we scarcely need add, a corresponding improvement in their general conduct and character."<sup>108</sup> The fact that the sisters could also now assemble for daily prayers and much-needed spiritual sustenance in the chapel went unmentioned in the report.

The establishment of the new House of Mercy at Ditchingham represented the beginning, rather than the culmination, of the Community's development. By 1865, the House expanded to include east and south wings, which completed the cruciform plan of the buildings. Yet expansion proved costly in a material sense. In *A Few Words to the Friends of the Penitent*, designed to raise the £400 debt accrued while completing the House, Scudamore crafted his appeal expressly in terms of the sisters' peace of mind:

The question is, then, who will help to put the finishing stroke to this work of many years? Until that is done, the charity is crippled, and those who conduct it have a source of

<sup>105</sup> 8th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1862.

<sup>106</sup> 11th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1865. See also Scudamore, "A Few Words to the Friends of the Penitent", 3. Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, gave a sermon at the opening of the chapel in October, 1864.

<sup>107</sup> Norfolk Record Office, DN/CSR/4. John Thomas Pelham was the Bishop of Norwich (1857 - 1893).

<sup>108</sup> 11th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1865.

care from which, for their work's sake, more even than their own, it is most needful that they should be set free.<sup>109</sup>

The debts accrued during the House's completion led to serious financial difficulties for the work of reform. The 1866 annual report noted that all further applicants were to be refused until the debt had been cleared. As penitents often were sent to the House on the recommendation of sponsors, only penitents who were paid for, at a rate of £25 per annum, would therefore be received.<sup>110</sup> The clearance of debt, like the presence of the garden, was presented in terms of how it would advantage the work, and thus indirectly the sisters. Through such a technique, Scudamore avoided representing the sisters as needy of support in their own right. Rather, they were portrayed as instruments through which the work of reform, if properly funded, could be achieved. Significantly, this manner of representation drew upon ideas concerning the dependency of fallen women, expressed in economic terms, but not that of the sisters. An important distinction was thus made regarding the ability of the sisters to support themselves and their need to support others.

The politics of philanthropic fund raising were structured by a discourse of social obligation, and Christian duty.<sup>111</sup> By tapping into the moral sensibility of Victorian society, and suggesting the responsibility shared by all toward its endeavours, the Sisterhood and its works made substantial gains. Subscription lists demonstrate that the charity did in fact attract a diverse range of supporters. Each report printed a detailed list of individual donors and the amount of their gift, in an effort not only to reward the generous, but also to publicly shame the neglectful and the self-absorbed. Donors and

<sup>109</sup> W. E. Scudamore, "A Few Words to the Friends of the Penitent, on behalf of the The House of Mercy at Ditchingham." [1865], 4.

<sup>110</sup> 12th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1866.

<sup>111</sup> See Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy, esp. "The Power of the Purse."

subscribers cut across all social classes and walks of life, from former penitent Fanny Crisp to Prime Minister William Gladstone.<sup>112</sup> The sisters were listed as frequent donors, along with many of their families.<sup>113</sup> Official days, such as the patronal festival of the Community on All Souls Day, were crucial in generating revenue. At the formal opening of the completed House in 1865, a large gathering was held in celebration. While an impressive £407 was raised, over £300 had come from those not in attendance. This slight on the House did not go unnoticed in the Annual Report: "very many of our best friends and most valued supporters were unavoidably kept away through the unfortunate concurrence on the same day of two important gatherings in Norwich."<sup>114</sup> Accordingly, the Community reinforced that the presence of influential patrons at such events was as significant as their material contributions.

The rapid expansion at All Hallows did not always affect the penitents positively. During the progress of the renovations, fears surrounding "the presence of a large body of workmen" impeded the work of reform. The sisters explained: "From our former experience and that of others, we had also learnt that the excitement and irregularities, to which such work must give rise, are a very serious and often fatal hindrance to the reformation of the inmates."<sup>115</sup> One can only imagine the effects that a crew of workmen might have on a group of women - sisters and penitents - for whom sexuality was officially sublimated but yet pervaded the air. In order to prevent potential "excitement," all but the most-trusted penitents were temporarily

<sup>112</sup> A group as varied as Miss Cozens, Lord and Lady Manners, former penitents, and many of the council members gave frequently and generously.

<sup>113</sup> Sister Elizabeth's munificence was not confined to All Hallows: in 1881 "Penitentiary Work in the Church of England" reported that she founded a house of mercy in rural Essex at a cost of £10,000.

<sup>114</sup> 11th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1865.

<sup>115</sup> 10th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1864.

transferred to other houses of refuge. Thus, when expansion, in the form of male construction workers, threatened to hinder the work of reform, the presumed weaknesses of the penitents were held responsible.

Perhaps most significantly, expansion enabled the Sisterhood to wield a greater degree of power over the House of Mercy materially as well as spiritually. Following the completion of construction, the discursive identity of the House of Mercy as an institution became increasingly shaped by material rather than moral and spiritual concerns. Unlike the earlier reports, which provided regular though sparsely detailed accounts of "graduating" penitents, reports after 1865 became almost entirely consumed by financial concerns. The first report failed to mention the out-going penitents at all. Ironically, although the completion of the buildings had been undertaken ostensibly to secure the future of the rescue work, the financial problems which this expansion created potentially undermined the work. However, the sisters refused to let the financial situation of the House impair the work of moral reform, or the monastic culture they had so carefully developed. Rather, dissatisfied with the council's financial management of the House, the sisters asserted their identity as businesswomen, wresting economic control out of the council's hands.<sup>116</sup> So authoritative was the Sisterhood in this regard that it brought about the demise of the council altogether.

Publicly, and in accordance with Victorian gender ideology, the sisters had avoided involving themselves publicly in their institution's finances. Even in her 1857 appeal, Lavinia Crosse had appeared to seek women's assistance more from their prayers and their needle than through their purse.

Although asking for money from others directly was beyond her scope, she

<sup>116</sup> For related analyses of the enterprising spirit of monastic women sisters, see Bradley Warren, Spiritual Economies, for the medieval context; Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales; and Mumm, "Lady Guerrillas of Philanthropy," for that of the nineteenth century.



did, however, request that Associates work to raise money from others through donations and subscriptions. Officially, she maintained a cool exterior toward material concerns, reportedly asserting "Why be anxious about funds? It is God's work. He will provide. Effort is necessary and care, attention, and economy, but not anxiety."<sup>117</sup> In the wake of the debt accrued in the construction of the buildings at Ditchingham, however, financial anxiety mounted. As such, Crosse set out to effect change. According to the Annual Reports, the interest which had accrued on unpaid bills was hampering the House's material welfare. In order to remedy this problem, in 1867, the Superior assumed responsibility from the council for paying the bills. The 1868 report acknowledged that the change "has led to considerable saving; as those who have to provide, know better the means that will be at their disposal, are more free to choose their market, and are able to secure all the benefit of prompt payment."<sup>118</sup> The following year it was confirmed that not only was the sisterhood now paying its own bills, but that it had completely assumed control of the institution's finances to "great advantage." The effects of careful financial planning and "prompt payment" were revealed in 1869: "The year closed without debt; and as the coals laid in for the whole winter were paid for at time of delivery, the present year is to some extent indebted to the good management of the last."<sup>119</sup> That the sisterhood was not averse to implicitly criticising the financial acumen of the male council in a public forum testifies to the ways in which these women utilised their collective identity as moral reformers to defy contemporary gender ideals. Ultimately, the sisters refused to leave the finances of the House of Mercy in the hands of group of men whom, they believed, were fiscally inept.

<sup>117</sup> CAH Archives. Sayings of the Mother Superior, nd.

<sup>118</sup> 14th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1868.

<sup>119</sup> 15th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1869.

The ability of the sisters to manage the finances of the House in a responsible manner enabled them to assume greater control of their work and, in so doing, to challenge Victorian ideas not only about the nature of women's involvement in charitable enterprise, but of women's nature more fundamentally.

The financial takeover, however, was only the first step in the assumption of power by the sisters. On May 7, 1872 the council was formally dissolved leaving complete control of the House of Mercy in the hands of the Sisterhood. The circumstances surrounding the transfer of power, "a subject of much anxious deliberation," speak to the broader politics of social reform in the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>120</sup> Although the sisters were clearly dissatisfied with the manner in which the council had been administering the House of Mercy, the language of the transfer of power as it appeared in the annual reports drew upon the gendered discourse of philanthropy. Thus, according to the rhetoric of the 1872 report, "It had been for some time thought by several Members of the Council that the Institution had now arrived at such a stage of maturity that the system of management, which had fostered its growth, was no longer needed, or even expedient."<sup>121</sup> The council's failure to manage the finances of the House of Mercy competently was responsible for its demise, yet the transfer of power was represented as the natural outcome of the relationship between the council and the institution which had now "matured" sufficiently to be able to exist independently. The familial language reinforced Victorian gender ideals by giving due recognition to the men's role in "foster[ing]" the institution. Due recognition to the women who had facilitated the institution's maturity was

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<sup>120</sup> 18th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1872.

<sup>121</sup> 18th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1872.

absent from the report.

In order to facilitate the dissolution of the council, a series of resolutions was passed further indicating how the transfer of power was justified. The language of the resolutions reveal that the council's demise was as influenced by the "maturity" of the institution as by the "maturity" of some of its members:

Whereas the necessary Buildings of the House of Mercy are now complete for 30 penitents, and the Institution fully established, and the business of the Council thereby greatly lessened, and whereas there has been for some years such a diminution of attendance at the prescribed Meetings of the Council, that its functions have been latterly in a great measure suspended....and whereas owing to the death of several of the Trustees of the House and Site, it has become necessary that a new Deed of Trust should be prepared....be it resolved, second, that...by the written assent of three-fourths of the existing Council, the said Council be dissolved and cease to exist.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, flagging levels of commitment, decreased responsibility, and death were the real reasons behind the council's inability to properly manage the affairs of the House of Mercy. The Sisterhood, having established a reputation as morally and financially responsible, took advantage of this situation to expand its authority. Hereafter, the property of the penitentiary was administered by a group of trustees - former council members - in connection with the Sisterhood.<sup>123</sup> All annual subscriptions and donations were sent to the Mother Superior and the sisters served as treasurers. The business of accounting - not only for souls, but for the sisters' future - lay in their own hands. While the takeover by the Sisterhood was not represented officially in terms of a power struggle, eleven women had succeeded in

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<sup>122</sup> 18th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1872.

<sup>123</sup> Community statutes were revised in 1884 in order to "put the Community on a legal standing as a corporate body and enable us to hold property." Chapter book, October, 1917. CAH Archives.

bringing about the demise of a thirty-one member male council which had included such ecclesiastical luminaries as the Bishops of Winchester, Oxford, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as members of the aristocracy, and which had vehemently refused to accept the Sisterhood when its establishment had been made public in 1856. That these women did so from within a system of female monasticism not officially recognised by either society or the established church, renders their accomplishment all the more exceptional.

Upon the dissolution of the council, the material welfare of the House improved markedly, but for new reasons.<sup>124</sup> Annual reports reveal that the manner in which revenue was derived at the House of Mercy had undergone a substantial change since the sisters assumed control. Primarily, this change involved an increase in the ways in which the penitents contributed to their own upkeep. As part of the process of reform, as was the custom at other houses of mercy run by Sisterhoods, the penitents engaged in laundry work in addition to serving as domestics at the convent.<sup>125</sup> The expansion of the House in 1865 had included enlarged laundry facilities and shortly after the sisters assumed financial control, they explained how laundry work

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<sup>124</sup> 19th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1873. Although the annual report for 1873 recorded the continuance of old debts, financial problems were attributed to the "death of many longtime benefactors."

<sup>125</sup> On contemporary discourses surrounding the politics of laundry work in the reform of penitents, see the debate between Carter and Armstrong. In addition to music and a variety of recreations, Armstrong advised needlework as an appropriate past time for the penitents. Laundry work, which was a common feature in many existing penitentiaries, he dismissed as "an employment particularly unsuited to the spiritual advancement of the inmates, but pursued, we suppose, because it *pays the best.*" Carter disagreed, favouring active laundry work over the sedentary nature of needlework, which, in his opinion, could lead to "evil conversation." Armstrong, "The Church and Her Female Penitents," 66. *Italics in original.* For recent analyses of this practice, see Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work," Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," and Linda Mahood, "The Wages of Sin: Women, Work and Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century" in Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach, eds. The World is Ill-Divided: Women's Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

contributed to the moral and material welfare of the House: "the enlargement of the laundry has also contributed to this good result. The earnings have been considerable, and the moral effect of providing more regular work and industrial training for the penitents, has been so great, that it alone would have justified that long deferred improvement."<sup>126</sup> Ten years later, however, the potential of such work was problematised:

The moral effect of work in a large laundry is not so good as that of some less remunerative kinds of labour. It withdraws the penitent a longer time than we could desire from higher influence and training, and makes it more difficult for us to exercise a close and constant supervision. But the choice lies between making more money and receiving fewer applicants. We have preferred the former alternative, though it condemns us to labour at a comparative disadvantage.<sup>127</sup>

In electing to choose the money-making alternative over that of more spiritual methods of reform, the House of Mercy at All Hallows in a sense "sold out" to the pressures of philanthropic work. While prayer and reflection brought spiritual rewards, in a material sense, they were not lucrative. By contrast, throughout the 1880s the revenue derived from the laundry contributed to a substantial degree to the total income of the House. In 1880, for example, laundry revenue amounted to £233 of the £782 that was raised for the year. By 1888, it had risen to £306 while total revenue fell to £748. By comparison, the annual grants from the CPA for those years were £58 and £66 respectively.

Although important purely in financial terms, laundry work at the House of Mercy had a greater significance as to how it affected the identity of the penitentiary and the penitents. Referred to in its formative stage as "not a

<sup>126</sup> 15th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1869.

<sup>127</sup> 25th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1879.

cheap charity," the House of Mercy, although not completely self-sufficient, had evolved into a sustainable enterprise thanks to a large extent to the labour of its inmates. Despite the economic depression which hit Norfolk in the 1880s, the constant pleas for financial aid which characterised previous reports are absent in the reports for that decade which proudly displayed the institution's lack of debt. In terms of how the penitents were portrayed, the effects of the laundry were also important. Laundry work was exhausting, unfulfilling, and often dangerous. Not surprisingly, penitents often took advantage of this type of work in order to rebel. As *East and West* explained, "Many are the articles which have to be replaced, because of a bad scorch or even a decided burn, from having been either thrown in temper or pushed in carelessness against a hot iron."<sup>128</sup>

Laundry work, however, served another purpose than character formation: in its ability to enable the penitents to "support" themselves financially in the rhetoric of rescue work, it contributed to a more positive public representation of these women, and may even, according to Community accounts, have enhanced their own self worth. *East and West* explained the nature of this controversial relationship: "If the girls think they are earning something towards the maintenance of the House, they feel happier."<sup>129</sup> Those penitents who, "for want of health or other reasons, [we]re debarred from the work of the laundry," were described as jealous of those in the laundry. These women were said to have declared that they did not feel that the work they did - mending and sewing - was as valuable as that which brought in a cash payment, whereas "the laundry girls earn their bread and butter." In the annual reports, prior references to the complete dependency of

<sup>128</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1890.

<sup>129</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1890

the penitents on the sisters were replaced by the declaration that "THE INMATES CAN TO A GREAT EXTENT MAINTAIN THEMSELVES BY THEIR OWN WORK."<sup>130</sup> That the sisterhood derived the primary benefits from the work of the penitents as laundresses cannot be disputed. Its ability to innovate and take advantage of the labour of its charges reveal the extent to which its relationship to gender ideals was highly ambiguous. Just as genteel Victorian mothers depended upon the physical labour of their working-class servants in order to perform the work of domesticity in a successful manner, so too did the sisters rely upon the labour of the penitents to facilitate the work of moral reform. Although the sisters capitalised on the spiritually and morally dependent nature of their "fallen sisters" in order to achieve their own financial independence, significantly, to some extent this independence was premised on the publicly-proclaimed financial independence of fallen women as well.

The expansion of the Community of All Hallows was, to a large extent, fashioned by the discourses which prevailed around the identities of women religious and fallen women. The power dynamics among the sisters, the penitents and the men "in charge," hinged upon these constructed identities and was based upon ideas of virtue, class, and gender. Throughout the nineteenth century, female power derived ideologically from the virtue ascribed to the feminine nature. However, in order to survive in the public world of philanthropy, the identity of Anglican sisters needed to extend beyond that of piety, chastity, and submission to encompass those virtues which Victorian gender ideology ascribed to men: chiefly, business savvy, ambition, and, most importantly, independence. The sisters who operated the House of Mercy at All Hallows needed to be as adept as preparing

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<sup>130</sup> 33rd Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1887. Emphasis in original.

financial statements as they did at rehabilitating the fallen. While their virtue as middle-class women gave the original sisters the opportunity to "rescue" and educate fallen women, their skill and proficiency in the business of philanthropy allowed them to win greater independence over their own lives. This independence, however, together with the Sisterhood's expansion throughout the nineteenth century, could not have been achieved without the labour of fallen women, whose own enforced enterprise, as will be analysed further in the following chapter, brought prestige and capital to the House of Mercy. The relationship between female monastic culture and feminism at All Hallows, as it was understood discursively and in practice, thus was highly ambiguous.

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CHAPTER FIVE "A very storming of the strongholds of Satan": The Politics of Rehabilitation at the All Hallows' House of Mercy<sup>1</sup>

So long as this earth shall be the scene of conflict between the powers of good and evil, so long will there be a blessing on those pathways of the Church, in which spiritual mercy embraces spiritual misery, and saints and penitents are walking hand in hand with their faces toward Zion.<sup>2</sup>

Lavinia Crosse, *The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow*

On the continuum of sexual morality in Victorian Britain, no two figures appear to occupy more distant points than the prostitute and the nun. The notion that one could transform into the other seems remarkable, even from the perspective of the twenty-first century, and must have seemed almost unthinkable to many Victorians. But in a society in which female chastity and vice were so rigidly demarcated, the line separating the two was incredibly porous: one slip and all was lost, virtue was forsaken in a catastrophic tumble. Not all Victorians, however, believed that the "fall" was irredeemable. In the Community of All Hallows located on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, not only could vice be cast off, but fallen women could actually become members of the Sisterhood. Under the shadow of God, the dramatic evolution of prostitute into nun became a reality.

Today, little remains to bear witness to the lives of these women whose sexual misadventures brought them to the All Hallows' House of Mercy and whose desire to embrace God enabled them to commit to a life of religion. The Community archives contain brief, often indirect, accounts of their trials, and no records of their careers as sisters; only a few scattered photographs

<sup>1</sup> East & West. Volume One (1886).

<sup>2</sup> [Lavinia Crosse], "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow, near Beccles," (Oxford: J.H. & J. Parker, 1857).

remain. It is through death, however, that their identity as women religious and the position they occupied in the Sisterhood can be most clearly viewed. On the grounds of the parish church, situated about half a mile from the convent, lies an extensive cemetery. It is an extraordinary site/sight. The rambling headstones abruptly give way to an extensive symmetrical array of large, bright crosses, each of roughly the same shape, size, and colour. These are the headstones of the sisters of the Community of All Hallows. The crosses are most impressive: made of high-quality materials, each bears the name of the sister and the date of her death. On the back of each the insignia of the Community is engraved, a corporate badge of membership that each sister carries with her beyond the grave and signifies to all onlookers her status. The headstone of Lavinia Crosse, the Mother Superior, outshines them all. Toward the back of the cemetery, where the land dips slightly, the last row of crosses look substantially different from the rest. These crosses are wooden and much smaller than the stone ones. They are in various states of decay and several have actually deteriorated completely, sheared off at the base, leaving nothing but a jagged stump. These crosses, too, carry inscriptions, but in the wood they are far more difficult to make out. These are the crosses of the Third Order, a branch of the Community composed of fallen women who had become women religious.<sup>3</sup> The substance of their headstones and their placement in the cemetery carry a powerful message about both the hierarchical nature of identity within this Sisterhood and the eternal nature of the crime those interred beneath once committed.

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of the term "Third Order" derive from older forms of Roman Catholic religious orders. It referred to members of orders who engaged in active work in comparison to that of cloistered nuns. On terminology in Roman Catholic orders, see Barbara Walsh, Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales, 1800-1937 (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), 163. Within Anglican sisterhoods, this designation distinguished these women from both choir and lay sisters.

The existence of the Third Order reveals the complexities of dealing with "sisters" and "penitents" as two separate, distinct, and stable identities, and demonstrates the potentially radical impact of female monasticism. As highlighted by the cemetery architecture, the identity of Third Order sisters was shaped fundamentally by their former identity as penitents. So too, the identity of All Hallows sisters was constructed in relation to the fallen.<sup>4</sup> These identities were constantly being negotiated within discourses of gender, class, and moral reform. As set out in the previous chapters, rescue work at the House of Mercy depended on the relationship between sisters and penitents: only through the latter's existence and potential reform, could the former's existence be justified to a society suspicious of female monasticism. Collectively, the penitents served as a justification not only for the existence of the Sisterhood, but also for wider policies of moral regulation and control within Victorian philanthropy. That these women on occasion actually transformed into sisters was widely considered as proof of the effectiveness of such work rather than as symbolic of their spiritual capabilities. It is a strange irony of the politics of Victorian identity that entering a convent as a sister was considered improper, possibly heretical, and a slight on English womanhood, while entering as a former prostitute was universally praised.

This chapter analyses how the practices of moral reform were implemented at the All Hallows' House of Mercy, a penitentiary established in 1854 to rescue fallen women, and managed, from the end of 1855, by a community of Anglican sisters. These practices were shaped by the culture of monasticism at the House and its emphasis on spiritual renewal. The discursive and material transformations from sinner to penitent expose how

<sup>4</sup> For a useful analysis of the construction of monastic identities in the medieval context, see Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

identity politics at the House of Mercy were structured through relationships of power. Fallen women's identities were fashioned in relation to the discourses and practices of moral reform. In turn, rescue work influenced penitents' lives materially and affected the performance of their identities: the centrality of religious redemption at the House created a diverse range of responses.<sup>5</sup> A focus on these responses, and the manner by which they were explained to the public, highlights the complex and often paradoxical relationship between women and religion.<sup>6</sup> While the penitents' "progress" served as a means of publicly legitimating the institution, it could also help to foster the development of the religious life, as witnessed most spectacularly through the advent of the Third Order.

The establishment of the Third Order within the culture of monasticism reveals how just as the identity of "penitent" was fluid and subject to ideological influences, so too was that of "sister." The ambiguous nature of how Third Order sisters' identities were fashioned derived from the Sisterhood's emphasis on the spiritual aspects of reform in connection with public insistence on the social utility of rescue work. Yet the ways in which Third Order sisters negotiated their identities suggests some surprising paradoxes between monasticism and Victorian gender ideology: the Sisterhood's public emphasis on the collective nature of Third Order sisters' functional identity enabled these women, privately and individually, to develop a controversial form of religious identity. The rescue of the "fallen"

<sup>5</sup> On the performance of identity, see Jo Burr Margadant, The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> On this relationship, refer to Gail Malmgreen, ed., Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 - 1930 (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 6-7. The author calls attention to the difficulties involved in recapturing religious beliefs, especially among non-literate women, and to the diverse ways religion operated in women's lives. See also Eileen Janes Yeo, "Some Paradoxes of Empowerment" in idem. ed. Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

facilitated the existence and social legitimacy of Anglican sisterhoods, yet it also gave rise to unconventional monastic identities among the fallen themselves. These identities provide new insights into the dynamic character of female spirituality in Victorian society.

An investigation of the reform work at All Hallows reveals that the development of religiosity among the penitents was paramount to the sisters and that some penitents did indeed experience spiritual growth. Attempts to regulate the fallen, particularly through Lock hospitals, Magdalene homes and the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts, have attracted the attention of a number of scholars.<sup>7</sup> Of the spiritual dimension of reform and redemption to which fallen women were subjected, however, less has been documented.<sup>8</sup> Typically, historians argue that women in penitentiaries were the unwilling recipients of religious rehabilitation. Linda Mahood, for example, who examines the regulation of prostitutes in nineteenth-century Scotland, argues that the Bible was used frequently to remind women of the severity of their

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<sup>7</sup> This literature includes studies by Linda Mahood, The Magdalens: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge, 1990); Judith R. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lynda Nead, Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); and Frank Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century "Equal Sinners": Irish Women Utilising the Salvation Army Rescue Network for Britain and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century," in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy, eds. Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997). On regulation in the colonial context, see, for example, Philippa Levine, "Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India," Journal of the History of Sexuality 4:4 (April 1994).

<sup>8</sup> For studies on rescue work by religious communities which consider the impact of religion, see Susan Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls': The Convent-Based Rehabilitation of Fallen Women in Victorian Britain," Journal of Social History vol. 29, no. 3 (Spring 1996). Mumm examines in greater detail the social rather than the religious aspects of convent reform. Hope Campbell Barton Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses: Contrasts in Anglican and Roman Catholic Religious Headship in Victorian England" Ph.D Dissertation, University of Leeds, 1993; Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds. Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1989). Prochaska notes how religious indoctrination was common in houses of mercy in Women and Philanthropy, 157.

sin.<sup>9</sup> In her study of convent-based reform within English sisterhoods, Susan Mumm, on the other hand, notes that "many penitentiaries tended to downplay religious practices among the penitents."<sup>10</sup> Neither study suggests that religious instruction was valued by the penitents. Yet the spirituality of fallen women needs to be more carefully explored; such women may have been Christians prior to the "fall" and did not necessarily abandon their faith thereafter.<sup>11</sup> It does not follow that because a woman earned her living in the sex trade - or had engaged once in premarital sex - she necessarily ceased to be a Christian. The Victorian association of female piety with virtue colours our ability to understand that those considered "unchaste" could be as devout as "respectable" women.<sup>12</sup> Their piety might become infused with guilt, but it did not disappear.

In their analyses of female spirituality, feminist historians increasingly are documenting the paradoxical force of religion in women's lives.<sup>13</sup> Historian Barbara Taylor's recent study of Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, notes how Wollstonecraft's "abandonment of Christian orthodoxy...only

<sup>9</sup> Mahood, 83. The Bible also functioned to instill self-sacrifice and duty among the penitents.

<sup>10</sup> Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 538. She refers to the archives of The Community of St. Mary the Virgin (Wantage) archives, S Anne Clare's book.

<sup>11</sup> The role of religion in shaping working-class women's culture has begun to be explored in studies about female preaching and radicalism, for example. Olive Anderson was a pioneer in this regard, see her "Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflexions on Feminism, Popular Religion and Social Change" *The Historical Journal* xii, 3 (1969). More recent studies include, Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton UP., 1985); Anna Clark, "The Sexual Crisis and Popular Religion in London, 1770 -1820" *International Labor and Working-Class History* 34 (Fall 1988). See also the introduction by Sandra Stanley Holton, Alison Mackinnon and Margaret Allen, "Between rationality and revelation: women, faith and public roles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," in the special issue of *Women's History Review* 7: 2 (1998); and Susan O'Brien, "Lay Sisters and Good Mothers: Working-Class Women in English Convents, 1840 - 1910," *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990)

<sup>12</sup> See Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant feminists and Catholic Saints in Victorian Britain" in *Radical Femininity* for an analysis of the radical potential of female spirituality.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Sue Morgan, ed. *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750 -1900* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., 2002); and Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760 -1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

served to underline her commitment to what had become a highly personal faith."<sup>14</sup> For working-class women in particular, religion could function as both personally liberating and institutionally oppressive.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps no clearer illustration of the complexities of the operations of religion can be found than in the practices of rescue work by Anglican sisterhoods towards the fallen and their impact on these women. The ways in which penitents' spirituality was shaped and experienced must be placed within the complex power dynamics which operated among penitents, sisters and the clergy. Even the most pious penitent might not appreciate the religious nature of her rehabilitation. Certainly second-hand testimonials of religious fervour among the penitents - especially those whose tenure at the House of Mercy was nearing an end - must be treated with caution, but the small wooden crosses of the Third Order sisters at the edge of the All Hallows cemetery are surely symbolic of some measure of Christian devotion. Although it cannot be assumed that all of the penitents who joined the Third Order did so primarily for reasons of faith, nor can it be discounted that some of these women felt drawn to the religious life. In this sense, Christianity could be an important tool in the work of rehabilitation not only of the fallen, but also by the fallen.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 95

<sup>15</sup> Malmgreen, for example, calls attention to the difficulties involved in recapturing religious beliefs, especially among non-literate women, and of the diverse ways in which religion operated in women's lives. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> This argument relies upon an understanding that Third Order sisters did not merely passively accept the religious tenets of moral reform but were actively engaged in the fashioning of their own spirituality.

## Accounting for Souls at the "School of Spirituality"<sup>17</sup>

You must lead them gently into green pastures, and beside the waters of comfort. You must place a man of God at their side, one skilled to minister, to minds diseased, one in whom they shall have the confidence to unburden the secret of their heart. You must send chosen women of God to talk with them, and familiarise them once again with the contact of all that is pure and modest and virtuous.<sup>18</sup>

Rev. John Armstrong, *Female Penitentiaries*, 1848.

Toward the end of 1855, the London-based *Penny Post* visited the Shipmeadow Penitentiary, and in an attempt to dispel the "mystery which seems to surround" the House of Mercy constructed an identity for the institution and the women who were its inhabitants. "Upon arrival," readers were informed, "you have difficulty in believing the small, comfortable-looking, private house at the end of [the lane] to be that of the ominous penitentiary."<sup>19</sup> The article imparted to its readers the industriousness of the House and its inhabitants, detailing the nature of the rescue work performed therein. The daily regime involved a good deal of housework and outdoor labour such as gardening and twine making. In addition, the penitents were engaged in needlework, laundry work, and class room instruction. Yet by no means, the columnist explained, was the House institutional in nature. Rather, this characterisation utilised the discourse of domesticity to present an appealing, familial identity for the penitentiary and its inhabitants:

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<sup>17</sup> W. E. Scudamore, "She Hath Done What She Could" A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham on S. Michael's Day, 1859. Second Ed. (London: JH & J Parker, 1860), 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in the Annual report of the CPA, 1861. See also "Debate in Convocations on Deaconess Institutions and Protestant Sisterhoods, February 11, 1862" (London: Emily Faithful and Co., 1862), 46 for a discussion of sisterhoods' penitentiary work.

<sup>19</sup> *Penny Post*, December 1, 1855.



Such an orderly regularity, as might satisfy the most rigid disciplinarian, and yet there is no forced stiffness at all, but that natural falling in with a rule judiciously appointed, and firmly adhered to. This is it which in this instance changes a community-life consisting of such naturally opposed and unruly elements to that of a peaceful and united family, and which excludes anything that the most delicate-minded shrink from.<sup>20</sup>

Readers could thus believe that the “ominous penitentiary” was nothing of the sort but rather something akin to a natural, well-ordered, peaceful, and united Victorian family. The columnist artfully expressed surprise at the overall tone of the House: “I am at a loss to describe that constant, soul-pervading moral influence which is THE one thing I have most truly felt to exist here; and still more should I be at a loss to explain exactly by what means it is attained.” Significantly, the article did not emphasise the religious nature of the work, highlighting only the silence which pervaded the house. Just as the columnist was unable to explain the spiritual influence behind the apparently smooth operations of the penitentiary, so too, over the next twenty-five years of the penitentiary’s existence, would its religious identity publicly be sublimated beneath its function to society.

The fashioning of a specific form of identity not only for the penitentiary, but also for the penitents, was central to the work of reform. In order for the public to believe that the fallen could be redeemed, supporters of the work drew upon popular discourses of fallenness which positioned the fallen as a sentimental figure.<sup>21</sup> Thus readers of the *Penny Post* discovered that for many women “it has not been the wilful choice of a life of sin” but rather the result of circumstances such as a lack of parents, and “unjust step

<sup>20</sup> *Penny Post*, December 1, 1855.

<sup>21</sup> Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, 56-60. For the rhetoric surrounding the fall, see Amanda Anderson, *Painted Faces and Tainted Lives: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP., 1993).

parents," "false promises," drugs unwittingly administered, and "the wretched accommodation of our closely-packed cottages, which ...undermin[es] the natural modesty of females."<sup>22</sup> As such, the paper urged its readers to "make much allowance for the[se women.]" The fallen woman's identity as victim was reinforced by the Community's Warden, the Reverend William Scudamore, in his own account of the rescue work at Shipmeadow. He too drew heavily on the cult of sentimentality, explaining how "the history of most of these poor girls unfolds a very panorama of human sin and misery."<sup>23</sup> Reporting on the present group at the House, he noted that three had come from "good homes," fourteen were orphans, and many others were from broken or abusive homes: "One at least had been *driven*--the word is almost exact--into a life of sin by the brutal violence of her step-father."<sup>24</sup> Alcohol was seen as one of the primary causes leading to the loss of virtue: "Were it not for this vice of intemperance in drink, not half of these poor women would have been in need of our help, nor should we meet with half the difficulty that now encountered us in our endeavours to reclaim them."<sup>25</sup> Drink was also viewed as responsible for the return to vice. One penitent who had been sent into service was reportedly "doing well" but had subsequently "returned to sin" as a "result of excess on a visit to her [alcoholic] mother."<sup>26</sup> By attributing the fall to "dysfunctional" family life, and by positioning the penitentiary oppositionally as a "peaceful and united family," supporters of the House of Mercy recast the institution as both

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<sup>22</sup> *Penny Post*, Sept 7, 1855.

<sup>23</sup> W. E. Scudamore, "An Account of the Penitentiary at Shipmeadow, in a Letter to the Rev'd James Davies, vicar of Abbenhall, Gloucestershire," (Norwich: Thomas Priest, 1857), 7. On the preponderance of prostitutes who were orphaned, see Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 7. Original emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> 8th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1862.

<sup>26</sup> 8th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1862.

familiar and familial. Within this discourse of domesticity, women whose own families had abandoned or betrayed them could find refuge in the penitentiary, where a "soul pervading influence" would help restore their "natural modesty."

Religiously-minded, socially-conscious Victorians were no doubt impressed with this portrayal of pious, domestic rehabilitation, but why did some of the fallen actually elect to enter a house of mercy run by Anglican sisters in the remote East Anglian countryside? The increasing number of former prostitutes who sought rehabilitation in such penitentiaries can be explained in part by the context of mid-nineteenth century attitudes toward the fallen, as discussed in the previous chapters.<sup>27</sup> However, without direct evidence, any attempt to understand the motivations that encouraged fallen women to apply for admittance to the House of Mercy can only be tentative. Although the association between penitents and convents was voluntary, these women's status as 'volunteers' was complicated by their status as social outcasts. In their research into rescue work at Anglican convents, Susan Mumm and Hope Stone both address the issue of motivation and argue that practical considerations often led fallen women to the convent's gate.<sup>28</sup> They state that the convent was often seen as preferable to the workhouse, and that, especially during the winter months, houses of mercy offered adequate shelter and care for these women. Convents, they argue, provided training for employment, references, and some even allowed the children of fallen women to be housed in their orphanages.<sup>29</sup> In addition, penitents could leave

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<sup>27</sup> Chapter Three addresses the various arguments put forth at mid-century which problematised these women and encouraged them to seek Christian redemption.

<sup>28</sup> Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 535. Hope Stone, "Constraints on the Mother Foundresses," Chapter 6, esp. 232 -233.

<sup>29</sup> Women would sometimes be accepted at houses of mercy with small children. All Hallows did not follow this practice.

whenever they wanted and were not pressured, as they were in other reform houses, to consider emigration. While Mumm does consider other more psychological reasons for entry to a convent rescue home, she does not privilege these over practical advantages: "It is possible that those who entered penitentiaries chose to leave the streets early as a result of feelings of guilt...[however I]t must not be assumed that all women who requested admission to a House of Mercy felt overwhelmed by a sense of personal sinfulness."<sup>30</sup> The earliest reports at the Shipmeadow House demonstrate that several of the penitents did indeed view their 'rescue' as a temporary stop-over. However, they also reveal that some may have been motivated by more spiritual concerns as well. Just as sisters felt a personal obligation and a duty to better themselves as Christians, so some penitents must have shared these feelings.<sup>31</sup> Although motivations were surely mixed, the sisters hoped that each penitent would arrive at the House imbued with the "true spirit of repentance."

In order to best-procure genuine repentance, the programme of reform at All Hallows was based upon spiritual renewal. Just as was the case in the Sisterhood, regulation stood at the heart of this process. Rehabilitation constituted an intimate invasion into body, mind, and soul. Those admitted to the House were typically over the age of sixteen, had not been sexually seduced, but were rather "open and habitual sinner[s]."<sup>32</sup> As such, these women were required to undergo a thorough transformation of spirit and character throughout a two-year period. In an initiation not unlike that which probationers of the Sisterhood underwent, newly-admitted penitents were stripped of their former identity: they were assigned new names, their

<sup>30</sup> Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 535.

<sup>31</sup> The spiritual motivations of the fallen women will be discussed below.

<sup>32</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 8.

hair was cut short, and they were given plain attire "to remind its wearers of their probationary state."<sup>33</sup> New penitents served a trial period at the "refuge," a building described as "an out-house on the premises, that had formerly been used as a laundry, [and] was fitted up as a kind of probationary ward."<sup>34</sup> There, newcomers underwent a three-month period of contemplation under the care of one of the sisters. Those who behaved badly would stay longer. Such a trial period was seen as essential to the success of moral reform. As the Warden explained, "Nearly all have to be *broken in* to those habits of religious and of domestic order, in which the more advanced penitent finds at once comfort and security."<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the *Penny Post*'s depiction of the ordering of the House as natural, the initial steps to reform reveal the highly-structured, artificial set of practices that were involved.

Once the penitents had graduated from the "refuge," spiritual renewal was fostered by close interaction with the sisters within the culture of monasticism. According to Scudamore, the very presence of the sisters had an indelible effect upon each penitent: "She is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses to the renewing power of grace, and to the love that awaits and welcomes the true penitent...A high example of Christian life is always before her."<sup>36</sup> This Christian life was propagated through the daily timetable of the house. Each day commenced at six a.m. with private devotion, followed by "a common tribute of prayer and praise" in the chapel.<sup>37</sup> Breakfast was followed

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<sup>33</sup> Scudamore, "An Account."

<sup>34</sup> In 1871 the sisters assumed the management of the Cottage Home Refuge in Norwich which housed new inmates for a "preliminary trial" period of up to two months in which "penitence is tested, good habits are begun, and a real desire for a higher life is awakened." *East and West. All Saints*, 1886. See also *Guide to Schools, Homes and Refuges for Girls and Women*, 1888 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1888)113; *Seeking and Saving*, vol 1, no 2 (June 1881) for details from the 10th annual report of the Home.

<sup>35</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 9. Emphasis in original.

<sup>36</sup> John Armstrong, the Bishop of Grahamstown, cited in "An Account," 14.

<sup>37</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 11.

by classes in scripture or catechism, and then some set about the morning's work in the kitchen, laundry and the house, while others were prepared for baptism or Holy Communion. A noon-time service preceded lunch, during which the penitents were read to by one of the sisters. After lunch the penitents were allowed one hour for recreation - in the garden if the weather was fair - and then resumed their work and lessons. At five o'clock the community gathered for evening prayer which was followed by tea, two hours of recreation in reading and needlework, at which point "a slight supper is then allowed." A strict silence was observed after dinner, during which time the penitents read the Bible and prepared their verses for the next day. Prayers were said at nine, with candles out at ten.<sup>38</sup> As the sisters' lives also were dictated by prayer and services, the penitents may not have found this inundation of religiosity as much of an intrusion into their lives as they might have in a more-secular institution. Some in fact, may have welcomed its presence.<sup>39</sup> In other ways too, the culture of the penitentiary, exacting on body, mind and spirit, differed little between sisters and penitents. Although the penitents' behaviour was strictly regulated by the sisters, that of the sisters was in turn regulated by the Mother Superior and the Community Rule. The uniform attire, silent meals, devotional practices and leisure activities which were shared by both sisters and penitents created what Susan Mumm terms an "equality of experience" between these groups of women.<sup>40</sup> Christian teaching, which emphasises the equality of all in the eyes of God, might too have contributed to the penitents' sense of self in relation to their spiritual "superiors." Despite these teases of equality, however, the "shared" aspects of

<sup>38</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 11 -12.

<sup>39</sup> Without direct evidence, it is as implausible to contend that the penitents - as a group - disliked the religious practices of the House as it is to claim that they all embraced them. I am suggesting the possibility that some penitents may have found solace and redemption through prayer.

<sup>40</sup> Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 538.

sisters' and penitents' lives were profoundly overwhelmed by each groups' relationship to power. At the House of Mercy, as in wider Victorian society, such power was based on ideas about moral virtue, spiritual purity and social status.<sup>41</sup>

The use of supervised silence to regulate the penitents exemplifies the operations of power within the House and how power was structured according to ideas about the identity of both penitents and their reformers, and also to monastic culture. As with the Sisterhood, silence was one of the cornerstones of spiritual contemplation for the penitentiary.<sup>42</sup> Discursively, however, the need for constant supervision and periods of silence was attributed to the character of the penitents. According to the Warden, fallen women were "either silent and dull, or disposed to boisterous and rude raillery;" he explained that "a number talking together would soon excite each other, and a sense of confusion ensue."<sup>43</sup> Idle chatter was frowned upon as it undermined the moral tone of reform: "the Sister in charge, not being able to hear all that passed, would have no means of checking improper conversation." The explanations for silence reveal how the power inequalities operated at the House. Conversation was permitted during recreation, but always within earshot of the sisters. Any mention of one's past life was strictly forbidden, and would result in a stern warning; repeat offenders were dismissed altogether. Such censorship was imperative not only due to excitable nature of the fallen, but also due to the assumed delicacy

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<sup>41</sup> On the relationship between virtue and class in Victorian gender ideology, see Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in mid-Victorian England (London: Virago, 1988) Chapter One.

<sup>42</sup> Silence was a crucial element in rescue work at various magdalene institutions throughout Britain and Ireland. See Linda Mahood, The Magdalenes, 87; Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work," 64. For the significance of silence to the religious life within the Community of All Hallows, see the Chapter Book, CAH Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 12.

of the sisters. Scudamore noted that "it meets an objection sometimes mistakenly urged against the employment of ladies in this particular work of mercy." As in any well-governed house of correction, supervision of this type was viewed as essential to rehabilitation: "This constant supervision stops many avenues of evil. It prevents quarrelling, and checks the contagion of disobedience and discontent." To this end, the identities of the penitents and the sisters were fashioned in terms of the dichotomy between virtue and vice. Ultimately, such regulation was designed not only to protect the penitents, but also to protect the rescuers, and to ensure the propriety of the House.

The ways in which the Sisterhood positioned itself in relation to the fallen women in its care were designed specifically to demonstrate that repentance was most effectively procured within a religious order. Promoters of the work argued that "The frequent offices of confession, prayer, and praise, are a continued memento of [the fallen's] state before God, and of the only means by which she may hope to regain health and life. Entire recovery is always slow and painful; for the disease is deep-seated and malign."<sup>44</sup> Rather than seen as a pariah, the penitent's identification as sick and in need of a cure helped to justify the House of Mercy's programme of reform. By positioning the penitent as a diseased member of society, the rhetoric utilised the metaphor of contagion, central to medical discourses of fallenness, and thus helped to promote her eventual acceptance back into society.<sup>45</sup> Because only God could cure the disease, this discursive strategy served to promote this work by sisterhoods rather than secular institutions. Further, by tapping

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Scudamore, "An Account," 14.

<sup>45</sup> Such rhetoric was common in the work of purity crusader John Armstrong, for example. See also William Acton, Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects (London: John Churchill, 1857). For an analysis of this discourse, see Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800 Second Edition ((London: Longman, 1989).



into the moral sensibilities of the upper and middle classes, this rhetoric encouraged society to feel obligated to participate in the process of rehabilitation and thereby ensured a steady stream of public funding, as seen in the previous chapter. After all, when the disease was one which affected not only the health of the individual but also that of society as a whole, and when God provided a solution through the "unbought labour" of Anglican sisters, what civic-minded and conscientious citizens could turn their backs on such an enterprise? Certainly Church Penitentiary Association (CPA) member and future prime minister William Gladstone and House of Mercy council member Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford believed the work was of vital importance.<sup>46</sup>

Within the discourse of Christian philanthropy, the ultimate goal of the penitentiary was to implement a complete religious transformation of character and identity: to create devout Christians among the fallen.<sup>47</sup> Most penitents had received little formal religious training prior to their time with the sisters: several were unbaptised and very few had been confirmed. Yet this lack of religiosity among the fallen in no way deterred the sisters who believed that through Christ, even the least penitent among the fallen could be redeemed. They explained that the transformation from petulance to prayer was never easy:

It often begins with a refusal to come down in the morning and take up the ordinary work. We are met by a sullen evil face, a bold defiant manner, and perhaps an open declaration, 'I don't want to do any more work in this

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<sup>46</sup> Gladstone was a member of the CPA and was well known for his night wanderings in London's East End to help reclaim women from the streets. His wife, Catherine, was also a tireless philanthropist; see Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*. Wilberforce joined the council of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham in 1860, and became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1863.

<sup>47</sup> In her study of convent-based rescue work in Ireland, Maria Luddy notes that some penitents did on occasion become quite devout. Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work in 19th Century Ireland."

house: I want to go!' [W]e wait 'for the power of prayer to touch the Great Healer, and bring out the hidden grace that is stronger than evil.'<sup>48</sup>

The process of spiritual healing reveals how religion structured identity and dynamics of power at the House. Defiance was met with determination as the sisters utilised their own faith in God to impart faith to the fallen. As compassionate Christians, the sisters believed that the fallen were capable of returning to God's fold. Although they had sinned, in the eyes of the sisters the penitents had not been abandoned by Christ. As a sister at the Sisterhood-run penitentiary at Wantage remarked, "They are Christians; they have sinned; they are Penitents; they need the same teaching and help as other Christians...their sin...is not to be continually thrown in their faces."<sup>49</sup> By identifying the fallen primarily as members of the Christian community, women religious created a relationship with those in their charge based on their mutual relationships with God.

The relationship between these two groups of women, however, depended on the unequal division of power at the House of Mercy, and was reinforced through both the actual and the discursive regulation to which the penitents were subjected.<sup>50</sup> Foremost among these regulatory practices was spiritual instruction. The most "successful" penitents were those who discovered the power of God in their lives. To facilitate this objective, a small chapel which was attached to the House provided a private space for regular prayer, and on Sundays the best-behaved penitents attended the parish

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<sup>48</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1887.

<sup>49</sup> Wantage Archives, "Penitentiary Work in the Church of England," Quoted in Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 540.

<sup>50</sup> For an analysis of the operations of female power within American Protestantism, see Tracy Fessenden, "The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere" Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society(2000), 25: 2.

church together with the sisters.<sup>51</sup> The process of spiritual renewal was fraught with difficulties, as Lavinia Crosse discovered during her initial months at the penitentiary. Her diary entries from this period reveal the ways in which religious influences operated within the process of reform and their individual impact on the penitents. In its first year of operation, the penitentiary received twenty-two penitents, Sarah was one of the first.<sup>52</sup> During her initial weeks, Sarah rejected the programme of reform, often spending days in her dormitory "sulky and sullen."<sup>53</sup> She refused to eat and scarcely spoke, but her behaviour could also be rude and noisy. After spending time talking, reading the Bible, and praying with her, Crosse accompanied this petulant penitent to the chapel where her repentance occurred: "there we knelt together in prayer [until] I withdrew and left her for a short time by herself. It was a touching incident and I felt much when kneeling down with this poor neglected wanderer. She wept and I was glad to see her tears."<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, Crosse's is the only existing perspective of this scene of repentance. As such, the manner by which Sarah experienced this aspect of her reform cannot be ascertained clearly. Indeed, she may have been one of the penitents later dismissed. What the incident does reveal, however, is the extent to which religion underpinned the process of reform, and that it was a process experienced by both the rescued and the rescuer, although in remarkably differing ways.

Penitents, the sisters believed, could only be reformed at the feet of Christ, only through God could they be led from the snares of sin. The work

<sup>51</sup> Other penitents, including those in the refuge, were not allowed this 'treat' as their conduct could not be guaranteed. Scudamore, "An Account," 11.

<sup>52</sup> The only reference to Sarah is found in Lavinia Crosse's diary. Although Scudamore discussed the initial cases in the 1861 Report of the House, he did not refer to the penitents by name.

<sup>53</sup> Crosse's diary, July 26, 1854. CAH Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Crosse's diary, July 27, 1854. Sarah's scene of repentance is one of many recorded in the diary during this time.

of repentance required the devoted efforts of the fallen, but also of their saviours. Such devotion shaped the work and fortified the workers. Even in death did faith provide succour. Commenting on the first penitent to die at the House of Mercy, a sister found consolation in that while "her disposition was very simple and childlike" and she had come from a "bad" home, "she had found religion."<sup>55</sup> The Chaplain's report to the CPA expressed the same sense of consolation: "She gave us much comfort...and lies buried in this churchyard with a simple wooden cross over her, erected by her friends."<sup>56</sup> For Crosse, the transformative power of religion shaped and defined the practices of reform, fuelling her conviction that with Christ's love, her work would flourish: "[W]e may have something simple and true here, something that must bring down a blessing from Heaven - and...results may be seen in the altered characters of these poor fallen women. Prayer is our work - watchfulness, humility and love our safeguards. May God preserve us from the evils which I feel and fear - in Him do I trust."<sup>57</sup>

The visit of the Bishop of Natal to the House of Mercy in August 1854, presents a compelling example of how the power of Christian influences operated on and was interpreted by one of the penitents. As the Bishop toured the penitentiary, Crosse was immediately impressed: "He is a fine and elegant man, very tall and good looking."<sup>58</sup> Crosse was not the only one, however, to be taken by the Bishop. Fanny, another of the original penitents at the House, was also deeply touched. In a letter to her relatives, she explained to them the power of being in the presence of a bishop for the first time: "I cannot describe my feelings when he and the clergyman past [sic] by

<sup>55</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 6.

<sup>56</sup> 4th Annual Report of the CPA, 1856.

<sup>57</sup> Crosse's diary, July 28 1854.

<sup>58</sup> Crosse's diary, August 1854. So impressed in fact was she, that she commented, "were I not here I do believe I would have wished to go with him to Natal."

me to go the Holy Communion Table - it brought those few words to my mind - 'how beautiful are the feet of those that bring good tidings.'<sup>59</sup> Although Fanny had endured trials during her time at the House, after three months in the penitentiary, she assured her family of her peace of mind: "I do hope that you will make yourself comfortable about me, as I am happy and comfortable in every way." Fanny's letter home is significant in a number of ways. Although she had written several such letters, and had received no reply, she wanted to share the effect of her encounter with the Bishop with her family. Her language suggests the extent to which Christianity operated in her life: she was familiar with its idiom, and she expressed herself in a Christian capacity. While the positive response of one penitent to a member of the clerical hierarchy cannot serve as evidence of general religiosity among the fallen at Shipmeadow, it does however, indicate that not all penitents responded negatively to the prominence of religion at the House.<sup>60</sup> Crosse was surely as impressed with Fanny's reaction to the Bishop as she was with the cleric himself. That she both read and copied from the letter in her diary reinforces the extent to which the forces of regulation existed alongside those of spirituality at the House.

While the experiences of penitents Sarah and Fanny bear witness to the personal impact of religious instruction at the House, no surer public sign of the presence of Christ could match that of the confirmation of the first group of penitents into the Church of England, in the presence of the Bishop of Norwich. To the sisters and their supporters, confirmation represented the

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<sup>59</sup> Fanny's letter was copied into Lavinia Crosse's diary, Sept. 1, 1854. Fanny's other letters, and those from other penitents were not kept in the CAH archives.

<sup>60</sup> Certainly the possibility exists that, knowing her letter would be read, Fanny deliberately chose to react positively to the Bishop in her correspondence as a way of ingratiating herself to her superiors. However, the argument that her letter was genuine must be considered as possible as well.

true transformation of the soul. Rev. George Hills, honorary Archdeacon of Norwich Cathedral, who presided over the confirmation, described it as "truly gratifying" and "consolatory" as he witnessed the five candidates received into the Church:

From the moment of entering the church till they left it, there was unvarying evidence of sincere devotion in their demeanour....While others were being confirmed they were occupied in private devotion, and appeared intelligently alive to those portions of the service in which they could take part....As far as external marks will permit us to judge, there was a real work of the Holy Ghost cleansing from the hearts of these poor wanderers the love and the power of sin.<sup>61</sup>

In a letter written to the sisters, Hills characterised the confirmed penitents within the discourses of fallenness. He took pains to point out the sincerity of these women's "religious principle" and "devotion," as evidenced by their conduct, scriptural knowledge, demeanour, and general appearance. These outward signs were interpreted as important signifiers of a reformed soul, and, in Hills' rhetoric, evidence of spiritual cleansing: these women had been purified, healed, and could now be embraced by society. No doubt existed in his mind as to the source of this healing power, as he thanked the sisters: "May every blessing continue to rest upon the Christian labours of those devoted women, whose self-denial, care, patience, love, and faith, have thus already found a reward in saving souls from death, and hiding the multitude of sins."<sup>62</sup>

Hills' testimony of the confirmation can be read any number of ways: it served as powerful propaganda for the work of the moral reform as carried out by the sisters. Whether the actual confirmation provides actual evidence of religious devotion among the fallen is less certain. What the event and its

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Scudamore, "An Account," 8. Hills was the incumbent at Great Yarmouth.

<sup>62</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 8-9.

representation do reveal, however, is the extent to which the identity of the Sisterhood was fashioned in relation to that of the penitents: significantly, these women's private moments of personal salvation - whether real or imagined - were publicly promoted in order to render the Sisterhood and its work viable. Thus, the confirmed "appeared intelligently alive," but it was the sisters' "self-denial, care, patience, love, and faith," according to Hills, which was responsible for the miracle.

Such constructed, detailed evidence of the spiritual aspects of reform provides invaluable glimpses into the work of the penitentiary during its formative period. Unfortunately, however, such glimpses are rare: Lavinia Crosse's diary, in which the intricate details of her work are so clearly elucidated, concludes with the formation of the Sisterhood at the end of 1855. While other Orders have retained case books containing records for each penitent, no such details exist at All Hallows.<sup>63</sup> Nor is the task of understanding the experiences of these women made any easier by the impersonal ways in which they are represented in the annual reports of the House of Mercy, and those of the Church Penitentiary Association (CPA), under whose guidelines the House was established. These annual reports provide little of the personal interaction between reformers and penitents. Instead personal struggles are replaced with statistical tables which tally each penitent's progress by various categories. Within this statistical discourse, the inmates of penitentiaries are stripped of their individuality, to be accounted for like goods received and distributed at a warehouse. Through these tables, the council members, to whom the reports were submitted, as well as the hundreds of subscribers who maintained an interest in the work, could

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<sup>63</sup> The Houses of Mercy at both Clewer and Wantage, for example, contain such records. For details, see Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls."

consume in a glance the progress of the institution.

The annual reports of both the CPA and the House of Mercy are instructive nevertheless as they illustrate the manner by which the progress of the penitents was measured, how some of the penitents responded to their rescue, and how the construction of identity was central to this process. Each CPA report presented a statistical analysis of the various penitentiaries operating under its purview. These tables displayed how many penitents the facility had in its care at the beginning of the year, the number of new cases over the course of the year, and the dispersion of who had left. Categories for dispersion included returned to friends, sent into service, and "returned to their evil courses."<sup>64</sup> At Shipmeadow, 11 had been in the house as of March 1855, 11 had been received, 1 was returned to friends, 3 were sent into service, and 1 was "likely returned to sin."<sup>65</sup> These reports emphasised All Hallows' identity as an institution rather than a sisterhood. As such, the spiritual aspects of the reform process do not figure prominently.<sup>66</sup> That the spiritual element of the institution should be downplayed in the annual reports in order to focus on the work testifies not only to the precarious position which the religious life occupied in Victorian society throughout the century, but also to the importance of representing these institutions in a functional rather than spiritual capacity.

Unlike the majority of the reports, the House of Mercy annual report for 1861 presented an account of the original penitents as individuals rather

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<sup>64</sup> CPA 4th Annual Report, 1856.

<sup>65</sup> CPA 4th Annual Report, 1856. By comparison at Wantage, there were 18 penitents as of March 1855, 10 were received during the year, 10 had left of their own accord, 5 went into service, and 3 were classed as "bad cases."

<sup>66</sup> The place of religion in the practices of the sisters' rescue work emerges clearly within correspondence, printed accounts, sermons, testimonials, and in the Community magazine, East and West. Moreover, the discourse of religion appears vividly in non-written sources such as the architecture and landscape of the penitentiary, and the cemetery.



than statistics. This unique report provided information on those women who, since the start of the work in 1855, had left or had been sent away prior to "recovery." Significantly, it illuminates how the Sisterhood manipulated discourses of fallenness to justify its programme even when rehabilitation had not been achieved. The inability of some penitents to be rehabilitated was attributed to their moral failings, character defects, or, in some cases, to mental deficiency. An early "failure" was attributed thus not to the Sisterhood, but to the penitent's disposition: "She was a very desperate character, who was found to have sought shelter in the House only to protect her from imprisonment."<sup>67</sup> Through such a depiction, the sisters were exonerated for this 'slip' since this "desperate character" lacked the true spirit of repentance. Yet such flaws did not necessarily lead "failed" penitents to a life of destitution; rather, most were reported to be "doing well." These records demonstrated to the penitentiary's supporters that even those classified as "failures" could become respectable members of society after even a brief stint under the sisters' watchful care.

According to the 1861 Report's catalogue of women dismissed from the House, the programme of reform met with mixed success as many penitents refused to be "*broken in*." In February 1855, one of the first penitents to be admitted was sent home due to her "sullen temper."<sup>68</sup> Although not given a recommendation for service, she subsequently found employment and was reported to be doing well. "C.D." was sent away a year later for "violent conduct;" however, the report noted that "[t]he effect was good; she soon

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<sup>67</sup> CPA 4th Annual Report 1856. Comment from Suckling, who was the Community's chaplain until 1856. Such individual comments were rare within CPA reports, although Suckling did make an attempt to explain "failures" in this manner.

<sup>68</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1861. 5. This may have been Rachel, who, as the previous chapter described, was often recorded as "sullen" in Lavinia Crosse's diary.

obtained a place in service and did well."<sup>69</sup> "L.M.'s" dismissal at the end of 1857 was due to "the absence of all serious feeling; so that no further benefit could be experienced from a longer stay, while she was hurting others with her constant levity."<sup>70</sup> "L.M." managed to secure work in a factory and later married. Even "R.S.," an "incorrigible liar," met with success in service. Along with these types of character "flaws" existed a problem of a different nature: the development of friendships. "N.O." was one such case, dismissed "in order to break up an intimacy dangerous to discipline." The Report explained that such friendships were not rare: "Others have been sent home because they have attached themselves in an undue and exclusive manner to one or two of the other inmates, and experience has shown that some friendships are injurious to the individual and to the general discipline of the House."<sup>71</sup> In a homosocial environment such as that of the penitentiary, close friendships between women would have been interpreted not only as detrimental to the work of reform, but also as potentially damaging to female morality.<sup>72</sup> Even these cases, however, were not lost as "N.O." was reported to be training as a nurse. Perhaps the greatest success among these 'failures' was "J.K.," deemed "unfit for service" but who upon release supported her sister, protecting her from their mother, whom, the Report explained, had abandoned them and had procured "J.K.'s" ruin.

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<sup>69</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1861. 5. Initials were used throughout these reports to protect the identity of the penitents.

<sup>70</sup> 7th Annual Report, 6.

<sup>71</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1861, p 4. Again, the rules which governed social dynamics among the sisters were extended to apply to the penitents.

<sup>72</sup> Although the language of the Report does not explicitly classify these friendships as anything other than platonic, at other rescue homes (with more detailed records), evidence of lesbian relationships among penitents does exist. See, for example, Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work," 75. Similar restrictions applied to relationships between sisters, see Lavinia Crosse's diary, in particular her reference to the "Rule of Life of the Great Saint Augustine" article LXXVII, which warned against the development of exclusive attachments.

As demonstrated by this detailed Report, the penitents reacted to the process of reform variously, from levity to lying.<sup>73</sup> Aware that disruptive behaviour could lead to dismissal, some intentionally broke the rules rather than be "broken in" by them. Their responses speak to the diversity of the women branded "fallen" and to their capacity, however restricted, to negotiate their reform.<sup>74</sup> Yet by utilising discourses of fallenness which emphasised the ambiguities within such women's character, the Community held up even these cases as successful. Even penitents who were told to leave were viewed positively, as in their case, the Report explained, "dismissal is the cure." Through such rhetoric, failures - penitents who left prior to their two-year term - were transformed into successes for the Sisterhood and the effects of even a short tenure at the House of Mercy were portrayed as beneficial. As the Report emphasised, the vast majority of these 'failures' established 'decent' lives beyond the penitentiary. They found steady employment, they married, they even protected those in danger: in short, they became "respectable." The 1861 Report's discursive construction of these women drew upon the paradoxes of Victorian identity: they were at once helpless and resourceful, feeble yet capable, failure and success. By stressing the ambiguous nature of these women, the Report not only legitimised rescue work, but also proved the Sisterhood's capacity to help even the most difficult cases.<sup>75</sup> Within this discourse, the House of Mercy could be

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<sup>73</sup> Mahood interprets these "failures" as acts of resistance, see *The Magdalenes*, 101.

<sup>74</sup> Other women lacked the strength to persevere as the health of newly-arrived penitents frequently was poor. Susan Mumm suggests that some may have sought shelter in penitentiaries in order to recover from illness, and may have been physically, rather than emotionally, diseased. That the death of penitents was not an infrequent occurrence certainly suggests that these women's health may have been poor when they arrived at the House. See Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 536.

<sup>75</sup> William Acton's assertion that prostitution was, for many women, a transitory state, contributed to the idea that those engaged in the trade could in fact be redeemed. See *Prostitution*. On Acton's general influence, see Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society*, 41-47.

effectively advertised as "a perpetual witness in a corrupt world for the divine law of chastity, and an effectual school of repentance for many who have sinned against it."<sup>76</sup>

"Successful" penitents, who completed the two-year programme of moral reform, were encouraged along the path of respectability. Many who promoted rescue work argued that domestic service provided an appropriate means of reintegrating these women as productive members of Victorian society.<sup>77</sup> As part of the training for their new identities as domestics, these women were taught how to serve in middle-class households.<sup>78</sup> Each penitent who completed the programme was given a referral for employment, a new suit of clothes, and, as further incentive, her own name was restored. In his account of the House published in 1857, Scudamore explained the symbolic relationship between old and new identities: "the resumption of their name appears in the light of a reward, and therefore acts, in some degree, as an incitement to press forward."<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, the sisters hoped that reformed penitents would enter the world of domesticity: service in middle-class homes was viewed as a path to a respectable married life.

As the sisters were well aware, however, not all penitents were well suited to a life of domestic duty and deference. Only a few of the early penitents had had any experience as servants. Scudamore attempted to account for potential problems of employment by again pointing to

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<sup>76</sup> 1861 Report of the House of Mercy, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Carter and Armstrong both recognised that going into service was the most "usual outlet" for these women, but were also well aware of the pitfalls that service might entail. Carter suggested that some women were "too mentally drained" for that type of work, while Armstrong worried about the problems associated once employers learned of penitents' pasts. For a discussion of the politics of domestic service, see Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink, and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London: Longman, 1999), Chapter Six.

<sup>78</sup> See Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls," 537. See also Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, 77.

<sup>79</sup> Scudamore, "An Account."

weaknesses in penitents' characters: "We often find some defect of memory or apprehension, which would detract much from their usefulness as servants, [such women] often labour under disadvantages which must prove a trial both to themselves and to their employers, and we cannot be surprised, if some fail."<sup>80</sup> Penitents were "tested" in one of the various works of the Sisterhood after their rehabilitation in order to gain experience and wages before leaving the sisters' care entirely. "By this plan," the *Community* magazine, *East and West* explained, "the sudden change is avoided from the close discipline of the Home to the freedom of the world."<sup>81</sup> The sisters recognised the potential dangers of domestic service for penitent women. As such, they encouraged their associate members to either take in these women themselves, or to recommend situations.<sup>82</sup> Just as the penitents' own homes might jeopardise restored morality, so too could those of future employers. Despite the unsuitable nature of this work for some women, and its inherent risks, domestic service was viewed as the logical application of the skills the penitents had developed while at the penitentiary. That this form of work was both socially acceptable and functional- despite being potentially dangerous - helped to ensure the House's continued public support.

The practices surrounding the transition from penitent at the House of Mercy to domestic servant effectively illustrates how regulation continued to shape the lives of the fallen after the completion of their formal rehabilitation. While many of these women did indeed enter service after leaving the House, only those who had completed the programme of reform were given recommendations by the sisters. Upon the assumption of a situation, former penitents remained unable to regulate their identities: new

<sup>80</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 15.

<sup>81</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1886.

<sup>82</sup> "The House of Mercy at Shipmeadow, near Beccles," (Oxford: JH & J Parker, 1857).

employers were informed of their disreputable background, although other servants in the house were not. "As yet, so far as we know, no evil has resulted from this necessary concealment," Scudamore pointed out. Testimonials from employers of former penitents served as a "brag book" by which the House promoted its work of moral reform. They also suggest how service was in some ways an extension of the regulatory practices of the House of Mercy: "I would not wish for a better servant than D," wrote one employer, while another commented that "E. is going on very nicely. She seems settled, and is trying to be more careful and tidy in her ways."<sup>83</sup> However, the relationship among the sisters, former penitents, and employers was not always geared solely toward the latter's satisfaction, as one employer's letter reveals: "I am well pleased with G. and she suits me very well. I am sorry you think she is not comfortable, as I should not like to part with her." These letters indicate not only that the sisters maintained a continued interest in the lives of their former charges, but, significantly, that "G" felt able to discuss her situation with the sisters. Although the sisters were no doubt compassionate toward former penitent's concerns, stable relationships with employers were not only encouraged but financially rewarded: women who remained at their situations for at least one year received one pound from the Community.

Ultimately, the sisters hoped that All Hallows' penitents would depart from the penitentiary not only as capable domestics, but also as devoted Christians. Such an achievement would be the crowning glory in the sisters' mission. "A.B." exemplified this success. A clergyman in whose service "A.B." was employed offered a glowing testimonial:

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<sup>83</sup> 7th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1861.

A. B. has conducted herself with the utmost propriety, and promises to be a most useful servant. She is very attentive to her religious duties, and I fully believe under the influence of sincere religious principle, which is especially observed in her conduct with regard to her fellow servants. She seems to possess a considerable knowledge of Scripture, for which she tells me she is indebted to the institution from which she came to us.<sup>84</sup>

Using sentiments similar to those of Rev. George Hills, "A.B.'s" devout employer highlighted the sisters' role in his employee's devoted spirit. Such was the success of some cases that employers frequently commented on the spiritual gulf that existed between former penitents and their other servants. While Scudamore noted that most Houses of Mercy attempted to conceal the former identity of penitents who went into service, he also acknowledged that the spiritual insignia of their reform could be difficult to conceal. Similarly, the chaplain at the Community of St. Mary the Virgin at Wantage recorded that some women "meet with some trouble at first on account of their more religious ways, e.g., saying their prayers night and morning and kneeling down when they pray, saying grace &c."<sup>85</sup> Apart from this display of religiosity, however, "there is generally no difficulty in avoiding the exposure." Ironically, by placing such an emphasis on spiritual devotion, sisterhood-based penitentiaries could manufacture such devout domestic servants that these women were subsequently forced to disguise their identities in terms of both their sin and their reform. In order not to reveal themselves as sinners, their subsequent redemption had to be concealed from fellow workers. The process of moral reform thus created a paradoxical relationship between the sinner and her salvation: rehabilitated women who became domestic servants were often forced to disguise their former identities

<sup>84</sup> Scudamore, "An Account," 6.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in [W. E. Scudamore] "A Proposal for the Establishment of a Female Penitentiary in Norfolk or Suffolk," (Norwich: Charles Muskett, 1853), 23.

as sinners within respectable employment, yet their salvation threatened to expose the very sin this salvation had redeemed.

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### **From Penitent to Sister: The Third Order**

Souls gathered in from the highways and hedges, the streets and lanes, to sit down at the King's table, in the garment of a new life, desire now to work in the power of the Cross that has saved them.

*East and West, 1886.*

For some penitents, the All Hallows' House of Mercy became more than a route to service, a temporary stop-over for the winter, or an path to respectability within marriage: it became their permanent home. The rehabilitation of these women did not lead to social reintegration, but rather the reverse; by remaining at the House, they minimised their social interaction. Their significance lies not, however, in their decision to stay at the penitentiary, but in the manner by which they did so: these women became members of the Sisterhood, constituting the Third Order: fallen women who became women religious. These women defy the rigid dichotomy between pure and polluted, virtuous and sinful, testifying to the complex operations of religion in women's lives.

While in theory, the idea of a prostitute becoming a nun is remarkable, within the context of female religious orders, such transformations were made possible.<sup>86</sup> The incorporation of former penitents into their own distinct order was not unusual among Anglican sisterhoods. The Community of St. Mary the Virgin, for example, at Wantage, established a

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<sup>86</sup> Roman Catholic orders also developed Magdalen orders composed of reformed penitents. These women were often referred to as consecrated penitents. See, Maria Luddy, "Prostitution and Rescue Work," 76 -77. Luddy notes that over 10,000 women were 'rescued' by Irish nuns in the nineteenth century, but does not indicate how many of these joined Magdalene orders.



daughter order in this capacity, known as the Servants of the Cross.<sup>87</sup> The emphasis which nineteenth-century gender ideology placed on women's innate spirituality and the power of Christian redemption combined within these institutions to allow for the radical reshaping of identity. As did all members of All Hallows, Third Order sisters shared the common belief that if a fallen woman could truly repent, why should she not join the Sisterhood? The experiences of the Third Orders sisters, and the ways in which they identified themselves as women religious were shaped fundamentally by their reclaimed virtue, their class and, perhaps most importantly to these women, by their commitment to a life dedicated to God and through him, to helping others. The manner in which these women were represented discursively by others, however, reveals that although the outward lives of these women was transformed by joining the Sisterhood, discourses of fallenness continued to shape and determine how they viewed themselves and how they were socially perceived. In such discourses, the religious aspects of their identity was undermined rather than underlined. Like other sisters and penitents, members of the Third Order were represented in terms of their social utility. Because the rehabilitation of these women did not lead to social integration but rather the reverse, identities were constructed for them which specifically emphasised their function to society. Their ambiguous identities testify to both the potential for change within Victorian gender ideology and to its limitations.

The first direct reference to the potential incorporation of penitents into the Community, in the 1860 Annual Report of the House of Mercy, highlighted the ambiguities in the ways these women's identities were crafted

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<sup>87</sup> Other Anglican sisterhoods, such as Clewer, also developed Magdalene orders around this time. See Mumm, "Not Worse than Other Girls" for an analysis of this development. Mumm does not deal with CAH.

publicly. Readers were informed of some problem cases, "aggravated by great weakness or morbid affectation of the mind," who were unfit for service and thus required prolonged care by the sisters.<sup>68</sup> The Report explained that

An institution is greatly needed in which those who, from this or other causes, are not able to maintain themselves by service, or other common means, might remain *for life*, not as a burden on public charity, but owing their support to their own united industry, though still under the control and care of devoted persons of their own sex. This would complete the machinery of Church Penitentiaries, and, with the blessing of God, ensure the safety of many poor women whom we now send forth into the world with as much fear as hope.<sup>69</sup>

The discursive representation of these women brims with the paradoxes of Victorian identity politics. They are crafted collectively as industrious, yet unable to function in the wider community; self-supporting, but in need of being controlled by others; pathetic, yet representative of the ultimate success of reform work. Their relationship to others is one of both dependence and independence: crucially their dependence is placed not on the public purse, but on the benevolence and devotion of the sisters. Although these women had undergone significant spiritual training, the Report positioned them as workers, rather than in terms of their religiosity. Such a characterisation provided an effective justification for the creation of the proposed institution, whereby "failure" was attributed to the fallen's own mental incapacities. The new institution was fashioned as a haven for these women, a "City of Refuge" safe from the cares and temptations of the world. It represented not a personal triumph for the reformed, but a triumph for the work of reform. Although the Third Order did not formally come into existence until several

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<sup>68</sup> 6th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1860.

<sup>69</sup> W. E. Scudamore, as cited in the 6th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1860. Original emphasis.

years later, the Sisterhood had considered the accommodation of repentant women on a permanent basis within five years of its commencement. The idea to incorporate these women reveals both the inadequacies of rescue work in preparing women for reentry into society and the inability of society to cater to women whose reputation had been tainted. It may also, however, suggest a desire among certain women for the religious life.

Fanny Crisp was one of the first women to join the Third Order. The records of her involvement with All Hallows are sparse, but as early as 1866, her name appears in the Annual Report as a subscriber to the House's building fund.<sup>90</sup> At some point prior to 1871, Crisp arrived at the House of Mercy as a penitent.<sup>91</sup> By the time of her death, on October 5, 1872, shortly before her twenty-sixth birthday, she had become a member of the Third Order: a fallen woman transformed into a woman religious.<sup>92</sup> Too often Victorian identity is viewed as rigid and stagnant. Fanny Crisp's existence, and that of those who joined her as Third Order sisters, however, suggests not only the subversive, negotiable, and dynamic nature of identity, but also the extent to which women could utilise faith to perform radical self-transformations.<sup>93</sup>

Moral reformers crafted discursive identities for penitents based upon observations, statistics and ideas they believed would generate the most support for their cause. In doing so, they suggested that some fallen women were victims, that most willingly sought refuge in penitentiaries, and that

<sup>90</sup> The first reference to Crisp appears in the House of Mercy annual report for 1866 where she is listed as a subscriber to the House. She gave 5 s. In 1871, Mr. Read Crisp donated £2, 2s.

<sup>91</sup> 1871 Census, NRO. Crisp is listed as a sister of mercy. She was a probationer of the Third Order. Profession roll, CAH archives.

<sup>92</sup> Fanny Crisp was born Nov 1, 1845 in Southwold, Suffolk. She died on October 5, 1872. Ditchingham Parish records, Norfolk Record Office, MF 721.

<sup>93</sup> See Eileen Yeo's introduction to *Radical Femininity*, on the transformative powers of faith in women's lives. Barbara Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism and Fantasy," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995).

some, as a result of their repentance, found God. The discursive techniques they utilised to explain why some penitents might remain at the House should not, however, blind us to the notion that some penitents might actually undergo a spiritual awakening. Feminist scholars, in their desire to give agency to fallen women, challenge the identification of such women as victims, and while some do acknowledge, in light of evidence, that women did voluntarily seek admission into houses of refuge, often as a temporary shelter for the winter, the idea that some penitents actually craved Christian compassion and repentance is yet to be explored.<sup>94</sup> The challenge of understanding the diverse elements that shaped women's lives is always a significant one. Among these elements, the complex operations of religion in women's lives must also be considered, including those women whose virtue had been 'lost' and who were subjected to a process of moral reform.<sup>95</sup>

Occupying a liminal space between penitent and sister, Third Order sisters cannot neatly be categorised as either; rather, the ambiguous nature of their identities and their experiences must be understood in relation to other members of the Sisterhood as well as to other penitents. Collectively, two features of the Third Order sisters stand out as distinctive from other members of the Community; due to the nature of the sources, both are statistically derived.<sup>96</sup> First, as a group, these sisters devoted a longer period of service to the Sisterhood than the other sisters: of the eight Third Order sisters for whom data is available, six were members of All Hallows for over

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, the above accounts by Walkowitz, Mahood, and Mumm.

<sup>95</sup> On the significance of such a consideration, see Sue Morgan, *Faith, Sex and Purity: the religious-feminist theory of Ellice Hopkins* *Women's History Review*, 9: 1 (2000); and Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft*.

<sup>96</sup> Evidence regarding Third Order sisters was obtained primarily from census records and the Community profession role.

fifty years.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, none of these eight left the Community. This figure is especially telling considering that ten of the first fifty-four choir and lay sisters departed after profession. Despite the commitment of these Third Order sisters and their vital place within the Sisterhood, their presence in Community records is tenuous. As such, it is difficult to ascertain precisely what motivated them to become sisters and to remain in the Order. While the possibility exists that these women remained because they felt they had no where else to go, or out of a sense of obligation, they may in fact have been attracted to the "strong female subculture" at the Sisterhood, which, historian Judith Walkowitz points out, characterised nineteenth-century prostitution.<sup>98</sup> The Community of All Hallows formed a distinct female subculture, and within it, Third Order sisters occupied a sharply-defined place determined as much by their sin as their redemption.

Rachel Faith was another original member of the Third Order. She joined the Community in 1870 and died in 1936 after 66 years as a sister.<sup>99</sup> Although she must have had a most interesting life, the Community's archives record nothing of it. Some women may have joined the Third Order after a period of service in one of the Sisterhood's various houses, as penitents were often used as domestics for the Community. Jemima Porter illustrates the transformation from penitent to servant to Third Order sister.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> See CAH profession role. Although ten Third Order sisters are listed, dates are given for only eight.

<sup>98</sup> Walkowitz, Prostitution in Victorian Society, 25 -28. See also, Angus McLaren, A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> CAH Archives. There is no record of Rachel in either the 1871 or 1881 censuses, or of her initial entry to the penitentiary.

<sup>100</sup> CAH Archives, Sisterlist; Census records, 1881, 1891, NRO. Phyllis Green provides yet another example. The 1881 census records Green, age 20, as a parlourmaid in the House of Mercy. In 1891, she is listed as cook at the House of Mercy working alongside Jemima Porter. Jemima Faith is listed as a member of the Third Order but there is no profession date listed in Community records. Both women hailed from Essex. Although only an assumption, it is possible that these women came to All Hallows together and had known each other prior to their arrival.

The first mention of Porter occurs in the census for 1881, where she is listed as a domestic servant, aged 25. A decade later, she appears as a laundress in the House of Mercy. Her transformation was complete in 1897 when she joined the Community as a Novice in the Third Order, testifying to her original status as a penitent. Due to the nature of the sources which record Porter's movement within the Community, the nature and extent of her spirituality remain a mystery. Yet such transitions should not be considered purely pragmatic. A letter from an unnamed penitent in service at the All Hallows Hospital in Ditchingham to another at the House of Mercy, written on the occasion of the death of the Superior, Lavinia Crosse, provides the clearest example of the ways in which these women viewed the spiritual dimension of their transformation:

My dearest Lucy...myself I think it is not only for the Sisters and Third Orders to feel her death, but also us girls; in a way she was more truly a Mother to us than to the Sisters. You will know what I mean if you just think what she has saved us from....You cannot think how I long for the time to come when I shall have the great privilege of making a vow that will help me to be like our dear Mother Superior.<sup>101</sup>

Significantly, this letter reveals that the penitents differentiated between Third Order sisters and the other sisters. Although published by *East & West* to demonstrate the loyalty of penitents toward the Community, this penitent's letter exposes a spirit of repentance and dedication. Additionally, it suggests the importance of religious vows in symbolising the transition from the penitent's former identity to that which might emulate Lavinia Crosse. The maternal relationship which the Superior established with the penitents in her charge appears to have shaped their identities in ways both material

<sup>101</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1890. Lavinia Crosse died of cancer and a number of other ailments after a protracted illness in June, 1890. See her obituary in the Guardian, July 2, 1890.

and symbolic.

As described in the previous chapter, the Community of All Hallows was based on a clearly-defined social and spiritual hierarchy of choir and lay sisters, as well as an enclosed order, the Companions. Within this hierarchy, Third Order sisters could never attain parity with the other sisters. The manner in which they were listed in the Community profession roll signifies the extent of their difference within the Sisterhood.<sup>102</sup> Unlike the choir and lay sisters, who were listed chronologically according to date of profession, the sisters of the Third Order were grouped together at the end of the roll. They were identified only by their names as women religious. Of the ten sisters listed, only two have recorded birth dates.<sup>103</sup> Although the year in which they became novices was recorded, there is no record of any profession ceremonies, suggesting perhaps that, although these sisters did profess vows, they were not fully professed. Their identity within the order was fashioned through a mixture of material and spiritual markers which served as constant reminders of their once-fallen state. Collectively, the name Third Order reinforced that these women were of a different, inferior kind, while individually, they were distinguished from the other sisters by the addition of the word "Faith" to their baptismal names, for example, Rachel Faith. Like the Companions and lay sisters, Third Order sisters were further differentiated by dress and prayer life. The Community historian remembers them warmly: "They were a sturdy group of women....in their brown habits, black aprons, heads covered with white goffered bonnets. They were the salt of the earth."<sup>104</sup> These sisters' characterisation as simple was reflected in their

<sup>102</sup> The profession roll is a list of all members of the Community who were professed as sisters. Profession refers to the taking of religious vows.

<sup>103</sup> CAH Archives, Profession Roll.

<sup>104</sup> Sister Violet, *All Hallows: Ditchingham. The Story of an East Anglian Community* (Oxford: Becket Publications, 1983), 16.

prayer life, structured as it was by a "very simple devotional rule under the guidance of a choir Sister."<sup>105</sup>

Despite the commitment of these women and their vital place within the Sisterhood, the Community continued to fashion their identities ambiguously, as illustrated by the 25th Annual Report of the House of Mercy in 1879. Their portrayal here is significant not only for what it reveals about the lives of these women, but also about the relationship between Third Order sisters and the rest of the Community. The report referred to "a somewhat anxious problem to which the very success of the work has given rise...Among the most satisfactory of the Penitents there will always be some who shrink from a return to the world, and have set their heart on remaining in retirement under the sisters."<sup>106</sup> Their devotion is crafted as "a problem" resulting from the success of the work. As they were in 1860, potential Third Order members are positioned as dependent on the sisters, cautious toward the outside world, and in need of continued care. Significantly, however, in the 1879 Report, these women have assumed a new relevance to the Community:

They cannot of course be supported by the Institution as Penitents, but they may be invaluable as workers in connection with the Sisterhood, and above all as bright examples to those still under training. We cannot drive them away, longing as they do to devote their life, in the love of Him Who had cleansed them, to 'works meet for repentance;' nor is it right to leave unused so great an instrument of good to others thus offered to our hand. Five of this advanced class are already in full work under our care.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike their representation in the earlier Report, this depiction reveals that

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<sup>105</sup> Sister Violet, 16

<sup>106</sup> 25th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1879.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, See also East and West, Easter 1886.



these women's incorporation into the Community derived from a combination of their devotion and their utility to the work of reform. Gone is the association of these women as weak minded or feeble. Rather, their capacity to serve as "bright examples" to other penitents, and to provide "an instrument of good to others," served as a justification for their continued care by the sisters, and thus the public.

The labour performed by Third Order sisters was vital to the Sisterhood. By 1879 the Community comprised approximately twenty-four professed choir and lay sisters and the demands of the penitents, pupils, patients, and probationers created an environment of perpetual work. Moreover, the existence of the enclosed order of praying sisters intensified the labour of other sisters. As such, rather than merely accepting former penitents for life, it is possible that the Sisterhood actually encouraged these women to remain as devoted workers. Their identity as sisters, however, was disguised in the House of Mercy Annual Reports: even though reformed penitents had been part of the Community for nearly twenty years by this date, and several had been professed as novices, no mention of their status as women religious was made, rather, they are pupils - an "advanced class." Instead of being praised by others for their spiritual redemption, Third Order sisters, were, like the other sisters at All Hallows and the redeemed who entered domestic service, represented primarily in terms of their function to society. Significantly, however, in the language of the 1879 Report, their social utility derived expressly and exclusively from their association with the Sisterhood: unable to function in wider society, these penitents were again "rescued" by the Sisterhood, which enabled them to serve as "invaluable workers" and thus earn a measure of public sanction.

Understandably, penitent orders at Anglican Sisterhoods attracted attention from the public. The January 1886 issue of *Seeking and Saving*, a magazine devoted to Christian mission work, ran a lengthy article devoted to one of these, the Servants of the Cross, the penitent order of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin.<sup>108</sup> The article, entitled "The Dedication of Penitents as a Religious Order," attempted to present this unusual group of women to the public, and in so doing, to craft an identity for these women which positioned them in relation to their sin and their redemption. The piece illustrated how both spiritual matters and concerns about propriety figured prominently in the incorporation of former penitents into a religious order, and in the construction of an identity for these women. Justified by the Biblical precedence of the Blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalen living together with St. John after the Ascension at Ephesus, "the union of the penitent and the saint" was applauded by the writer.<sup>109</sup> Yet, as the article explained, the relationship between these two types of women was complex: the "penitential order" was "not merely raised penitents or Magdalens, but actual sisters," functioning "as an actual and substantive part of the community." However, although such women could become "actual sisters," in no way were they to be considered - or to consider themselves - "the same:"

Nothing would be more fatal, especially in an age of ever-increasing moral laxity, than the adoption of any plan which would tend in the remotest degree to obliterate, or shade off, the distinction between fallen and unfallen womanhood, to draw down from its high and unique preeminence the grace of chastity, or to rob of any of its lustre the special glory of the

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<sup>108</sup> *Seeking and Saving: a monthly journal of home mission and penitentiary work*, no 3, (January 1886) "The Dedication of Penitents as a Religious Order." See also the *Saturday Review*, Mar 21, 1885, for a similar discussion of a penitent order at another religious order.

<sup>109</sup> The magazine appealed to this Biblical precedence in order to help legitimate the existence of this order of penitent sisters. The writer of the piece remained anonymous.

virgin life.<sup>110</sup>

Rather than serving to blur distinctions between the "virtuous" and the "fallen" in Anglican sisterhoods, *Seeking and Saving* attempted to shore up the sexual differences between these two categories of women by highlighting "the special glory" of virginity. Although technically "sisters," women of penitent orders were in fact intermediaries situated both actually and discursively between the polarities of virginity and sexual stain.

In the absence of details of the Third Order at All Hallows, the *Seeking and Saving* article not only depicts how such groups of women were characterised publicly, but also sheds lights on how their lives were structured. In contrast to the motivations attributed to Third Order by the All Hallows' House of Mercy Annual Reports, the article emphasised the spiritual dimension of Servants of the Cross sisters' commitments. The author explained that while some penitents did remain at the Sisterhood as workers, others "wish a deeper dedication... they yearn for a more perfect form of self-devotion." In the process of achieving this "more perfect form" these women underwent the same initiation as other sisters, entering a period of novitiate, followed by a profession service. After three years, vows were renewed, and after an additional three years, life vows were professed. Spiritual commitment, however, could not be rushed, and drawing upon contemporary beliefs regarding moral virtue and devotion to God, the article noted that "Bearing in mind the material on which we have to work, we have the greatest need to be aware of superinducing upon an imperfect or immature spiritual condition an artificial religiousness." Thus, discourses of fallenness which stressed the undeveloped spirituality of the fallen also

<sup>110</sup> *Seeking and Saving*, Jan 1886. See Maria Luddy for a discussion of the construction of identities of penitent women in Irish convents, "Prostitution and Rescue Work," 76.

shaped ideas concerning the rules governing these sisters. As with "regular" sisters, the identity of these women was structured by a series of professions, vows, and rules in which their dedication to Christ and to the Sisterhood was reinforced.<sup>111</sup> However, due to assumptions based on their identities as "fallen," the religious lives of these sisters could never be equal to those of their spiritual "superiors:" identity was reinforced in a Community hierarchy according to virtue.

As at All Hallows, the identity of this group was also fashioned by their collective title, or name, the "Servants of the Cross," which was, the author noted, "expressive rather of the present devotion of the life than of its past degradation."<sup>112</sup> The work of these sisters was similarly designed to enable them to forget the past. While their experiences as penitents was certainly considered useful in the work of rehabilitation, such work formed only a part of the labours of these sisters as "the continual representation of the past degraded life is most depressing, and tends to clog and hinder, rather than inspire, the efforts of the present." These sisters resided in and operated Holy Cross House, a home for incurable women and children. In their names and their occupations "they are separated from any direct association with the memories of their former lives." Thus, the complex identities of these sisters rested on a blend of the old and the new, of the sinner and the would-be saint, of remembering and forgetting. Their names, rules, occupations, and positions within the Sisterhood were designed to stamp these women as unique, to differentiate them from penitents and sisters alike. The construction of their paradoxical identities speaks to the fusion of the conservative and the radical within Victorian monasticism: through their

<sup>111</sup> For the function of the profession service and the taking of vows in the shaping of nuns' identities, see Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, Chapter One.

<sup>112</sup> *Seeking and Saving*, January, 1886.

involvement in charitable enterprise, these women created highly-unorthodox religious identities which just like those of the sisters, were ultimately deemed socially acceptable.

At All Hallows, further clues into the lives of the Third Order are revealed most graphically in the bricks and mortar of their own residence. Also named Holy Cross House and completed in 1887, this building provides invaluable insights into the nature of these sisters' place within the Sisterhood. Prior to his death in 1881, Scudamore had drawn up the plans for a residence to house the Third Order, and Holy Cross House was constructed from the proceeds of a Scudamore memorial fund.<sup>113</sup> Donations to the fund were immediately popular. Fittingly, Rev. Thomas Carter, who had attended at the formation of the original Community in 1855, was on hand for the formal dedication of Holy Cross House in September 1887.<sup>114</sup> In his address to the assembled guests, the Community's new Warden referred to the Home's residents, now known, significantly, as the Order of the Repentance, as "these grown-up children of ours...[who] have much to contend against; though greatly sheltered from temptations from without, there is no hindering those from within."<sup>115</sup> The Warden's characterisation of these women, their collective identity as the Order of the Repentance, together with the creation of a separate and distinct residence for the Third Order sisters, speak to the ways in which these reclaimed penitents were positioned within All Hallows. They remained "grown-up children" but not adults, defined collectively by their former sin. Although Holy Cross House gave them a place of their own, in so doing, it isolated them from the other sisters. A few years later, their

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<sup>113</sup> See East and West, Easter 1886, and 27th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1881. The CPA also approved of the proposed building plans.

<sup>114</sup> 34th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1888; East and West, All Saints, 1887.

<sup>115</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1887. The new Warden was the Reverend Mr. Congreve.

ambiguous position within the Community was reinforced during the ceremonies for Mother Lavinia's death: in the processional they walked behind the sisters and the associates, and in front of the orphanage children and the penitents.<sup>116</sup> Not until 1917 did the Community attempt to reassess the status of these women formally in its Chapter meeting. Chapter minutes record that the purpose of the discussion was to "prove that the Third Order held a distinct position as "The Third Order of the Community," according to Mother Lavinia's original teaching. That they were not "outsiders", or simply "Consecrated Penitents", as had sometimes been wrongly considered."<sup>117</sup> The Community Warden "objected strongly" to the name "Order of Repentance," which, he exclaimed, "brings with it a stigma."

Today, Holy Cross House functions as the guest wing of the convent. The rooms are narrow and sparsely furnished, much like those belonging to the other sisters.<sup>118</sup> Each, however, is bright, airy, and offers its occupant a private space for relaxation and contemplation. Perhaps as much as anything else in their lives, these private rooms, in sharp contrast to the dark dormitories equipped with spyholes which housed the penitents, enabled the Third Order sisters to create a sense of self not defined by the tangles of sin. Perhaps, in their private rooms they discovered ways of defining themselves purely in terms of their relationship with God. In her analysis of the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Barbara Taylor comments on how "Women's existence as self-acknowledged moral subjects...is dependent on their unmediated relationship to God, a relationship founded on the human

<sup>116</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1890.

<sup>117</sup> CAH Archives, Chapter Book, October 31, 1917. In April 1919 the Third Order was again discussed, as its members called for a series of changes to their position within the Sisterhood, such as the form of their dress, and requested that the title "Sister" be added to their names. See Chapter Book, April 1919.

<sup>118</sup> I was accommodated in one of these rooms while researching at CAH.

capacity for identification with the ideal."<sup>119</sup> Although the spiritual and social politics of the Sisterhood did not enable their "fallen" sisters to escape their pasts, in allowing these women the privacy and the space to develop their faith, All Hallows offered them an opportunity to gain a greater degree of self awareness. Sue Morgan, who examines the "religio-feminist theory" of purity crusader Ellice Hopkins, points to the unconventionality of female piety and its application to women's lives: "Through greater attention to the social, symbolic and ideological functions of religion, it is possible to rehabilitate the discourses and activism of a seemingly conservative group of reactionary Christian women and reveal their surprisingly radical, unorthodox constructions of sexuality and gender."<sup>120</sup> At All Hallows, within discourses of fallenness and moral reform which fashioned their identities and regulated their lives, a small group of women performed stunning acts of self-transformation. Not only did their retreat from society - from the street to the convent - actually enable Third Order sisters to become productive members of society, but they utilised the emphasis placed on female virtue as a means of developing meaningful spiritual identities. The ability of these women to negotiate the oppositional aspects of their lives, and to derive meaning with them, testifies to the redemptive power of faith within nineteenth-century monastic culture.

Due to the nature of Christian spirituality in Victorian England, the relationship between the Anglican sisters at the House of Mercy and the penitents in their charge was symbiotic. As Scudamore explained at the opening of the House of Mercy in 1859, "the saint most full of love still needs

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<sup>119</sup> Taylor, "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy", 109.

<sup>120</sup> Sue Morgan, "Faith, Sex and Purity: the religio-feminist theory of Ellice Hopkins," Women's History Review 9: 1 (2000), 28.

repentance, while true repentance cannot subsist without love."<sup>121</sup> This dynamic fundamentally affected the development of the Community of All Hallows and the nature of how its identity was fashioned. Religion figured prominently in the processes of reform of the House, and in the lives of both sisters and penitents. However, because sisters earned social legitimacy primarily through their identity as workers - not as devotees of Christ - the religious character of both the rehabilitation programme at the House of Mercy and the penitents themselves was, to a large degree, publicly sublimated under a functional identity. Such was the extent of the social emphasis on the function of women within monastic culture, that even the most pious of penitents were positioned primarily as workers. The relationship between sisters and penitents, including those who became sisters in their own right, was also structured by dynamics of power. Due to the vast inequalities of power which existed between these groups of women, it is often difficult to discern how penitent women at the House were able to exercise any control over their lives. Religion, however, may have enabled them, as it enabled the sisters, to create radical identities such as the devout domestic and the Third Order sister, wherein, despite the limitations of their sphere, they achieved some measure of self-determination. The paradoxes within these identities demonstrate the mutability of the ways in which Victorian identities were both constructed and experienced - even in the context of the apparently stark contrast between nuns and prostitutes.

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<sup>121</sup> Scudamore, "She Hath Done What She Could," 18 -19.



## Epilogue: A new frontier

By examining the development of All Hallows over a twenty-five year period, this analysis sheds light on the ways in which Anglican sisters created and performed a variety of monastic identities. It also reveals how one Community prospered during the nineteenth century in terms of work and prayer. Although the recruitment of new sisters originally was slow, as these institutions gradually became important within Victorian society, and as they shed their reputation as Roman Catholic in all but name, they gained public and ecclesiastical acceptance.<sup>122</sup> At All Hallows, the establishment of an internal hierarchy both mirrored the culture of nineteenth-century society and provided an alternative to it, enabling various classes of women - even those who had "fallen" - to create and develop spiritual identities within monastic culture. Such paradoxes defined identity within Anglican sisterhoods as prominently as they shaped that of Victorian identity politics more broadly. The means by which the women of All Hallows, both sisters and redeemed penitents, utilised the imperative on moral reform to procure imaginative individual and institutional transformations testifies to how monasticism shaped identity in both conventional and highly unorthodox ways.

As these chapters have demonstrated, the Community of All Hallows owed its legitimacy and to a large extent its success, on the sin, redemption, and labour of "fallen women" whose lives the sisters controlled: without the "tainted" and the moral imperative to rescue these women, the religious life at this Order could not have developed as it did. By the time of her death in

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<sup>122</sup> Refer to the Church Congresses and Convocations for clerical debates about the nature of sisterhoods later in the century. As will be explored in the Conclusion, the Church of England officially recognised these institutions in 1891.

1890, Lavinia Crosse controlled a sizable enterprise, which, as the following chapters will explore, extended across the Atlantic. She had transformed a tiny penitentiary staffed by female volunteers under the direction of a group of well-intentioned men into a thriving religious order controlled by women. Her ability to do so - based on personal faith, determination, and the regulation of other women - speaks to the ambiguous relationship between faith and feminism within monasticism and to the negotiable nature of identity politics in Victorian culture.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Community's expansion assumed a bold new direction. As few penitents actually joined the Sisterhood as members of the Third Order, and amid growing concerns about the moral dangers of industrial England, the sisters hoped that some penitents could achieve a "fresh start" in life through emigration. The earliest reports of the CPA had discussed the merits of such a scheme, listing potential destinations as Australia, Cape Town, and "the North American colonies."<sup>123</sup> Such powerful rhetoric ensured that the emigration fund of the CPA was consistently popular. Not until the 1880s, however, did emigration become a viable option for "successful" penitents at the All Hallows' House of Mercy. "S.S.," the first of these, departed for Manitoba, Canada in 1884 after spending a year at the Community's farm in Ditchingham, on a government-assisted emigration scheme.<sup>124</sup> The sisters were pleased to report a few years later that although "'S.S.' had a wicked mother who taught her her wickedness" now she was doing well as a housemaid in Canada and writes "loving, grateful letters."<sup>125</sup> The sisters embraced the opportunity for their departing penitents to emigrate, especially to Canada. House of Mercy annual

<sup>123</sup> 1st Report of the CPA, 1853.

<sup>124</sup> 30th Annual Report, 1884. Her passage cost £3.

<sup>125</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1890. See also All Saints, 1886.

reports proudly presented letters from Canadian employers documenting these women's progress.<sup>126</sup>

If emigration to Canada offered a seemingly practical solution to the potential pitfalls of late-Victorian society, discursively this option was packed with promise. In 1885, *Seeking and Saving*, concerned with the potential dangers which faced fallen women upon the completion of their reform, provided its readers with "A few practical hints on emigration":

A few days' journey from our shores is a colony willing and anxious to receive these, our young "waifs and strays," with open arms, offering them adoption, education, food, clothes, love and care, and an honest and respectable future, if we will but send them young enough to grow up as children in their new homes, knowing no others save as a bad dream soon to be forgotten. I am speaking of Canada.<sup>127</sup>

Even "older girls," the magazine declared, would find "the kindest treatment, high wages, a beautiful and healthy country, and a far better chance of settling in life ultimately." Canada's "open arms," beauty, kindness, and promises of "adoption" and a "respectable future" represented the antithesis of mothers who had, it was claimed, so often led their unwitting daughters into sin. As such, the discourse of fallenness and philanthropy became linked to that of Empire to provide a powerful example of the ability of sisterhood-based houses of mercy to restore and renew.

For the Community of All Hallows, Canada provided not only a new home for the rescued, but also a new field of labour in the work of reform. In the same year that "S.S." arrived in Manitoba, three sisters left Ditchingham for the British Columbia interior.<sup>128</sup> Imbued with ideologies of moral

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<sup>126</sup> See, for example, the 34th Annual Report of the House of Mercy, 1888.

<sup>127</sup> *Seeking and Saving*, New quarterly series, no 1 (July 1885).

<sup>128</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the sisters accompanied "S.S." to Canada.

rehabilitation, these sisters established an Indian residential school and engaged in missionary work among Native peoples of the region. As it did for the rescued penitents who left England, Canada represented a new horizon for the sisters and their work. Yet, just as the lives of penitent emigrés were fundamentally shaped by their pasts, so too were the sisters'. The following chapters investigate how these sisters negotiated their identities as English women religious against the cultural imperatives, racial politics, and physical demands of the Canadian wilderness.

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## CHAPTER SIX Civilised Pioneers: Anglican Sisters, Colonial Culture and the Creation of the All Hallows' School at Yale, British Columbia

Our work is the separation of the fallen from their opportunities for sin which has now extended to the red Indians of British North America.<sup>1</sup>

*East & West, 1886.*

Highway 4, running inland from Vancouver along the Fraser River and into the Cascade Mountains, passes through some spectacular scenery. As it rises north of Hope, the road winds its way between dramatic mountain faces and the rushing water down below. About 100 miles from the coast, you arrive in Yale, a small community that once was home to the headquarters of the Canadian Pacific Railway, miners of the gold rush, and a highly-regarded residential school run by the Church of England. Although the town once bustled with railroad men and anxious prospectors, it is today a shadow of its former self. Yet there remains something majestic about Yale: the sweep of the mountains, the roar of the rapids, the overwhelming sense of the power of the land. Just as you approach the town, a sign on your right indicates "The All Hallows Trailer Park." At the end of the steep road into the park lies an array of trailers, neatly laid out as its own community. The park is nestled in a curve of the river, about 3/4 miles from the old C.P.R. station, long since fallen into disrepair. In contemporary discourse, the term "trailer park" is associated with stereotypes of "white trash." One hundred years ago, the racism associated with this site had a different hue. During this period, the plot of land at the bend in the river was occupied by a different sort of community, one which embodied its own set of assumptions about race, class, and gender: the "All Hallows' School for Canadian and Indian Girls"

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<sup>1</sup> East and West, Volume One, Easter 1886.

operated by an order of Anglican sisters from England.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1884 and 1920, a group of sisters of the Community of All Hallows based in Norfolk, England participated in the civilising mission of empire at Yale, British Columbia.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the school they established for Native girls, the sisters engaged in mission work to the Interior Salish throughout the Fraser Valley.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, the original intention of the party dispatched to the interior of British Columbia in 1884 was an extension of the Sisterhood's objective in England to inculcate within their charges the principles of Christian thought and morality. Certainly, it was in this context that the sisters viewed their obligations, as set out in the Community magazine's 1886 inaugural issue: "our work is the separation of the fallen from their opportunities for sin which has now extended to the red Indians of British North America."<sup>5</sup> For the sisters, the education of girls was part of a more complete program of spiritual instruction among Native society as a

<sup>2</sup> This was the official title of the school after 1887 when white girls formed a sizable component of the school's pupils. Their contribution to the school and their impact upon it will be analysed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>3</sup> On British women's contribution to the foreign missionary enterprise, see, for example, Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, eds. *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> A note on terminology: I use the term "Native" to refer to actual indigenous peoples of British Columbia. The term "Indian," which was used by the sisters, the clergy, and other non-Native peoples during the nineteenth century, will be used when referring to discursive representations of these people. In this usage, I follow the usage of historian Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992). The sisters worked primarily with the Interior Salish, an ethnic group which contained four linguistic sub-groups: Thompson, Lillooet, Shuswap, and Okanagan. See Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* revised edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 14. The sisters worked with the first three of these sub-groups. I will refer to these sub-groups individually, and to the Interior Salish collectively when linguistic distinctions are not discernible in the sources. The sisters referred to these people as "our Indians."

<sup>5</sup> *East and West*. Easter 1886.

whole. According to the sisters' chaplain, the scope of the mission was indeed wide: "there is so much before us in the work among the Red Indians, to be the means of raising them and helping to undo what has been done in the past."<sup>6</sup> Culturally, the sisters hoped to imbue the values and moral principles of English middle-class society, specifically those expounded by Victorian domestic ideology, among the Interior Salish.<sup>7</sup> Intellectually, their goal was to raise up Native girls, and their families, from a state of ignorance, by providing a thorough academic education. Their primary aim, however, as it was at the Norfolk House of Mercy, was to impart the doctrines of Christianity: it was from this fundamental principle that all other aspects of their work emanated.<sup>8</sup> Thus, into this most natural of settings - the British Columbia interior - the sisters attempted to impose a thoroughly artificial structure of social relations.

An analysis of Anglican sisters within the context of late nineteenth-century British imperialism brings yet another perspective to the ways in which their identities were constructed and experienced. Specifically, it enables a consideration of how these identities were shaped by Victorian racial ideologies and by the complex relationship among the sisters, the Native people of the Fraser Valley, and the Canadian landscape. In British Columbia, the sisters' identities and their relationships with Native

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<sup>6</sup> East and West, Easter 1887.

<sup>7</sup> On the tenets of Victorian domestic ideology, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (New York: Routledge, 1988), Part III, on the operations of gender and power in the colonial context.

<sup>8</sup> East and West makes frequent references to the centrality of religion to all the sisterhood's missions.

Canadians were based primarily on their status as 'white' women.<sup>9</sup> In a society in which power was determined on the basis of skin colour, their whiteness accorded them privileged status over the Native population and served as a passport to legitimise their educational and proselytising efforts. The sisters' membership and acceptance as part of the privileged "white community" of British Columbia stood in stark contrast to their cultural marginalisation in Britain where these women were often positioned by their detractors as "unEnglish," as a threat to "true English womanhood" and as defiant of the "true" Church of England.<sup>10</sup> Socially, culturally, and often spiritually, they were deemed outsiders.<sup>11</sup>

While in Britain Anglican sisters had to struggle to gain acceptance on the basis of their religious, national, and gender-based identities, paradoxically, in Canada, these same aspects of their identity made them a welcome addition to the colonial scene. The responses of the Church in particular expose the degree to which the identity of Anglican sisterhoods was repositioned in the colonial context: in Britain the Church often viewed sisters as undermining its social position, in British Columbia, the Church relied heavily on sisters to support it. The All Hallows sisters' marginal identity within British culture affected their newfound identity as imperial

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<sup>9</sup> Significantly, however, one of these women, Sister Amy, may not have been "white." She is referred to as a "Maltese Princess" by the Community historian. Photographs of Sister Amy do not confirm her ethnicity. Regardless of her ethnic origins, she was afforded the status "white" by Native and White societies in BC. On the role of gender in early BC history, see Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). Susan Thorne examines the gendered nature of the missionary enterprise in "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in Huber and Lutkehaus, eds. Gendered Missions. See also Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (London: Routledge, 1995); and Ruth Compton Brouwer, New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions 1876-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See the discussions in Chapters One and Three.

<sup>11</sup> Although by the 1880s the work of Anglican sisters was becoming more accepted in Britain, the lifestyle of these women remained a source of popular derision.



agents in the Canadian West. Their status in Britain had fostered a sense of independence and defiance among these women: they had forced the all-male committee which originally governed the Community to relinquish control, and had operated for years without episcopal sanction.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the conditions of their lives in England form an essential context in which to understand their experiences at Yale. Their previous status as 'outsiders' shaped the performance of their colonial identity and how they positioned themselves in relation to both Native and colonial society.

The ambivalent nature of the sisters' identities as "civilised pioneers" in British Columbia complicated their relationships with both white and Native cultures.<sup>13</sup> In her analysis of the contested colonial dynamic, Anne McClintock spotlights white "women as boundary markers of Empire," whose identities shifted ambiguously within various contexts.<sup>14</sup> Although representatives of British imperial culture, the sisters frequently found themselves contesting its tenets. Vron Ware too, has pointed to the many cases in which "English women challenged the expectations arising from their allotted place within the colonial system."<sup>15</sup> At Yale, the sisters' identities were often fashioned discursively and materially in relation to Victorian gender ideology in a paradoxical manner: they were at once privileged and impoverished, self-sufficient and vulnerable. The dualities of their position were complicated by Victorian imperial ideologies of race and class which prescribed to white, upper- and middle-class English women a

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Four for details of the early development of the CAH.

<sup>13</sup> See Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002) for a thoughtful analysis of how female missionary identities were constructed in the Canadian North.

<sup>14</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 24. See, for example, her analysis of Olive Schreiner in South Africa.

<sup>15</sup> Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 42.

discursively compact yet practically multifarious social function.<sup>16</sup> Although the school provided the original impetus for work with Native peoples, the sisters' involvement with the Interior Salish was not confined to the classroom. Rather, the sisters participated with the Native community in diverse ways: their identities were structured not only by their position as teachers, but also through their missionary, medical, civic, and familial personae. The manner by which the sisters' identities were fashioned by others speaks to the often-fragile nature of colonial authority.<sup>17</sup> Their collective identity was often manipulated by the Anglican clergy and the state in an effort to secure authority and consolidate control over the Native population. The sisters, however, crafted their own sense of self primarily through their identity as women religious. Spirituality was the most significant sphere in which the ambiguities of identity operated, fracturing the racial nature of their colonial identities: not only did their spirituality set them apart from the Native community, but it also served to differentiate them from Anglican missionaries, and from the majority of white society in the province.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the colonial context forced the sisters to recraft their collective identity as women religious and to negotiate among these contested notions of self in their efforts to carry out their Christian obligations.

This chapter examines these ideological and cultural contexts in which

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of how missionary identity was structured through a series of dualities, see Myra Rutherdale, "Revisiting Colonization through Gender: Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic, 1860 -1945," *BC Studies*, 104 (Winter 1994), 3 -23. On how women, particularly those in an imperial setting, chafed against the restrictions set out by social convention, see McClintock's discussion of Josephine Butler in *Imperial Leather*, as well as Ware's in *Beyond the Pale*.

<sup>17</sup> On the unstable nature of this authority, see Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, esp. the Governor Eyre controversy in Jamaica.

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of how gender identity was negotiated among Roman Catholic nuns in the American West, see Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836 -1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

the sisters established the All Hallows' School at Yale between 1884 and 1887. It analyses how the sisters' lives and the school's formation were shaped by monastic culture, by the agents of Church, state, and society, and by the discourses of imperialism. While the school serves as a venue through which the ideologies of the sisters' work can be explored, a complete understanding of their missionary enterprise can only be gleaned by analysing the wider contexts in which it was formed. Foremost among these is the culture of the Sisterhood in England: not only did it train the sisters and shape their values, but also it provided the spiritual milieu in which these women operated and through which their collective identity was defined. The focus then shifts to the social and religious contexts of Yale society, and to an examination of the ways in which the sisters' mission was shaped profoundly by the Bishop of New Westminster. Finally, the chapter investigates the experiences of the sisters as they settled in to their home in the Canadian wilderness and began their mission to the Interior Salish. Imperialism formed a central element of the construction of Victorian identity: just as analyses of the origins of the Society of St. Margaret and the Community of All Hallows in England expose the relationship between monastic culture and gender ideology within British society, this study uncovers how Anglican monastic identities were forged within and shaped by the ideological imprint of empire.

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### **Anglican Sisterhoods in the Context of Imperialism**

From their inception at mid century, Anglican sisterhoods depended on the imperial context both as a field for employment as well as to enhance

their popular reputation.<sup>19</sup> Florence Nightingale's inclusion of Anglican sisters in her nursing party at the Crimea had initially garnered these women some measure of support in Britain. At All Hallows, catering to the needs of children throughout the empire had been, from the late 1850s, a significant aspect of the Sisterhood's work. From its Ditchingham base, the Community operated a residential school for the daughters of clerics and other dignitaries who were stationed abroad.<sup>20</sup> Girls came from such distant ports of call as Jamaica, Calcutta, and Malta.<sup>21</sup> As noted in the epilogue to the previous chapter, the empire also served as new home for reformed penitents: it was to Manitoba that the Community sent its first emigrant in 1884.<sup>22</sup> By the 1880s, several English sisterhoods were in the process of establishing missionary outposts throughout the empire. The Society of St. Margaret sent sisters to Ceylon in 1887, while other communities expanded to South Africa, Australia, India, and America.<sup>23</sup> The Canadian West, in particular, was viewed by the Church as a wide-open field for expansion, and one in which, if the Anglicans did not conquer, the Roman Catholics and various dissenters

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<sup>19</sup> This dependency was both physical and ideological. The empire provided foreign missions, such as that to the Crimea at mid century, and also gave sisterhoods an ideological moral imperative to civilise and educate colonial people across the globe. On the nature of this work in religious orders, see, for example, Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*; and Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion*, revised and edited by A. W. Campbell (London: SPCK, 1964). See also Judith Rowbotham, "Ministering Angels, not Ministers: Women's Involvement in the Foreign Missionary Movement, c. 1860 -1910," in Sue Morgan, ed. *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750 - 1900* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Rowbotham explains that British missionary societies targeted women "characterised by humility." In this sense, Anglican sisters may have appeared an ideal choice for missionary work.

<sup>20</sup> Opened in 1857, this school, St. Ann's, was referred to by the Sisterhood as an 'upper-class' institution to distinguish it from the working-class orphanage the Community also operated. See CAH Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Details of these pupils was recorded in the 1881 Census. Ditchingham, Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of the discursive merits of this scheme. It is possible that this woman, "S.S.," accompanied the sisters from Norfolk to Canada in 1884 although no evidence exists to this effect.

<sup>23</sup> Anson provides a list of sisterhoods with overseas missions.

certainly would.<sup>24</sup>

The Community of All Hallows was linked to the Canadian West through its varied connections with the diocese of New Westminster, created in 1879 in southern British Columbia. Fanny Pelly, a long-time associate member of the Sisterhood in England, was the first Bishop of New Westminster's mother-in-law.<sup>25</sup> The Bishop, Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, had visited the sisters at Ditchingham and was "much impressed" by their dedicated lives and "the high standards of education provided in their school."<sup>26</sup> Justinian Pelly served as treasurer of the *New Westminster Quarterly Paper*, the official organ of the diocese in Britain.<sup>27</sup> When the Mission Guild was established in 1881 to help the diocese through prayers and donations, the Mother Superior of All Hallows, Lavinia Crosse, pledged her support. The Sisterhood had also developed a long-standing relationship with Rev. George Hills. Hills was based at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk during the Sisterhood's formation, and had been most impressed with the sisters' work converting fallen women to Christianity.<sup>28</sup> In 1859, Hills left Norfolk to take up the appointment of Bishop of British Columbia, a position he held

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<sup>24</sup> On the place of female missionaries in the Canadian West, see Rutherford, Women and the White Man's God; Rosemary R. Gagan, A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) esp. Chapter Five; See also Vincent J. McNally, The Lord's Distant Vineyard: A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), esp. Chapter Ten.

<sup>25</sup> See Work for the Far West, January 1909 for details of her connection with the Sisterhood. Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, was the first bishop of New Westminster.

<sup>26</sup> The 24th Report of the Okanagan Historical Society (n.p.1960), 101.

<sup>27</sup> Justinian Pelly, Esq., of Elmsley, Yorford. He may have been Fanny Pelly's husband.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Five for Hills' commentary on the conversion of these women.

until 1892.<sup>29</sup> Even more-closely associated with the Sisterhood was Rev. Richard Small, who served as its subwarden at Ditchingham in the early 1880s. He left the sisters in 1882 for missionary work in British Columbia with the promise of his services if they too ventured to Canada. Although the Community of All Hallows had diversified considerably by that time, none of its works had expanded the Sisterhood beyond East Anglia. As such, the prospect of establishing a school for Native girls in the interior of British Columbia must have been somewhat daunting. It did not deter Lavinia Crosse, however, who, in April 1882 made an offer to diocese of New Westminster for "the Sisterhood of All Hallows to maintain or supervise a school for Indians" in BC.<sup>30</sup> The Sisterhood's decision to make such a pledge testifies not only to their faith in the assistance they would receive from Hills, Small and the Sillitoes, but also to the importance of empire in the discourse and practices of late-Victorian philanthropy.

Due to the demands of work within the Community, it was another two years before three sisters could be spared to establish the school at Yale. No records exist as to the process of selecting the sisters who would carry out All Hallows' first overseas mission; the Community magazine, *East & West* simply records that considerable time was spent "training, testing, and equipping them" for the adventure.<sup>31</sup> In several ways, the sisters who

<sup>29</sup> Hills' relocation to BC was funded by Angela Burdett Coutts. The arrival of Bishop Hills in Victoria witnessed a change in the complexion of Anglicanism in the diocese. Hills had worked as a curate in England under Dean Hook, a staunch proponent of the tenets of the Oxford Movement. Until the creation of other diocese in BC, Hills presided over the entire province. For details of Hills' career, see Roberta L. Bagshaw, *No Better Land: The 1860 Diaries of the Anglican Colonial Bishop George Hills* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996); and Ken Volkenant, "Charity and Principle: The Anglican Church and Indians in British Columbia, 1859-1892," Unpublished paper, UBC, March 1982.

<sup>30</sup> Journal of the First Meeting of the Diocesan Synod, New Westminster, October 3, 1882, 12. Church of England Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, UBC, series 1.4, file 8/1. The tender of help was made on April 12, 1882 in Crosse's name to the English Committee of the Diocese of New Westminster. See *East & West*, Easter 1886.

<sup>31</sup> *East and West*, Easter 1886.

embarked for Canada in 1884 represented the diversity which existed among members of the Sisterhood. At first glance, Alice Louisa Rolfe appears an odd choice to send to the Canadian wilderness. She was relatively new to the Order, having entered the novitiate in 1881 at age 34 and taking her profession as a choir sister the following year. Born in 1847 in Hempnall, Norfolk, Rolfe hailed from a wealthy family and perhaps it was her social status in connection with her spirituality, that made her a judicious choice.<sup>32</sup> Her rapid profession certainly indicates her highly-regarded position within the Order. Amy Nickar, born in 1856, entered the novitiate in 1877 at the young age of 21 with her older sister, Bertha. They were professed together as choir sisters in 1879.<sup>33</sup> According to the Sisterhood's historian, Amy Nickar was a "Maltese princess" from a titled family.<sup>34</sup> Sister Amy's background may have influenced the decision to send her to Yale: if she had lived in Malta at some point, the Sisterhood may have felt that she would weather the transition to a foreign culture more easily than a less-travelled sister.<sup>35</sup> The third sister in the group was the most experienced of the three. As a lay sister, she also had the least status. Elizabeth Ann Hurst was born circa. 1855 in Cowley, Oxfordshire, joined All Hallows in about 1875, and was professed in 1877.<sup>36</sup> Her inclusion probably was determined by her lay status, as it would

<sup>32</sup> Notes of the Reverend Heber Greene, Vancouver School of Theology. Greene's chart notes for Sister Alice Louisa that she put up some of her personal money to help fund the Indian school. The 1881 Census lists her at the Community House, age 35. She died January 1925, age 78.

<sup>33</sup> CAH Archives, sisterlist. Their last name may be Neckar. They were professed on the Eve of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1879. Sister Amy, born May 14th, 1856, died of cancer in March 1929.

<sup>34</sup> Sister Violet, *All Hallows: Ditchingham, the Story of an East Anglian Community* (Oxford: Becket Publications, 1983). A less reliable source (Heber Greene) records her as being the "sweetheart of Kitchener." See VST files. I have found no evidence to corroborate either aspect of her identity.

<sup>35</sup> It is also possible that Sister Amy was selected because of the death of her natural sister: the CAH sisterlist records Bertha's death in 1877, which is obviously impossible, but she may have died prior to 1884. The content of Community records can be decidedly unclear.

<sup>36</sup> CAH Archives, the sisterlist records neither Sister Elizabeth's birth date or the date of her novitiate. She returned to England 1899. No records exist to determine her whereabouts thereafter.

have been important to have a sister experienced with domestic labour among the Canadian party.<sup>37</sup>

Within the Community, sisters rotated among its various missions where they gained experience in different types of employment and developed a diverse range of skills. By the 1880s, the Sisterhood operated two schools and an orphanage, the House of Mercy for fallen women, in addition to Grange farm, and the Ditchingham hospital. Nor were All Hallows' sisters' experiences confined to the rarefied air of the convent at Ditchingham. Particularly through their mission work and women's guilds in Norwich and throughout East Anglia, the sisters were exposed to the realities of dire poverty. In the early 1880s, Norwich was experiencing one of the worst depressions in the century. As a result, homelessness, unemployment and prostitution were rampant. The city was, one commentator declared, "unfit for the ministrations of ordinary district visitors."<sup>38</sup> Under such conditions, the sisters were in continual demand, developing expertise in parish work, nursing, education, moral reform, and in particular, the needs of women and children.

While the occupational backgrounds of the three Yale sisters cannot be determined fully, as probationers, novices, and sisters they would have been thoroughly imbued with the culture of the Sisterhood and its various works. The census of 1881 reveals that Sister Elizabeth was posted at the House of Mercy, catering to fallen women, and Sister Alice Louisa was serving as a novice at the Community House.<sup>39</sup> Prior to her departure for BC, Sister Amy had been stationed at St. Clement's Parish, Cambridge, where she operated a

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<sup>37</sup> In 1884, Sister Amy was 28 years of age, professed 5 years; Sister Alice - age 37, professed 2 years; and Sister Elizabeth age 29, professed 7 years. CAH profession roll.

<sup>38</sup> East and West, Easter 1886.

<sup>39</sup> 1881 Census. NRO. The sisters are identified only as "workers".



working-women's guild in addition to holding classes for girls, mothers' meetings, and visiting the parish sick.<sup>40</sup> Shortly before she left for Canada, she returned to Cambridge to say her goodbyes. The women of the parish had arranged a party on her behalf, presenting her with a selection of gifts, including a black leather bag for carrying tracts, which had been purchased by pawning their husbands' Sunday coats.<sup>41</sup>

The nature of the sisters work at the Community in England is significant in two respects. Rather than forcing the sisters to retreat from the world, this work exposed these women to a wide range of social problems and individuals. In addition, like their work, the culture of the Sisterhood was female centred. Through their missions to former prostitutes, working women in Cambridge, working-class orphans, and the daughters of the elite, the sisters gained a diverse understanding of the actual and potential risks which young girls deprived of a "proper" upbringing faced, and of the necessity of spiritual instruction as the cornerstone of their educational and redemptive regime. The female culture of the Sisterhood affected the sisters' sense of self individually and collectively, empowering them as women to work to improve the lives of their sex.<sup>42</sup> As women religious, their mission was underpinned by their spirituality. From this diverse and complex female subculture, the sisters prepared to embark for the remote town of Yale in the Canadian West.

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<sup>40</sup> Three sisters were sent to the parish late in 1882 upon the sudden departure of the volunteers.

<sup>41</sup> CAH Archives. According to Community records, Sister Amy was moved almost to tears by the women's kindness. Sixty women attended the event. The other gifts were a teapot stand and a glass.

<sup>42</sup> On the empowering nature of religion in women's lives, see, for example, Eileen Janes Yeo, "Protestant feminists and Catholic saints" in id. ed. *Radical Femininity: Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

## Yale: The Town and its Inhabitants in the 1880s

Happy is the land that has no history--but very uninteresting must be its newspapers.<sup>43</sup>

*East & West*, 1886.

In July 1880, Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, the first bishop of the newly-created diocese of New Westminster, arrived in Yale with his young wife Violet as part of a tour of his extensive diocese in the BC interior. The Bishop at once was taken with the town's "beautiful and glorious" setting alongside the Fraser.<sup>44</sup> Within days of the Sillitoe's arrival, however, fire ravaged Yale reducing more than half its buildings to ashes. With Violet manning the pump, the Bishop was able to douse the flames on the roof of the Church of St. John the Divine, which had been the first Anglican church constructed in mainland British Columbia, and save its destruction.<sup>45</sup> Together, the Bishop and his wife sat up through the night supplying coffee and tending the burn victims. It was hardly an auspicious beginning.<sup>46</sup>

The image of the courageous Bishop with his wife at his side, saving the town from destruction, speaks to the interaction among the civilising mission of Christianity, the performance of gender, and the precipitous

<sup>43</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1886. "She is full of ghosts. But she is no ghost town" declared the unknown author of *Historic Yale, British Columbia* (Vancouver: British Columbia Historical Association, 1954), 23.

<sup>44</sup> "First Report of the Right Reverend the Bishop of New Westminster." 31 August 1879. Anglican Church Archives, Synod of New Westminster. Series 1.4: Journal of Proceedings of Synod and Related Materials. Vancouver School of Theology. The date of the Report is uncertain as the Sillitoe's did not arrive in BC until April 1880.

<sup>45</sup> St. John the Divine Church was the first Anglican church to be constructed on the mainland in BC., and is the oldest church in British Columbia to occupy its original site. Today, a plaque inside the Church bears witness to the sisters' presence at Yale. For earliest church records, see Vancouver City Archives (VCA), ADD MSS 447, parish register.

<sup>46</sup> For two accounts of the Sillitoe's early experiences in the Canadian West from the perspective of Violet Sillitoe, see Violet E. Sillitoe, *Early Days in British Columbia* (privately published, c. 1922); and Kathryn Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer: women of the frontier* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1998) 169-223. These sources verify that the Sillitoe's arrived in BC in April 1880.

nature of life in the Canadian West. At Yale, the development of missionary work was closely tied to economic activity, itself highly precipitous. Yale's fortunes in the nineteenth century depended largely on various groups of men temporarily descending upon the town, all hoping to extract a piece of it. Rising to prominence during the gold rush of the late 1850s, with over 25,000 prospectors surging into the community, Yale subsequently became the headquarters of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in the early 1880s, when its population, composed significantly of male Chinese workers, and a small community of Interior Salish, reached 2,000.<sup>47</sup> According to the Bishop, "the railway works have made Yale the liveliest place in the Province."<sup>48</sup> From Violet Sillitoe's perspective, it was lively *and* dangerous: "Yale was a pretty rough place, and for three days after pay-day it was as well to keep away from the front street."<sup>49</sup> The town's rugged masculinity often led to class and racial conflict as the men struggled for control over economic interests. In 1884, Sir John A. Macdonald, Canadian Prime Minister and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, reported that "a bad feeling" had arisen between the Native peoples of the Lower Fraser and the Chinese concerning competition for "various industrial pursuits."<sup>50</sup> The prostitution of Native women was of particular concern. That same year, P. McTiernan, the government Indian Agent for the

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<sup>47</sup> For details on the construction of the CPR around Yale and the use of Chinese workers, see Richard C. Bocking, Mighty River: A Portrait of the Fraser (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 174 -178. The Hudson Bay Company maintained a trading post at Yale intermittently from 1836 to 1892. The completion of the CPR at Yale in 1885 forced it to relocate its commercial interests. All Hallows in the West (AHW), Midsummer 1911. See J. R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada Revised Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), on the men of the gold rush in the Fraser Valley, 146 -147. The population of New Westminster was also about 2,000 in 1880.

<sup>48</sup> "First Report of the Right Reverend the Bishop of New Westminster." 31 August 1879. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Sillitoe, Early Days in British Columbia, 10. Advertisements in the local papers of this era - for saloons, hotels, and alcohol - reinforce her impressions. See, for example, the Inland Sentinel, Sept 4, 1884.

<sup>50</sup> Report of John A. Macdonald. Department of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1884. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (PABC), microfilm D-28/1.

Lower Fraser Agency, noted the existence of a thriving liquor trade between 'half-breed' consumers and Chinese merchants.<sup>51</sup> Further, he commented that the Chinese incursion into the traditional Native trade of berry picking had "almost completely ruined the Indians." Masculinity in the town was mapped out along the terrain of racial conflict, sexual exploitation, and material self-interest.<sup>52</sup>

The presence of these workers, alongside that of the small group of Interior Salish, attracted the attention of a variety of religious organisations, whose activities were also defined by competition. According to Sillitoe's biographer, Yale was a town where "irreligion and depravity had been a byword throughout the province for many years."<sup>53</sup> Missionary activity had developed in the lower mainland with the arrival of Roman Catholic Oblates who subsequently established a missionary outpost at Yale in 1861.<sup>54</sup> For its part, the Church of England worked through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the Church Missionary Society, which

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<sup>51</sup> Report of P. McTiernan. D I A, Annual Report, 1884. PABC, microfilm D-28/1. On the problems associated with the influx of over 17,000 Chinese railroad workers into the province, see Hugh Johnston, 'Native Peoples, Settlers, and Sojourners' in Johnston, Ed., The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996), 190.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the operations of colonial masculinity, see Perry, On the Edge of Empire; Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995) and Hall, White, Male and Middle Class.

<sup>53</sup> Rev. Herbert H. Gowen, Pioneer Church Work in British Columbia: Being a Memoir of the Episcopate of Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, D.D., D.C.L. First Bishop of New Westminster (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1899), 92. He claimed, however, that by the early 1880s, the Church of England had managed to become "influential and powerful."

<sup>54</sup> McNally, The Lord's Distant Vineyard, 47.

established its first mission in the late 1850s.<sup>55</sup> With the creation of the Diocese of British Columbia in 1859 under Bishop Hills, Anglican missionary activity had taken root throughout the province. Anglicans had maintained a presence in Yale as of 1859 with the construction of the Church of St. John the Divine, followed ten years later when the mission church had been established to help facilitate the process of Native conversion.<sup>56</sup> From the 1860s, Anglican missionaries worked at Yale, focusing their efforts on both the Chinese and Native communities. By the early 1880s, the Methodists and Presbyterians were also actively competing for adherents in the town.<sup>57</sup>

Relations between Anglican missionaries and Native society were shaped by denominational rivalry, racial ideology, and the performance of missionary masculinity.<sup>58</sup> Beginning in 1866, missionary John Booth Good had brought Christianity to a small Thompson community in the Fraser

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<sup>55</sup> William Duncan was one of the first and most controversial Anglican missionaries in BC, arriving in 1857. He established a community at Metlakatla, BC. See J. R. Miller, Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) Chapter 4; For a discussion of the role of missionaries in British Columbia, see John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 119-142. Grant maintains that clashes between Christianity and Native culture were stronger in BC than anywhere else in nineteenth-century Canada, 136. See also Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens; and Robin Fisher, Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890, second edition (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992). In 1859, John Sheepshanks arrived in BC, he eventually became the Bishop of Norwich. See Rev. D Wallace Duthie, ed. A Bishop in the Rough (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1909) for an early account of the church in BC. See Lyndon Grove, Pacific Pilgrims (Vancouver: F. Forbes Pub, Ltd., 1979) for a discussion of the genesis of the Diocese of British Columbia. According to Grove, Angela Burdett-Coutts offered the Archbishop of Canterbury £50,000 to establish the Church of England in the Northwest Pacific Colony. 19. See also Frank A. Peake, The Anglican Church in British Columbia (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1959); and Bagshaw, No Better Land, for a discussion of the scene at Yale in 1860, 142-143. Photo on 136.

<sup>56</sup> David Holmes was a Yale-based missionary in the 1860s and 1870s. According to Adele Perry, Susan Nagle, Holmes' future wife, began a school at Yale during this time. No details are given of what became of the school upon Nagle's marriage. 173.

<sup>57</sup> See the Inland Sentinel, December 18, 1884. Refer to Grant, Moon of Wintertime for the rivalry between Methodists and Anglicans by mid century, 125-136.

<sup>58</sup> See Perry, On the Edge of Empire, on gender within BC missionary culture, esp. 101-110.

Valley, who became well versed in reciting the Litany.<sup>59</sup> Bishop Sillitoe, however, was not impressed, and by September 1883, conflict between Good and the new Bishop led to the missionary's departure from Yale.<sup>60</sup> The following year, Good's replacement, Darrell Horlock lamented his new surroundings, exclaiming that "Yale is a gradually decaying place."<sup>61</sup> Horlock already seemed defeated by the obstacles to mission work he faced in the town, complaining of how his initiatives were plagued by low church attendance due to Sunday work, the mobile population, and a general distrust by all classes for "clergy."<sup>62</sup> Competition among denominations and a variety of "other sects" complicated the missionary's efforts further.<sup>63</sup> Horlock's assistant, Deacon Edwin Wright, was similarly frustrated by the inertia he encountered in the town. His attitudes toward the local Native population displayed the cultural differences between European expectations and the Native way of life: "The Yale Indians are somewhat different from other Indians up country. They are indolent, somewhat heavy--no energy about them, sleepy; whereas the Indians at Spuzzum, Boston Bar and farther north

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<sup>59</sup> Peter William Robin, "Beyond the Bounds of the West: The Life of John Booth Good, 1838-1916" Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 1987, 68. Good produced a Native translation of the Book of Common Prayer for the Lytton mission, as well as a grammar and a dictionary. Robin, 122. Good had relocated his family to Victoria, but was himself based in Lytton from 1867. He returned to Yale in 1879.

<sup>60</sup> Sillitoe believed that Good's manner with the Thompson was altogether too congenial, and that he had subsequently antagonised the white community: "I was so shocked at the farcical character of his Indian Services that I could not contain myself and left the church in anger....Mr. Good has stood sadly in need of a controlling hand...the accounts of his work have been unblushingly overstated." Archives of the United Society for the Promotion of the Gospel, Rhodes House Library, Oxford. CLR 149, Bishop of New Westminster to Secretary, August 16, 1880, p. 274. Quoted in Robin, 135. According to Robin, Good's low church style clashed with the Bishop's High-Church tendencies.

<sup>61</sup> Horlock to the Diocese of New Westminster (DMW), Yale, July 9, 1884. New Westminster Quarterly Paper(NWQP), June 1884.

<sup>62</sup> NWQP, June 1884.

<sup>63</sup> NWQP, June 1884. "Presbyterians and Methodists far exceed Churchmen in numbers, and there are also other sects of every type and description" Horlock explained. For her part, Mrs. Horlock ran a Sunday School, while a reading room was set up as an alternative to the bar-room.

are more energetic, and consequently earn more money."<sup>64</sup> To affect real change, Horlock insisted on reinforcements: "Send men out to us of the right sort - experienced, earnest priests."<sup>65</sup>

Such racist and capitalist attitudes coloured Wright's experiences at the small school he established at Yale for Native boys where boarders were expected to contribute \$8 monthly in addition to finding fuel.<sup>66</sup> His report in the *New Westminster Quarterly Paper*, the official organ of the diocese, reveals the potential of and the problems associated with Native schooling in the region: "The Indian boys are quick to learn and seem fond of it. It is rather an experiment to keep them confined to certain hours...something they have never been accustomed to; yet, at present, they seem happy and contented ....They are keen observers and far from being stupid."<sup>67</sup> Wright did, however, lament the widespread ignorance of Christianity among his pupils, which derived he believed from the "scarcity of missionaries" in the area.<sup>68</sup> He proposed a scheme for the future of Native education informed by the dictates of cultural assimilation structured by Victorian gender ideals: "[U]ntil we have large boarding and industrial schools, carried on with the help either of sisters or other ladies, the Indians must remain ignorant....There should be schools for both boys and girls, separated some distance—half a mile or so apart; the girls taught by ladies, the boys by men."<sup>69</sup> Mission work in the Fraser Valley was designed to procure fundamental

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<sup>64</sup> NWQP, June 1884. Nor, in Wright's opinion, did the younger generation offer the potential for change: "One finds a Yale Indian here and there who is a very good fellow to work; but as a body they are indolent, and of course the children are like the parents." The Native settlement at Spuzzum was located 14 miles from Yale.

<sup>65</sup> Horlock to DNW, NWQP, June 1884.

<sup>66</sup> Report of Edwin Wright, Yale, March 25, 1884. NWQP (June 1884).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Horlock to DNW, NWQP, June 1884. On his agenda for Native education, see also the *Churchman's Gazette*, 3,12, (March 1884).

<sup>69</sup> Report of Edwin Wright, Yale, March 25, 1884. NWQP (June 1884).

change: clerics competed for souls in an ultimate effort to eradicate traditional Native spirituality and replace it with 'enlightened' Christian beliefs. It was in this context - the desire to transform and civilise Native children in industrial boarding schools segregated by gender and race- that the Anglican Church envisaged its programme of Native education.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, on the eve of the sisters' arrival, the missionary enterprise at Yale, defined and controlled by men, was in desperate need of reinforcements. Mission work had been carried out for over twenty years, yet the male missionaries had met with limited success and their teaching efforts had been largely confined to a small group of male pupils. However, as Wright's comments suggest, if education were to succeed among the Native population, women were required to participate. Such women, it appeared, were in short supply at Yale. Although Mrs. Horlock supported her husband's mission by operating a Sunday school, Yale society was dominated by men. Moreover, the town was rife with internal divisions, not only denominational, but also racial and cultural. Within such a climate, the clergy hoped that the sisters from the Community of All Hallows could affect impressive results. They were expected to support and bolster the efforts of their male counterparts.<sup>71</sup> Just as the Sillitoe's rescue operation at the Yale church illustrates that the success of imperialism depended on initiative, courage, and stamina, so too did it depend upon the efforts of devoted women.

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<sup>70</sup> For further discussion of the missionary motivation behind Native residential schooling, refer to Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, esp. Chapter Four and 414 -15. The CMS set up a school at Alert Bay, in northern Vancouver Island, in 1880, and William Duncan's in Metlakatla. See Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, 91,95. The politics of Indian Residential schools will be examined in Chapter Seven.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Rowbotham, "Ministering Angels" on the "lack of enthusiasm for independent female involvement in the mission field." 181.



## **"A social revolution in the land": Bishop Sillitoe's Educational Agenda**

The establishment of the All Hallows' School at Yale at the end of 1884 illustrates how gender politics lay at the heart of the imperial project and the Christian civilising mission in particular. Competition for Native pupils was fierce within the province, and Sillitoe was determined that, under his leadership, the Anglicans would not be outdone.<sup>72</sup> Specifically, he hoped that with the help of a permanent, devoted staff, the construction of workshops for technical and industrial education could be established. Sillitoe explained the potential of such work:

When we shall have been allowed to accomplish this, we shall have wrought a social revolution in the land, for we shall have elevated the people from the servile condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water and given them an equal chance in the race of life. Whether they are capable of this is, of course, a question which we must expect to have raised.<sup>73</sup>

Utilising the discourses of Victorian gender ideology, the Bishop commented that "If the men are to be raised socially, industrially, and physically, *the women must be raised too...* [for] the influence of woman is perhaps the strongest auxiliary for refining and purifying the nature of man."<sup>74</sup> As a broker of female education in the province, Sillitoe realised that the success of such education depended on three factors: the right sort of instructors, the commitment of Native families, and the acquisition of funds. Bishop Sillitoe devoted substantial efforts to each of these necessities at the All Hallows'

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<sup>72</sup> The first Anglican girls' school in BC started in 1860. Angela College catered to upper-class girls and was established in direct competition to the Roman Catholic school run by the Sisters of St. Ann. The oblates, together with the Sisters of St. Ann, had established several Native residential schools in the province by 1890. See McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard* and Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, Chapter 4.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Gowen, *Pioneer Church Work*, 117. On the ways in which Anglican clerics viewed the potential of Native peoples to become "civilised", see Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 187.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Gowen, *Pioneer Church Work*, 117. Emphasis in original.

School, and as such, his involvement needs to be considered carefully. In contrast to the tenuous support of Bishop Gilbert in connection with the Society of St. Margaret at East Grinstead, or the apathy of the Bishops of Norwich in relation to All Hallows at Ditchingham, Bishop Sillitoe's enthusiasm for and commitment to the School at Yale profoundly influenced its fortunes and its character. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, dynamics between sisters and the clergy were essential to the development of the religious life and its interpretation. Like that of John Mason Neale at East Grinstead, and the male council who oversaw the House of Mercy at Ditchingham, Sillitoe's involvement affected the sisters' experiences and how their collective identity was shaped in fundamental ways. Moreover, his agenda for the All Hallows' School involved not only Native education, but also the religious-based education of white girls in the Fraser Valley. While the impact of the inclusion of white girls at the school will be examined in the following chapter, the Bishop's intention to utilise the sisters for such education, despite the sisters' original mission to teach Native pupils exclusively, had a significant effect upon his negotiations.

The Bishop's first task in preparing for the sisters' arrival was to ensure that Native pupils would attend the new school. Here Sillitoe took advantage of relations between Native workers and their employer, the CPR. Significantly, these negotiations reveal the ways in which Native peoples were directly involved in both the establishment of education for their own children, and its financing.<sup>75</sup> While the railroad works were headquartered at Yale, the CPR relied on Native labour alongside that of Chinese.

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<sup>75</sup> For a perspective on Native residential schools which challenges "the conventional picture of residential schools as totalitarian institutions" and argues rather than Native people could be instrumental in the formation of such schools, see J. R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy" *Ethnohistory* 37: 4 (Fall 1990), 386-415.

Unsurprisingly, it appears that railroad contractor Andrew Onderdonk had been remiss in paying his Native workers.<sup>76</sup> Not one to let opportunity slip, Sillitoe struck a deal with members of the Native community in an effort to recoup their losses and promote the education of their children. The resulting statement, with twenty-three signatures appended, was dated, perhaps inauspiciously, February 29, 1884:

We the undersigned Indians of Yankee Flat desire a certain sum of money due to us from Mr. Onderdonk to be paid over to the Lord Bishop of New Westminster, for the purpose of building and establishing a day school for our children in the neighbourhood of our village.<sup>77</sup>

Although the details of this proposal are unknown, specifically, how the deal was negotiated, and whether Onderdonk actually agreed, its significance lies in the fact that Native peoples were willing to ally with the Church in order to facilitate the education of their children. For its part, the Church, which faced serious competition from Roman Catholic missionaries who were also eyeing this same source of revenue, was not adverse to capitalising on the Natives' position as creditors and using their unpaid wages as a means of furthering its missionary agenda. In the pursuit of educating children, the Anglicans and the Native community developed a mutual interest and determined a solution which had the potential to be amenable to all.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> For details on aristocratic New Yorker, Onderdonk, see Bocking, *A Mighty River*, 175 - 177.

<sup>77</sup> *The Churchman's Gazette and New Westminster Diocesan Chronicle*, Vol. III, no 12 (March 12, 1884). The statement was also signed by Darrell Horlock, E. L. Wright, the missionary at Yale, and Pearson, the Justice of the Peace.

<sup>78</sup> Of course, it is questionable whether the clergy had any intention of establishing a day school "in the neighbourhood" of Yankee Flat. Without direct evidence, it is impossible to determine if Native people were coerced into this deal by the Church. Both Peake, *The Anglican Church in BC*, 73, and Grove, *Pacific Pilgrim*, 43, comment on the negotiations among Sillitoe, CPR officials and Natives concerning the funding of a school for Native children. For testimonials as to the desire which existed among Native parents for their children to receive such education see, DIA School files, PABC, reel B 9825. According to Rev. Enoch Woods of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, "We cannot but be moved by the earnest and repeated requests made by the Indians on behalf of their children, the parents of whom are exceedingly anxious for them to be instructed." 2. See also J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 196- 199; Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 408.

Significantly, however, the means by which this education was to be achieved derived primarily from the unbought labour of Native men and white women which was manipulated by the Bishop to advance Christianity in the diocese according to his own specific agenda.

In the summer of 1884, the Sillitoe family travelled to Pritannia, a campsite located in the mountains between the Fraser and Thompson rivers, to prepare Native families for the sisters' arrival and announce the arrival of Rev. Richard Small who would be setting up a similar school for boys at Lytton.<sup>79</sup> The camp meeting was designed specifically to publicise Christian education among the Interior Salish. Camp meetings served as an elaborate form of imperial spectacle revealing the nature of the relationship between the Church and the Native peoples of the Fraser Valley during this period. The camp was composed of roughly 900 tents nearly all flew the diocesan flag, which, the Bishop lamented, had faded to resemble "a dirty white handkerchief."<sup>80</sup> Dutifully, the assembly gathered for evensong together at night and elaborate Holy Communion proceedings the following morning. Such religious indoctrination was accompanied by instruction in morality and domesticity, which the Sillitoe family dispatched with characteristic aplomb:

In the afternoon all the women and girls assembled under the shade of a gigantic pine, at the foot of which my tent was pitched. I addressed them on the subject of domestic life, the duties and responsibilities of their sex, and the cultivation of womanly virtues, and explained to them the objects of the girls' school shortly to be established at Yale under a branch of the Ditchingham Sisterhood. Mrs. Sillitoe then distributed among them the handkerchiefs, aprons, picture-

<sup>79</sup> Lytton was located about 50 miles upriver from Yale. The Sillitoe family were highly impressed with Small; Violet spoke of him as "the most single-hearted and devoted missionary that could be imagined." Sillitoe, *Early Days in BC*, 22. For details of his career, see his obituary in *Work for the Far West*, April 1909. In 1867, John Good had established a similar school for boys at Lytton. See Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 132.

<sup>80</sup> "Account of the Indian Gathering at Lytton, June 1884, by the Bishop," (reprinted from *The Mission Field*) *NWQP*, October 1884.

cards, etc.--gifts for this purpose from friends in England.<sup>81</sup>

The process of dispatching the spiritual, material and cultural accoutrements of imperialism was central to the Church's mission and thus to the success of the sisters' school. It helped to lay the foundation for an education which the clergy and many Native leaders hoped would provide "a strategy of adaptation" to Canadian culture.<sup>82</sup> This indoctrination not only into the religious practices of Christianity, but also to the social rituals of English culture provided an essential background to the education which would be imparted by the sisters. According to the Bishop's account, such education was as important to the Native population as it was to the Church. A conference held by the Interior Salish during the Bishop's visit to discuss school matters determined that they were willing to support schools in their area.<sup>83</sup> As the Bishop explained to readers of the *New Westminster Quarterly Paper*, they agreed that schooling would not be for all children, but for those "selected boys and girls [who] as soon as fit, [would be] installed as teachers in the midst of their families and friends."<sup>84</sup> To this end, twenty girls would be taught by the sisters at Yale and twenty boys by Small at Lytton.

Part of the camp meeting involved the festivities of the potlatch, which was outlawed by the government in 1884.<sup>85</sup> Although the Bishop decided not to describe the potlatch "because the barest statement of facts would appear

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<sup>81</sup> *NWQP*, October 1884.

<sup>82</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 409.

<sup>83</sup> According to the Indian Act of 1876, the choice of school was left to the chief's discretion, with the majority of the band's approval. See DIA School files, 1892.

<sup>84</sup> *NWQP*, October 1884. Beyond his function dispensing religion, morality, and education, Sillitoe also served as a magistrate for the Native community, in which capacity he negotiated drinking, gambling, and matrimonial problems: "I had the happiness of restoring harmony to two wigwams," he reported proudly.

<sup>85</sup> DIA Annual Reports, 1885. The laws forbidding the potlatch came into effect January 1, 1885. See Johnston, "Native People, Settlers and Sojourners, 1871 -1916," ; Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 138 -140.

exaggerated," he did not seem to condemn this practice, as did many missionaries at the time, but rather recognised it as an integral aspect of Native culture. For their part, the Interior Salish also acknowledged a no less crucial element of English culture, when, at the close of the camp, their voices rose in unison for three cheers to the Queen, "a name of mingled mystery and confiding love in Indian ears," the Bishop exclaimed. The nature of the relationship between the Church and the Interior Salish was thus complex, dynamic, and symbiotic. Native people seem to have been prepared to accept some of the outward tenets of Christianity and apparently were willing to participate in the diocese's programme of education.<sup>86</sup> Naturally, however, it was in the Church's best interest to portray Native society not only as devoted Christians loyal to the crown, but also as willing to engage in the imperial project of self-improvement.<sup>87</sup> Only by this type of portrayal did the schools have a chance to garner popular support within English and Canadian white society.

Assured of Native cooperation, the Bishop's next stop in preparing for the sisters' arrival was to negotiate with the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), a federal body whose policies were administered in British Columbia by Dr. Israel Wood Powell, the federal superintendent.<sup>88</sup> Since education in the province was on a secular rather than religious basis, the Bishop hoped

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<sup>86</sup> On the reception of Christianity among Native peoples more widely, see Grant, Moon of Wintertime, esp. 239 -263.

<sup>87</sup> See Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Leicester: Apollos, 1990) for a discussion of the four assumptions of missionary thinking. 1. "Heathen societies were the domain of Satan." 2. "Nineteenth-century Britain constituted a model of Christian culture and society." 3. "The confidence of British Christians...rested...on the implicit faith in human progress." 4. "Efforts to civilise the 'heathen' ...could be shown to have worked." 160 -62. See also Susan Naylor, The Heavens are Changing (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queens UP, 2002).

<sup>88</sup> The Dept. of Indian Affairs was created in 1880 by the revision of the Indian Act of the same year. The Act extended Ottawa's powers over the Native population politically, socially, and culturally. Miller, Skyscrapers, 189 -190.

that Ottawa would agree to fund the new schools. Ottawa's policy toward Native education in recent years had undergone a sea-change as a result of the recommendations of a study undertaken by MP Nicholas Flood Davin in 1879. Davin had been dispatched to the United States to study the "aggressive civilization" policy of the Grant administration and successfully recommended the approach be applied in Canada.<sup>89</sup> Cultural assimilation was the intended goal, as the DIA annual report for 1884 explained, "The progress of Indian children at day schools...is very greatly hampered and injuriously affected by the associations of their home life, and by the frequency of their absence and the indifference of their parents to the regular attendance of their children at such schools."<sup>90</sup> Residential, rather than day schools, were seen as the most effective means of procuring a transition to working-class standards:

Schools for the higher education of Indian youth should be established...in which the brightest and most promising pupils of the day schools might be trained in industrial pursuits, the knowledge of which would eventually enable them to rise in the social scale to an equality with the white artizan or husbandman.<sup>91</sup>

To ease the burden on the state, and to capitalise on a dedicated work force who already operated many schools, the churches would be made responsible for the education of Native people. As such, the government would support church-controlled Indian residential industrial schools, rather than set up its

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<sup>89</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 101. McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard*, 127, and Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 158. Grant explains that the application of the Davin Report created new sources of funding for church-based Native residential schools, 178.

<sup>90</sup> DIA, Annual Report, 1884, cited in Samuel Woods, "Education of Indians in the Dominion of Canada" DIA, Annual Report 1885, 170.

<sup>91</sup> DIA, Annual Report, 1884, cited in Samuel Woods, "Education of Indians in the Dominion of Canada" DIA, Annual Report 1885, 169 -170.

own state-run schools.<sup>92</sup> Not only would church schools supply their own teachers - ideally, virtuous volunteers - but they would also provide Native peoples with a new faith to replace a Native spirituality deemed primitive and irrelevant by the state.<sup>93</sup> By 1885, nine schools in British Columbia received grants from the Department. Hoping to capitalise on the new government policy, Sillitoe submitted an application to the Department that same year, "for aid to establish one or two boarding and industrial schools in the interior."<sup>94</sup> Refused by Powell, the Bishop went directly to Macdonald, who, despite the fact that the Native peoples of the Lower Fraser Agency had been described by the DIA agent as "a well-behaved, honest and progressive people," declined to grant him the \$20 per pupil per annum he requested.<sup>95</sup> This initial rejection provided an early indication of the federal government's parsimonious attitude toward Native education and foreshadowed the Yale school's continual battle with the government for financial support.<sup>96</sup>

Despite encountering disappointment in Ottawa, Sillitoe had reason to remain optimistic. Lenders in England proved more generous, as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) allocated £200 for the Yale school.<sup>97</sup> In addition, funds raised in his own diocese in 1884 included "a special donation of \$1,000 to the Yale Institute."<sup>98</sup> The largest expense of the proposed

school was the maintenance of the students, estimated at approximately \$20

<sup>92</sup> McNally, The Lord's Distant Vineyard, 126. The term "Indian Residential School" was used in the nineteenth century to describe these institutions and it continues to be employed by the Canadian government, significantly, at the request of Native peoples. Originally, however, Prime Minister Macdonald believed that this system of education should apply only to boys.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, 102, 414. Mc Nally, 128. Grant, Moon of Wintertime, Chapter Eight.

<sup>94</sup> DIA, Annual Report, 1885, 123. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (PABC).

<sup>95</sup> DIA, Annual Report, 1885, Iviii. See McNally for Macdonald's refusal, 127. Ottawa began funding Native boarding schools in 1884. See DIA School files.

<sup>96</sup> On the general parsimony of the government, see Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, passim. esp.414.

<sup>97</sup> NWQP, June 1884. For an analysis of the SPG and its missionary motivations, see James G. Greenlee and Charles M. Johnston, Good Citizens: British Missionaries and Imperial States, 1870-1918(Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

<sup>98</sup> NWQP, June 1884.



each per annum. To help defray these costs, the Bishop appealed to friends in England for \$10 per pupil per year.<sup>99</sup> Unlike the situation at Deacon Wright's school for boys at Yale, at the All Hallows' School the Bishop advised that "the Indians themselves must not be depended on to contribute much." Although not mentioned in his report to the diocese, the fact that the sisters required no financial remuneration was surely considered an additional benefit. In his introduction of the work to the diocese, Sillitoe crafted a specific relationship among Native children, the sisters, and the public purse which positioned the children and their education, but, significantly, not the sisters, as financially dependent. In so doing, he helped to ensure a positive reception not only for the school among white society, but also for its teachers. With Native pupils ensured, and financial backing received from a variety of sources, Sillitoe had only to wait for the sisters to arrive in order to fulfil his ambition of education among the Interior Salish. Yet the sisters' arrival toward the end of 1884 would bring with it additional educational opportunities as far as the Bishop was concerned, and he was keen to exploit their identity in order to pursue his agenda.

Christian-based education for girls had been a priority for the idealistic new Bishop since his arrival in British Columbia. Nor was his vision confined to Native girls exclusively. Sillitoe had been instrumental in the establishment of Columbia College, a boarding school at New Westminster

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<sup>99</sup> N.W.Q.P. October 1884. Bishop Sillitoe's diocesan letter, St. James' Day, 1884. Readers of the letter were also advised that they could 'adopt' a child: "In similar schools in New Zealand and Africa, parishes at home have adopted a child. Could not the same plan be followed in this instance?" On the commodification of colonial subjects, see McClintock, Imperial Leather.

which catered to the daughters of the town's white elite.<sup>100</sup> In 1882, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) had granted the diocese £500 for the purchase of land and buildings for the College's refurbishment.<sup>101</sup> After struggling for three years with limited funds, stiff competition from provincial schools, and an inability to secure long-term commitments from its female principals, the College had been forced to close its doors without utilising the £500.<sup>102</sup> Loath to lose the financing for the school, the Bishop seized the opportunity to reclaim the funds, by utilising the All Hallows' sisters' labour for white girls' education as well. His negotiations to secure funds for the school were premised specifically on his discursive construction of the sisters' identity. He explained to the SPCK that "Having lost three Lady Principals in three years by marriage, I am convinced that the success of the institution will depend largely upon such a permanency of management as would be afforded by placing it in the hands of a Sisterhood."<sup>103</sup> As the procuring of a "separate community of three Sisters would be difficult to obtain...unnecessarily large and extravagant" Sillitoe concluded that "an extension of a Sisterhood already established at Yale seems to offer the simplest and most economical solution of the question how to provide Church education for our girls."<sup>104</sup> He assured the Society that the Sisterhood

<sup>100</sup> The Churchman's Gazette and New Westminster Diocesan Chronicle, Vol. III, no 8 (Nov 1, 1883). The curriculum at Columbia College included English, French, Latin, music, German, and singing which was taught by Violet Sillitoe. The Bishop and Mrs. Sillitoe also were instrumental in the formation of Lorne Collegiate School for boys, which opened in November 1883 in New Westminster. While the Bishop taught classes in religion, elocution and singing, his wife taught vocal music. The school was operated by the Rev. and Mrs. Brenton.

<sup>101</sup> Report of the SPCK, January 1885, reprinted in The New Westminster Occasional Paper, no. 7 (June 1886). The NWQP was formerly the NW Quarterly Paper, the name change itself an indication of the diocese' financial position.

<sup>102</sup> NWQP, June 1886. The original £500 grant was to be supplemented with funds raised by the Bishop, but he had been unable to generate the required balance.

<sup>103</sup> Report of the SPCK, January 1885. On the problems associated with rapid staff turnovers in other BC schools, see McNally, 93 -5.

<sup>104</sup> Report of the SPCK, January 1885.

fully endorsed his proposal on the conditions that one extra Sister and a resident governess be made available.<sup>105</sup> Unlike other female teachers in the province, who frequently resigned in order to marry, by contrast, the sisters held the potential for greater long-term stability.<sup>106</sup> Not only were such women desirable for their commitment to celibacy, but they were also self-sufficient materially. Sillitoe noted that the sisters "come at their own expense, and maintain themselves, if necessary, for a year or more, and the cost to the Church amounts to no more than the hire or erection of a suitable house, and the purchase of furniture."<sup>107</sup>

Although finding a suitable building to house the sisters and educate pupils could have proved extremely difficult, the Bishop again took advantage of existing conditions. Toward the end of 1884, as construction of the CPR at Yale was nearing completion, only about 750 residents remained.<sup>108</sup> Sillitoe noted the potential of securing an economical site for the school: "I could buy very advantageously in Yale now, for everybody is leaving."<sup>109</sup> With the departure of the CPR in 1885, railroad contractor Onderdonk's home was placed on the market. Onderdonk's house, the largest in Yale, was situated near the river on an acre of land. In addition to the home's numerous reception rooms and bedrooms, the third floor contained a large dormitory with a dozen beds. It was furnished throughout and featured a complete laundry and a pianoforte.<sup>110</sup> Such a property was ideal for the sisters' school. At an asking price of \$3,000, however, its purchase required some

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<sup>105</sup> Report of the SPCK, January 1885.

<sup>106</sup> See *NWQP*, June 1884, and *NWQP*, June 1886. Columbia College in New Westminster, and All Saints' at Nicola both lost teachers frequently to marriage.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Gowen, 117-118. See also *NWQP*, October 1884.

<sup>108</sup> Sister Violet, *All Hallows: Ditchingham*, "The Nuns Go West," 37. The population of the province in 1881 was composed of about 19,000 whites and 29,000 Native peoples.

<sup>109</sup> *NWQP*, October 1884. Bishop Sillitoe's diocesan letter, St. James' Day, 1884.

<sup>110</sup> *NWQP*, June 1886.

creative financing.

Once again, Sillitoe turned to the SPCK. Describing the particulars of the Onderdonk house and freehold site, Sillitoe explained how the sisters and the house at Yale offered an ideal combination:

I can now, for £600, acquire site and furnished buildings, admirably adapted for the purpose; and if the school is established there, I gain, besides, the services of a Lady Principal, who will require no salary. I think I can raise, with difficulty, £200 towards the 600. Will the Society transfer the grant of July, 1882, to this object, or at all events allow me £400?<sup>111</sup>

The appeal was successful and the Bishop received £400. The funds that had originally been earmarked for the exclusive Columbia College was now transferred to the All Hallows' School, and with it came an obligation to accept white girls into the school as day pupils. The Bishop's negotiations were impressive: in one fell stroke, he had managed to convince the sisters to undertake the education of well-to-do white girls - with no on-going financial compensation - as part of their school for Native girls, and by doing so, convinced the SPCK to cover a good portion of the cost of the building.

The deal had been brokered on the issue of the nature of the sisters' identity as labourers: in his appeal to the SPCK, the Bishop had not stressed the distinctive religious and moral characteristics of the education that would be provided by the sisters, although this would have been assumed, but rather he emphasised the fact that the teachers "will require no salary." Thus, the sisters' collective identity as reliable, volunteer educators - not as Christ's devotees - was utilised by Sillitoe to secure his funding for the education of privileged white girls. The Onderdonk house was crucial to these

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<sup>111</sup> Report of the SPCK, January 1885. On the Bishop's plan to utilise abandoned CPR buildings for the All Hallows' School as early as 1882, see Gowen, Church Work in British Columbia, 117 - 118.

negotiations: this impressive site would encourage wealthy parents to entrust their daughters to the sisters' care. Significantly, the Bishop seems not to have been concerned that white parents might react negatively to the presence of Native girls in their daughters' school.

Although the Canadian government refused to fund the school at Yale, the depth of religiously-based resources in both England and British Columbia testify to the ways in which the Christian education of girls - both white and Native - was considered a matter of imperial and domestic importance by the Church of England. In the imperial context, the civilisation of "heathen" children rang a particularly urgent note. Such a project was embedded in the politics of foreign mission work which stressed the absolute responsibility of Christians to spread the word of God.<sup>112</sup> The fact that this work was to be undertaken by an Anglican sisterhood was viewed advantageously, in contrast to the reception of these groups in England in the 1850s. The same degree of prejudice did not exist toward sisterhoods in British society by the 1880s as had operated at mid-century. Moreover, while Anglican religious orders for women were a relatively new phenomenon in Canada - the first indigenous order, the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine was established in Toronto in 1884 - they did not generate the popular opposition which had originally existed in England.<sup>113</sup> Significantly, however, just as supporters of the Society of St. Margaret in East Sussex and the Community of All Hallows in Norfolk had promoted these Orders on the basis of their

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<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag.

<sup>113</sup> In The Call of the Cloister, Peter Anson, however, refers to the threat to burn down the SSJD convent by members of Toronto's Orangemen, 577. The Tractarian threat was neither as visible or as virulent in Canada as it was perceived to be in Britain; hence religious orders for women were more-readily accepted. Former SSM Sisters founded the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity in Wisconsin in 1882. Other indigenous Anglican communities were established in New York, Ohio, and San Francisco by 1901. See the Churchman's Gazette, Vol. 4.3 (June 1884) for the arrival of the SSJD sisters in Winnipeg in 1884.

functional identity, so too did the Bishop of New Westminster create an identity for the sisters based on their commitment and labour, rather than on their spirituality. Unlike the controversy which surrounded the establishment of All Hallows in England in the 1850s, the arrival of Anglican sisters in British Columbia thirty years later, whose work would focus on the "cultivation of these dusky maidens," was warmly welcomed in the diocese.<sup>114</sup>

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### **"The Nuns Go West": Civilised Pioneers and the Creation of the All Hallows' School<sup>115</sup>**

In October 1884, the three sisters finally arrived at Yale full of expectation and enthusiasm. From the onset, the exotic landscape of British Columbia dramatically shaped their experiences and the manner by which they fashioned their identities. There exists no description of their passage aboard a Great Western Steamer from England to New York and then by railway across the continent, but Mrs. Pelly, a Community Associate who accompanied the sisters on the final stage of the voyage, left an account of this formidable experience: "The journey was a rough and dangerous one - trestle bridges had to be crossed after dark, on one of the which the party were almost caught by a train. A precipitous bank led down to the Fraser, which was crossed in a small Indian canoe, a steep climb on the other side bringing the

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<sup>114</sup> In November 1884 the Churchman's Gazette welcomed the sisters' arrival with alacrity: "Three members of the Community of All Hallows, Ditchingham Sisters, Amy, Alice, and Elizabeth arrived in the Diocese last month and have been established in the Mission house, Yale; where they will conduct a School for Indian Girls." Churchman's Gazette, Nov. 1884. See also the NWQP, no. 3, (January 1885).

<sup>115</sup> See Sr. Violet, All Hallows, Ditchingham, Chapter Six.

party to the Mission House."<sup>116</sup> Upon their arrival, the sisters took up residence in the abandoned four-room mission house which served as their home until the Onderdonk house became available. Their earliest description of their new environment, anonymously written for the Community newsletter in England, emphasised the ways in which the sisters were captivated by the spiritual and almost magical power of the landscape and their new home:

Standing in the verandah which shelters the front of the Mission House, one seems almost at the bottom of a deep basin - so shut in on all sides, is Yale by mountains....above the adjacent hills, towers Hope Mountain, the Mont Blanc of this district, pure and serene in shadow, radiant and sparkling in sunshine: typical may we not add, of the spirit that reigns in that modest little wooden home, where cultivation and refinement temper daily labour, and the rays of Divine love are reflected joyously back from the humblest duties.<sup>117</sup>

The sisters' idyllic romanticisation of their new surroundings illustrates their collective mind set as they prepared to commence their Canadian mission. Characterised by other observers as "pretty rough," "decaying," and full of "indolent, somewhat heavy Indians," Yale was transformed in the sisters' minds, its buildings "dotted picturesquely along a strip of country lying between high hills and the margin of the river." This spiritualised landscape

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<sup>116</sup> Work for the Far West, January 1909. New Westminster Quarterly Paper, no. 2, October 1884. The English Committee of the New Westminster Mission recorded that "Tuesday, September 9th, was a bright day for the Mission. The Rev'd Henry Edwardes and three of the Ditchingham Sisters for Indian work, Miss Boyce for Nicola School, and Miss G. Pelly, the Bishop's sister-in-law, left England for the Diocese." The sisters' travel expenses - £145, 4s. were paid for by the CAH. For a contemporary account of a similar voyage, see Violet Sillitoe's description of her crossing in 1880 in Bridge, By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer. CAH archives contain a sketchbook by Sister Althea, entitled "Across the Bright Continent" which recorded her journey to BC in 1891. The book includes sketches of the mission house, and various landscapes. The children's picture book by Jonathan Routh, entitled, The Nuns Go West, displays pictures of nuns with bears, Natives, and in wilderness scenes.

<sup>117</sup> East and West, Easter 1886. This was the magazine's first issue, therefore, letters from the Yale sisters written in 1884 & 1885 also appear in this issue. The letter's author was not identified.

was one where nature and Christian civilisation existed in harmony. Just like that of "Mont Blanc" in the distance, the mission house was pervaded by the 'serene' yet 'sparkling' spirit of the sisters, where "cultivation and refinement" nestled amid the chaotic wilderness of the British Columbia interior.<sup>118</sup> Thus the relationship between the majestic landscape and its newest residents highlighted the sisters' paradoxical identity as "civilised pioneers."

The manner by which these women measured the experiences of their mission, and constructed their identities in relation to them, emerges primarily within accounts of their work in varied correspondence.<sup>119</sup> Through their communication with the government and the clergy, they fashioned an official, public identity. In their letters to the Community in England, such as that cited above, a more personal identity emerges. From the time of their arrival in Yale, the sisters wrote lengthy, detailed letters to the Mother Superior, in which they described their fears, their hopes, their needs, and their frustrations. Unlike the annual reports of the House of Mercy, in which successes and trials were recorded in a corporate fashion, these letters illustrate how the sisters interpreted their imperial mission and their place within the Canadian West. Yet, even within this correspondence, often published in the Community magazine, *East & West*, personal identity was often eschewed in favour of a collective voice, rendering unclear the nature of personal dynamics among the Yale sisters and their differing interpretations of their experiences. The sisters rarely referred to themselves directly in these texts, however, their commentary upon their environment

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<sup>118</sup> No doubt the sisters were actually referring to Mount Baker in Washington state.

<sup>119</sup> On the politics of women's colonial narratives, see Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); and Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God*, esp. 47-48.



and their host society reveals the ambiguities of their identities as constructed within the colonial context. Taken together, these sources provide invaluable insight into the nature of the relationship between the sisters and the imperial landscape, revealing how the sisters positioned themselves in relation to the discourses of race, class, religion, and gender that operated in this highly-charged terrain.<sup>120</sup>

The sisters' experiences were shaped significantly by the relationships they developed with their host societies, in particular, the Natives with whom they lived and worked. Although these women had been led to believe that they would be supplied with basic necessities upon arrival at Yale, they soon discovered that their survival depended upon their own ingenuity and the generosity of neighbours. Diocesan funds were scarce and several years passed before the sisters were able to relocate to the Onderdonk house. Recollecting their first All Saints Day in 1884, the sisters' self-conscious self-representation in their letters emphasised the precarious nature of their existence: "Three Sisters, poor, landless, homeless, but for the temporary shelter offered us in the then vacant Parsonage, childless and fearful of the unknown future, we gathered round a tiny Altar in a tiny Oratory to keep the Feast of our dedication, and to invoke God's blessing on our lowly endeavours."<sup>121</sup>

Their first winter at Yale and their attempts to establish a school for Native children presented a number of difficulties.<sup>122</sup> They found themselves

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<sup>120</sup> For an analysis of the ways in which ideologies of race were constructed in the nineteenth century, see Robert Young, "Sex and Inequality: The Cultural Construction of Race," in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>121</sup> *All Hallows in the West*, (AHW) 3: 3, Christmastide 1901.

<sup>122</sup> For a comparative study of the trials which faced Roman Catholic sisters in their attempts to establish Native schools in the American West, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, esp. Chapter Four. Iron Ware explores the physical and ideological obstacles which plagued Annette Ackroyd in her attempt to set up a mission school in India. See *Beyond the Pale*, part III.

not only without a proper residence, but also without a building in which to teach. Sister Amy, the Sister Superior at Yale, explained how their circumstances affected the genesis of the school:

As a beginning, we thought of receiving four or five Indian girls--in our small house it was not possible to accommodate more--but, as various difficulties occurred to delay the arrival of these children from 'up country,' we tried, with the Bishop's permission, to start a day school for the Yale Indians in their own Church, screening off the altar.<sup>123</sup>

During the first week, five Native children attended, with numbers rising to eighteen by week three. As winter set in, however, both the ink and the children's' fingers began to freeze in the wooden church and the classes moved into the mission house.<sup>124</sup> Not all of the children were willing participants in the sisters' venture, some needed literally to be dragged from their homes. An unpublished contemporary account explained: "In the early days of All Hallows' Indian School one of the Sisters used to have to go down into a keekly hole at Yale to bring back pupils whose longing to return to their old ways had proved to strong for them."<sup>125</sup> Violet Sillitoe described these "keekwillie holes" as "underground dwellings [with] a hole on the surface, in which was placed a notched pole, forming the entrance and exit, and allowing the smoke to escape."<sup>126</sup> She noted that "even as late as 1884" Native families inhabited such dwellings in wintertime. Tellingly, these methods of coercion did not figure in the published versions of the sisters' letters home. Undeterred by these challenges, the sisters held classes for boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 17, taught by Sister Alice Louisa and Sister

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<sup>123</sup> "Letters from the Branch of the Ditchingham Sisterhood," Indian Mission, Yale, January 19, 1885. NWQP, no. 4 (April 1885).

<sup>124</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale, January 19, 1885." NWQP, April 1885.

<sup>125</sup> "Our Indians in British Columbia," A hand-written, unsigned account of the sisters experiences at Yale, possibly written by one of the sisters. All Hallows file, PABC.

<sup>126</sup> Sillitoe, Early Days in British Columbia, 25.

Elizabeth, with the aid of "Tom," a Native interpreter.<sup>127</sup> Originally, the school catered primarily to Native pupils, although evidence exists to suggest that several white girls attended as day pupils in 1884.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, however, the earliest records of the school refer only to Native pupils. Not until the acquisition of the Onderdonk house in 1887 did white pupils form a sizable presence at the school.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, while the sisters had arrived in British Columbia specifically to educate Native girls, they seem initially to have been willing to accept boys as well, with the hopes that these pupils might then be induced to go to Richard Small's mission school for boys at Lytton.

As they had done with those whom they worked and lived in Ditchingham, the sisters soon developed close bonds with the children. Their initial description of the education of their male pupils provides a glimpse into the nature of their relationship with these boys:

[The boys] attend irregularly, often having jobs of afternoon work, such as felling trees, chopping wood, or fetching water, by which they earn a small maintenance. They evince a desire to learn, and are fairly intelligent, though very shy; their costume and general appearance is somewhat startling at first to an English eye; but the 'fierce banditti,' as on our first acquaintance we laughingly called them, have won a very warm place in the hearts of their teachers.<sup>130</sup>

What is interesting here is the ways in which the sisters represented their male pupils to the readers in England: the boys are depicted as industrious,

<sup>127</sup> See *NWQP*, July 1885; *Churchman's Gazette*, March 1884. Tom also served as an interpreter at Wright's school in Lytton.

<sup>128</sup> The All Hallows' school register for 1884 includes the names Minnie Bessbech, Mabel Williams (from Calgary), Alice and Nannie Teague, the daughters of William Teague, a Yale trustee, and Grace and Florrie Johnson. These girls were all white day pupils. See the collection of artefacts pertaining to the All Hallows School at the Yale Museum, Yale, BC. These pupils may have attended the school for spiritual instruction. Violet Sillitoe recorded the presence of white girls in 1885 during her visit with the sisters at Yale.

<sup>129</sup> The impact of these pupils upon the school will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>130</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885. *NWQP*, no.4, April 1885.

bright and endearing, their masculinity reinforced by their physical labour. Their lack of regular attendance at school was justified in an effort to emphasise the boys' enterprising nature. Although their race branded them as visually 'different,' the 'fierce banditti' became domesticated in the sister's account. Within the discourse of late-Victorian racial ideology, the taming of the 'fierce banditti' created an identity for Native boys predicated on a firm belief that 'heathen' savages could be transformed into model Christian gentlemen. Such a representation was certainly important in order to receive financial support for their work. It also, however, suggests an awareness among the sisters that the education of Native children must rely on a careful balance between white and Native culture. Maternal affection operated as bridge between these cultures: it allowed the sisters to establish close relationships with the boys by granting these women some insight into the dynamics of Native life.<sup>131</sup> The creation of a domestic environment was crucial to imperial politics, as Anne McClintock explains, "colonialism took shape around the Victorian invention of domesticity and the idea of the home."<sup>132</sup> The notion of "home," and of the sisters' collective identity as mothers emerged in how the sisters both crafted the school and their relation to its pupils. When the seasonal migration of the Native community at Yale to Spuzzum resulted in the temporary closing of the school, the sisters worked to make the schoolroom more attractive, "fitt[ing] up the largest room in the house for school, hoping that our children might return."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See Myra Rutherdale on the ways in which motherhood was an essential part of the missionary identity. esp. Chapter Five.

<sup>132</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 36. See also Myra Rutherdale's analysis of female missionaries' attempts to domesticate the Canadian North in *Women and the White Man's God*, Chapter Four; and Jean and John Comaroff's analysis of the manipulation of domestic space as a tool in the imperial project in *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

<sup>133</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885. *NWQP*, no.4, April 1885.

Thus, the sisters' relationship with these male pupils was bound up within discourses of race and gender; significantly, like their own existence, this relationship was also highly precarious.

The sisters' educational ideals extended to the small group of Native girls which began to attend the mission school within a few weeks. Their representation reveals the extent to which the sisters had to negotiate ideas of moral reform within the realities of conducting a school. Readers of the *New Westminster Quarterly Paper* were introduced to the girls individually: "gentle" 'Alice,' an "Indian child," "a bright little half-breed, called Christine," and "little 'Maggie,' such a sweet little blossom of a child that one longs to take her in," whose uncle had converted to Christianity.<sup>134</sup> This sentimental depiction was geared to elicit financial support from England, as the sisters explained the cultural conditions of their work:

[T]his is an expensive country, and the maintenance of our children will be, in a measure, a constant source of anxiety. We cannot look for much help from Indian parents, though in some cases, I believe, they can afford it. The Indians are a slow people; they have very little idea of progress: what was good enough for the parents in the past, must, they think, be good enough for their children in the present. Our work must approve itself to them before they will trust or support it.<sup>135</sup>

This passage helps to provide a context in which to understand how the sisters viewed the Native community in British Columbia. Their attitudes were based primarily on the tenets of nineteenth-century imperial ideology and specifically on the belief that women like themselves, on the basis of their race, nationality, status, and religious character, had a duty to transform

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. Christine was the daughter of white father Dugald McDonald and Indian mother "Annie." See *Churchman's Gazette*, May 1884. Maggie's uncle was her only remaining male relative.

<sup>135</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale", January 19, 1885, *NWQP*, no. 4, April 1885.

colonial subjects in their own image.<sup>136</sup> Central to this belief was the notion of their potential for change. Such pupils must merely be directed and coached in the proper manner. At the All Hallows' school, the negotiation of "English" and "Native" identities was complicated by the nature of the relationship between sisters and their Native pupils: it was personal, maternal, and protective.<sup>137</sup> Alice, Christine, and Maggie were presented not only as representative of the potential and the problems associated with the work, but also as individual children - gentle, bright and sweet. While the sisters believed that this transformation was in the best interests of the Interior Salish, they were also aware that change required both time and money, neither of which these people were obliged to give. They therefore attempted to choreograph their work with the realities of Native culture.

The construction of racial identities, not only for Native society but also for themselves, became central to the implementation of the sisters' mission. Within these identities, ideas about morality, especially sexual morality, were fundamental to the practices of negotiating difference and power. In the sisters' work with fallen women in England, their own assumed moral purity in relation to their 'fallen' charges mediated difference and power. At Yale, racial classifications complicated the politics of the sisters' moral hegemony. Weeks after their arrival, the sisters reported that they were approached by "a few half-breed girls [who] showed a desire to

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<sup>136</sup> On the imperative of white women's mission in the colonies, see Ware, Beyond the Pale, esp Chap. 3.

<sup>137</sup> On the maternal aspects of Native education, see Coburn and Smith, Spirited Lives; Myra Rutherdale, Women and the White Man's God.

receive instruction from us" and were "admitted gladly" to the school.<sup>138</sup> A sister's description of these girls reveals the ways in which discourses of race, morality, and sexuality cooperated in the Canadian West: "They speak English, and, having attended the Free School, are fairly advanced; but as religious teaching and influence are greatly needed by this particular class of children, who are often placed in circumstances of peculiar temptation, we are making a special effort for them."<sup>139</sup> In colonial British Columbia, historian Adele Perry explains that white society "constructed mixed-blood people as a unique and particular kind."<sup>140</sup> The construction of colonial discourses, based on fears of miscegenation, and assumptions of sexual profligacy among 'half-breeds' affected how the sisters viewed their mission at Yale. For the sisters, such discourses of racial degeneracy were influenced by those of prostitution which operated at the English House of Mercy. As neither "Indian" nor "white," but very clearly "other," the "half-breed" girls were positioned not as inherently immoral or sinful, but, like "fallen women," as susceptible to the presumed promiscuity of their environment, and thus in need of the sisters' special care.

The sisters' identities were also characterised by ambiguity in relation to both white and Native women in the Fraser Valley. Such ambiguity emerges from their discussion of colonial racial politics. In an effort to extend

<sup>138</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885. *NWQP*, no.4, April 1885. "Half breed" was the pejorative term used to describe individuals of mixed ancestry. Specifically, it referred to the off-spring of a white father and a Native mother. For a discussion of the problematic construction of the 'half-breed' in colonial discourse, see Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October*, 28 (Spring 1984), 125 -134. On the construction of mixed-blood peoples in British Columbia, see Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 74 - 78. Although the sisters recognised ethnic distinctions between Native and mixed-blood peoples, they commonly referred to both groups of pupils as "Indian." For clarity, and unless distinctions are evident in the sources, this usage will be maintained throughout this chapter.

<sup>139</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885, *NWQP*, no. 4, April 1885.

<sup>140</sup> Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 75. She notes that while "a minority [of white observers] thought this specificity positive," most viewed the notion of "half-breed" identities as "disturbing and confusing."

their cultural influence to the women of Yale, as well as their to children, Sister Alice Louisa led twice-weekly classes for "half-breed" and Native women "to receive reading, writing and religious instruction."<sup>141</sup> Although the sisters would have liked to merge this class with a white women's guild, they were aware of the problems such a situation would pose: "at present this would not be possible, as those will well understand who know anything of the state of society in the Colonies, and the consequent difficulties with which we have to deal in this direction."<sup>142</sup> The sister's language here speaks to the ways in which these women framed their sense of moral superiority in relation not only to Native and "half-breed" women, but also to white colonial women.<sup>143</sup> After just three months in "the Colonies" it appeared that the sisters had become finely attuned to existing racial politics and had adopted the racial classification used generally by white society. However, unlike other white settlers at Yale, the sisters seemed to be uncomfortable with these rigid racial distinctions. Their attitudes toward racial politics resonated with ambivalence: at once knowing yet naive, pragmatic yet idealistic. Moreover, their self-identification was fraught with ambiguity, differentiating themselves not only from Native women, but from colonial white women as well. As it did in England, but in differing ways, the sisters' sense of moral and spiritual superiority as women religious served to differentiate them sharply from the other women of the Fraser Valley.

The sisters' racial attitudes also emerge in relation to the mission work

<sup>141</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885, *NWQP*, no. 4, April 1885. The article reported that "Sister Alice's class of Indian and half-breed women has a good influence."

<sup>142</sup> "Letter from the Indian Mission, Yale," January 19, 1885, *NWQP*, no. 4, April 1885.

<sup>143</sup> According to Susan Thorne, "The entire edifice of missionary "feminism" - the employment opportunities, the valorization of (British) women's skills and virtues, the institutional and social space for self-assertion, collective action, and aggressive challenging of male prerogatives - rested on the existence of a degraded female Other in the colonies and at home." 60. Thorne argues that "the construction of middle-class women's professional capacities as a missionary vocation may have precluded" solidarities based on race and class. 61.



they carried out at Yale. In her letter reprinted in the *New Westminster Quarterly Paper*, Sister Amy spoke of “a very nice service in the Church for whites” and “an encouraging service at the Indian church,” which, through the assistance of two interpreters, combined a Native service with English hymns “and an earnest, inspiring address, which did us all good.”<sup>144</sup> Within the Sisterhood and its various works in England, religion functioned to provide much-needed spiritual renewal. At Yale, however, it also served the purpose of highlighting racial difference. The town supported two Anglican churches, significantly referred to throughout the sisters’ reports not by their actual names, but as the “white church” and the “Indian church.” Sister Amy’s letter discloses her ambiguous identity in relation to these churches: not many English women would have referred to “the Church for whites.”<sup>145</sup> Moreover, in contrast to the “very nice” service and the “white church,” the “encouraging service” at the “Indian church” was positioned in Sister Amy’s account as providing the sisters the greatest spiritual comfort. In the absence of their own Community-based services at their Ditchingham home, the sisters drew upon both the “white” and the “Indian” services in order to fortify their spirituality as women religious. In the colonial context, the relationships these women developed with both cultures were essential to the nurture of their own religious identities.

By the middle of February 1885, both the schools at Yale and Lytton were managing to survive despite the severity of the climate and the lack of resources. The sisters’ household had grown to include six “children,” one, whom they called ‘Naomi,’ was “bigger than ourselves, and not far from twenty.”<sup>146</sup> At Lytton, the school had attracted three boys, including the

<sup>144</sup> *NWQP*, no. 4 (April 1885). Sister Amy to the DNW, February 12, 1885.

<sup>145</sup> Her Maltese background may have coloured her views on racial difference in Canada.

<sup>146</sup> *NWQP*, no. 4 (April 1885). Sister Amy to the *NWQP*, February 12, 1885.

William who had been one of Sister Amy's "fierce banditti" at Yale.<sup>147</sup> The transitory patterns of Native life hampered the efforts of regular teaching, yet the sisters remained optimistic. Yale missionary Henry Edwardes explained: "I am afraid it has been rather a hard fight with the sisters here at Yale; they suffered from the severe cold very much, but they are picking up again now the frost is over."<sup>148</sup> Another fire had ripped through the town, which had only been saved by a sudden change of the direction of the wind. Financial concerns remained high as the sisters depended solely on the generosity of patrons in Canada and Britain.<sup>149</sup> Yet Sister Amy felt it was important that the mission not be presented to readers back home as wholly dependent. As such, her public letters emphasised the domestic utility of sisters and pupils alike: "Sister Elizabeth is able to make bread nicely; and we do our own washing. We hope the girls will soon prove useful."<sup>150</sup> At the House of Mercy in Ditchingham, penitents were also expected to engage in domestic labour and similarly were presented to the public as contributing to their own upkeep.<sup>151</sup> Not mentioned in Sister Amy's letter, but equally important to the mission's survival, was the fact the Sister Elizabeth was also taking in

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<sup>147</sup> According to Edwardes, William was "the ugliest Indian in British Columbia; yet, in his way, he is quite a gentleman-nice mannered, and very willing to work and please." Within missionary discourse, the 'ideal' Indian pupil must be docile but not lazy in order to effect reform. William had thus been effectively tamed. Significantly, Edwardes began his letter (to Mrs. Pelly) with the traditional Indian greeting, "Klah how yah." *NWQP*, no. 4 (April 1885). On the significance of "docile bodies" in the art of discipline, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 135-169.

<sup>148</sup> *NWQP*, no. 4 (April 1885).

<sup>149</sup> Significantly, *NWQP* donation and subscription lists did not include the names of Neckar, Hurst or Rolfe.

<sup>150</sup> Sister Amy to DNW, Yale, 12 Feb 1885. *NWQP*, no. 4 (April 1885).

<sup>151</sup> Although other studies (Miller, McNally, Barman, Haig-Brown) have presented the domestic labour of Indian pupils in terms of racial ideology, at the Community of All Hallows in England, penitents, orphans, pupils and sisters all were employed in various labours to maintain the Community's diverse operations. The division of labour was based on class not race and was complicated by monastic ideals of self-sacrifice.

washing.<sup>152</sup> Utility and self-sufficiency figured prominently in Victorian discourses of philanthropy and were central not only to the promotion of charitable work, but also to the sisters' survival in their new surroundings.

Sister Amy's approach to financial matters was designed to play upon such discourses and to create an identity for the sisters and their work which stressed their independence. Her letters at this time also reveal a degree of vulnerability, as she wrote to a friend early in 1885, "With our cares, disappointments, work, failures, hopes, and wishes, 'daily bread' is still a small anxiety; but we have much sympathy from England. Perhaps in the summer I may be able to do a little collecting here, and in surrounding settlements."<sup>153</sup> The publication of the letter in the diocesan newspaper exposed the material needs of the sisters' mission: Sister Amy hoped that friends back home might send bacon and tea along with their sympathy.<sup>154</sup> The suggestion that she had to resort to begging to make ends meet highlighted the precariousness of the sisters' existence; certainly genteel ladies in England did not include begging in their philanthropic routine.<sup>155</sup> As the long winter months at Yale dragged on, the sisters' vulnerability reflected the precarious nature of their existence in respect to both the environment and the goodwill of their host society as they attempted to negotiate colonial terrain.

The geographical vastness and complexity of the Fraser Valley intensified the sisters' situation. While the Bishop was based in New Westminster, almost one hundred miles away, the missionary heart of the

<sup>152</sup> Work for the Far West, 1902. The paper presented an historical account of the school's development.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Sister Amy, Yale, 12 Feb 1885. NWQP, no. 4 (April 1885).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, She wrote: "Thanks for the parcel of pictures, and your kind intention of helping our housekeeping stores. Bacon and tea will be as acceptable as anything."

<sup>155</sup> Frank Prochaska notes that begging was not an acceptable form of fund raising for ladies. See Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

valley was located in Lytton, a small settlement about fifty miles north of Yale. The decline in Yale's population after the departure of the CPR lessened the town's significance on the Church's map. Due to the scope of the region, visits from Bishop Sillitoe, Richard Small, and the sister's new chaplain, Sewall, who was based in Lytton, were infrequent. With the departure of missionary Darrell Horlock, the sisters were left without a resident cleric and had to rely solely on missionary E. L. Wright, who often spent time away from the town. The loss of regular clerical support would have deprived the sisters of the practice of daily Communion, an important cornerstone in their devotional lives. They must have felt this spiritual isolation quite keenly. In one of his annual reports, Bishop Sillitoe attempted to revive interest in their mission: "The work of the Sisters is so far off the beaten track of life in the Diocese that I daresay many of the more recently arrived Churchmen are unaware of it altogether. Otherwise I am certain they would derive a much larger measure of support from the Diocese than is at present the case."<sup>156</sup>

Within this context of irregular clerical contact and celebration of the liturgy, the establishment of good relations with the diverse residents of Yale was essential. Various members of the clergy were keen to emphasise how the sisters were being accepted by all. Their reports helped to validate the sisters' presence at Yale and to shore up their own identity as missionaries. Visiting from Lytton in the summer of 1885, Rev. Henry Edwardes recorded impressive results: "the Sisters...are doing an excellent work amongst the females, adults and children, and are greatly beloved."<sup>157</sup> Deacon Wright testified to the extent of popular support: "The Sisters are a great help to the Mission and working hard. They enlist everyone's sympathy for their work,

<sup>156</sup> Churchman's Gazette, October 1887.

<sup>157</sup> NWQP, no 5, July 1885.

and all are kind to them. \$50 came one day from up country, the sender of which they knew nothing of. Little presents of clothing are sent, and toys, etc., for the children."<sup>158</sup> Members of the Chinese community at Yale also served an important function for the sisters. Their extensive market garden provided the fledgling school with produce. The Chinese were perceived by the clergy and sisters as reliable workers, and throughout their years in Canada, the sisters depended upon Chinese men for gardening, outdoor work and construction.<sup>159</sup> For his part, Bishop Sillitoe was primarily concerned with relations between the sisters and the white community at Yale. Revealing his educational agenda, he noted, "it is satisfactory, too, to know that the work of the Sisters is so appreciated by the whites, that if the mission house had sufficient accommodation, many of the white children would be sent to them for education on the terms they charge."<sup>160</sup>

The survival of the sisters' mission depended as much on local patronage, as it did on the sisters' entrepreneurial initiatives. The Easter offertory in 1885 provided over \$40 in addition to donations from local citizens, including bacon, winter stockings, eggs, trout, oysters, ham, and potatoes. While waiting for the purchase of Onderdonk's house to be finalised, the sisters obtained the former railway hospital, located next to the mission house, which they fitted up as a dormitory for their nine pupils.<sup>161</sup>

The addition of this building allowed them to set up an oratory at the mission

<sup>158</sup> Deacon Wright, Sept 22, 1885. NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885).

<sup>159</sup> Edwardes explained that "A Chinee [sic] works steadily, never getting drunk, whilst the white labourer, after pay-day, will absent himself for days, drinking and gambling." NWQP, no 5, July 1885.

<sup>160</sup> NWQP, no 5, July 1885. He ended his statement "whilst the education given at the public schools - quite secular, but, in its way very good-- is entirely free from cost." The previous year, the Churchman's Gazette and New Westminster Diocesan Chronicle referred to secular education in derogatory terms: "It means the production of a race of clever, irresponsible animals." Vol 4 (April 1, 1884).

<sup>161</sup> The railway hospital was described as "not much more than a long low shed." Work for the Far West, Jan. 1902

house - "that essential need of a Religious House" - where women's classes could also be held.<sup>162</sup> The sisters managed to raise \$300 from the sale of various goods to acquire furniture and fittings for the new building. These goods included articles sent from the Sisterhood in England, items produced by local crafts people, plus home-grown cherries from the mission house garden. The congregation at New Westminster's Holy Trinity Church also proved a valuable resource to the school, raising money, collecting parcels of groceries, and supplying blue serge for the girls' dresses. Nor were the sisters hesitant to ask for assistance directly in diocesan publications. In *An Appeal from the Sisters*, Sister Elizabeth emphasised the domestic nature of the mission, borrowing heavily on notions of female dependence within Victorian gender ideology: "I am wishing so much that somebody would give us some baize for curtains to the windows and doors. It would make such a difference when the terrible cold comes; but it is so dear, I do not think there is any chance of our being able to buy it."<sup>163</sup> The Paper's editors were more direct: "Who amongst our friends will send forty or fifty yards of baize to make the good Sisters a little more comfortable in their cold Mission House during the coming winter, with the thermometer 20 [degrees] below zero?"<sup>164</sup>

<sup>162</sup> NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885).

<sup>163</sup> Letter from the sisters. NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885).

<sup>164</sup> NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885). In the New Westminster Quarterly Papers such local generosity was often contrasted with a lack of support from England. The 'Home News' section declared boldly: "It is clear that Christ's work is blocked for want of money." For Bishop Sillitoe, the lack of material assistance was seen as a personal affront: "I am bitterly disappointed at the failure of support from home.... I cannot help feeling some indignation as well at being left to do the best I can with obligations which home support, a year or two ago, encouraged me to incur." He argued that on the strength of former donations "I have opened up Missions, and brought men out from England to occupy them; I have established Schools, and sent for teachers to superintend them; and then, suddenly, and without one word of warning, contributions fail, and no alternative is left us but to abandon much promising and prosperous work." His despondency was total: "I have no heart to write of work while this financial burden is weighing on me." Letter from Bishop Sillitoe, Sept 24, 1885. NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885).

From the time of their arrival in Yale, the sisters were aware that the success of their work among the Interior Salish depended not only on financing operations but, more importantly, on negotiating cultural differences. Both required skill in the not-so-subtle art of colonial coercion. Material assistance sometimes came from unusual sources, such as that from the pupils and masters at Trinity College at the University of Toronto, whose promise of support enabled the sisters to take two Native girls into their house.<sup>165</sup> The act of convincing the white community to part with its money to fund the imperial civilising project was much less complex, however, than that of convincing Native parents to participate by parting with their children. Those who were willing to send their children to schools tended to favour day rather than residential schools.<sup>166</sup> Understandably, such parents often needed to be convinced that a full-time boarding school education was in the best interests of their children. Only by a tripartite commitment could Native education succeed. While the sisters' commitment was sustained by faith, that of the Interior Salish and of members of the white community required the sisters to exercise different forms of skill and initiative.

During the school's first official year, 1885, only nine pupils were registered.<sup>167</sup> Sister Amy explained the reason why: "I am afraid we must not expect any rapid increase in the number of our pupils, owing to the extreme reluctance of Native parents to part with their children on any terms; and when payment for board is mentioned, their refusals are decided."<sup>168</sup> While the notion of educating their children may have been amenable to some parents, they were less willing to part with their daughters for a period of up

<sup>165</sup> NWQP, April 1885.

<sup>166</sup> See Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens on the problems associated with residential schools.

<sup>167</sup> By comparison, the public school at Yale admitted 40 pupils in the 1884/85 school year. See the Kamloops' Inland Sentinel, Sept. 4, 1884.

<sup>168</sup> Sister Amy, Sept. 14, 1885. NWQP, no. 6 (October 1885).

to ten months a year, and certainly not willing to pay. The boarding schools the Sisterhood operated in England catered primarily to orphans, or those whose families lived overseas, but in British Columbia, this system was far less popular: the 1884 agreement with the Bishop, for example, had called for the establishment of day not residential schools. Moreover, the English school year, with holidays at Christmas, Easter, and in the summer, was irrelevant to the annual cycle of Native life. Although residential schools were favoured by the Canadian government, it was not the state which determined the type of school the sisters would create. Rather, the Yale school was based on the Sisterhood's own institutions in England: the boarding system there was adapted through necessity, but also because it, like the House of Mercy, allowed the sisters to extend a round-the-clock moral and spiritual influence over the girls.

The pupils who initially attended the Yale school often came from Native or mixed-blood families who in some way were unable to care for their daughters by themselves.<sup>169</sup> These families looked to the sisters as a means of providing a surrogate home for their children. This helps to explain why pupils often came to the school from regions throughout the lower mainland, such as Spuzzum, New Westminster, Chilliwack, and Bootherings, and why the "half-breed" girls, whose parents often did not reside together, represented such a high proportion of the school's original students.<sup>170</sup> Thus, although their worlds were vastly different, the Native girls at the All Hallows' School often shared some similarities in their family backgrounds with the penitent women at the House of Mercy, and the pupils

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<sup>169</sup> Mali Quelqueltako and Christine Macdonald provided two such examples. Neither girl lived with both her parents.

<sup>170</sup> DIA School files, PABC, RG 10, vol. 6042, file 165-1-1, reel B 9826. All Hallows School Report, 1885. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, many of the "half-breed" girls at All Hallows had not resided with both parents prior to attending the school. Some pupils also came from Yale.



of the orphanage schools. Christine Macdonald, who entered the school in 1884, was a "half-breed" whose mother Annie suffered from poor health and whose father was seemingly absent. Significantly, Christine had been baptised in the Church of England earlier that year.<sup>171</sup> To a certain extent, in its early years, the school operated, as did the House of Mercy, as a type of refuge for girls deemed "at risk" by the sisters and in this capacity, it allowed the sisters to perform their identity as reformers and protectors to such girls.<sup>172</sup> That "half-breed" children made up a significant proportion of the pupils at Yale is evidenced by the Department of Indian Affairs 1885 report which listed the school as "All Hallows Mission School for Indian and Half-breed girls" and mentioned that one child was paid for by her white father.<sup>173</sup> The sisters drew no such distinctions, referring simply but proprietorially to "Our Indian School."

To the sisters, the surest way to increase support for their school was through the conversion of Native peoples to Christianity, which was the heart of their mission in the Fraser Valley. Just as the sisters measured the success of the school in terms of how many pupils attended, they judged their spiritual mission on the popularity of their religious services. Sister Amy's letter to the Community recorded their first Easter celebrations as particularly heartwarming.

We have been having the most encouraging services at the Indian Church this Easter. Crowds of Indians have come up from surrounding settlements; so many, that I think on Easter morning more than 100 assembled in the Church. We had some nice decorations put up for them, and on Holy Saturday a goodly number of women and boys came to help me dust and scrub, wreath and decorate. They were so reverent in

<sup>171</sup> Churchman's Gazette, May 1884. She was baptised in February 1884.

<sup>172</sup> See Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, for a consideration of how schools operated to protect girls at risk, esp. 230.

<sup>173</sup> DIA School files, PABC, RG 10, vol. 6042, file 165-1-1. AHS Report, 1885.

their work, and if the result is not exactly tasteful, I have no doubt its acceptance is not wanting of Him for whose glory all was so lovingly done.<sup>174</sup>

The sermon, delivered by Deacon Edwardes from Lytton, was interpreted in "the Yale and Thompson tongues" by 'Tom' and 'George,' two Native men who had become essential to the sisters' religious mission.<sup>175</sup> A willingness to incorporate Native languages into religious services was crucial to the highly-significant work of confirmations. During the autumn of 1886 the sisters prepared a number of Native candidates for confirmation by Bishop Sillitoe including one of their own pupils.<sup>176</sup> As in the case of penitents at the House of Mercy, the confirmation of Native peoples into the Church of England represented a significant achievement for the sisters and demonstrated an important way in which Victorian women utilised Christianity to impart the civilising mission of imperialism.<sup>177</sup> *The Churchman's Gazette*, proudly reported that the ten candidates remained in Yale for a week "attending daily instruction and submitting themselves to be catechised before being presented to the Bishop."<sup>178</sup> Two of the women in the party, who were prepared for confirmation by Sister Alice Louisa, had recently married white men.<sup>179</sup> The

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<sup>174</sup> Sister Amy, April 9, 1885. *NWQP*, no 5, July 1885.

<sup>175</sup> The Yale language was Sh'Atjinkujin, the Thompson language was Neklakapamuk. (AHW, *Ascentiontide* 1900). On the significance of translation to the work of conversion, see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "The Long Conversation: Establishing a Colonial Discourse," in *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*. Miller argues that "in the early years at least, the virulently assimilative thrust of residential schooling was weakened by an openness to Aboriginal languages." 415.

<sup>176</sup> *East and West*, Easter 1887. The pupil was described as "one of the *full* Indian girls from the Sisters' School." Emphasis in original.

<sup>177</sup> See Vron Ware's discussion of the relationship among Christianity, imperialism and feminism in *Beyond the Pale*.

<sup>178</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, December 1886. In the districts of Yale and Hope, the combined number of Church of England members was only 50 in 1886, with 21 communicants. These numbers were very low compared to the rest of the diocese. *Churchman's Gazette*, Nov 1886.

<sup>179</sup> *East and West*, Easter 1887.

marriages and confirmation of these Native women suggest the ambiguous relationship between the sisters and the racial discourses of imperialism among the white community in British Columbia. The project of indoctrinating these women into the Anglican Church certainly represents more traditional elements of imperial ideology, yet, the sisters' acceptance of mixed marriages was relatively progressive and reflected their attempts to adapt to the realities of the colonial context.<sup>180</sup>

Part of this strategy of adaptation involved developing sound relationships with the white community at Yale as well with the Interior Salish. Significantly, these relationships were often contrasted by the sisters in published accounts, revealing the extent to which these English sisters differentiated themselves from both groups. For example, the Christmas celebrations at the "Indian Church" in 1886 received extensive coverage in the *Churchman's Gazette*, read by Anglicans in Britain and BC, noting that "the chancel, reading desk and pulpit were very neatly decorated by the Indians themselves."<sup>181</sup> Strong attendance at the "Indian Church," whose adherents had arrived by canoe, was contrasted with that of "the white church," where bad weather was reported to have deterred the congregation from attending. For their own part, the sisters acknowledged that their reception by the white community at Yale was improving: "We have been very much cheered by the kindness and good will shewn to us by the townspeople this year. Our position here as Religious and Churchworkers is becoming so generally recognized that we can venture to go out to the people

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<sup>180</sup> The sisters' support of mixed-race marriage represents an example of the ways in which Christian identity could be superimposed over racial identities. Rutherford notes that female missionaries in the North also condoned mixed-race marriages, which were seen as a means of Native assimilation into white culture. See, *Women and the White Man's God*, 111.

<sup>181</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, January 1887.

much more warmly than we could have done a year ago."<sup>182</sup> These remarks reveal the ambiguous nature of the support from white society at Yale, complicating the earlier vision of social harmony which the clergy had attempted to depict to mission supporters back home. Although such statements are rare, they suggest that the sisters were not fully embraced by white society upon arrival in the province, highlighting the liminal position these women occupied in relation to the colonial society at Yale.

The process of adapting to the colonial context, as the sisters soon became aware, involved not only a concerted effort at Yale, but also a willingness to travel throughout the Fraser Valley. Unlike at the House of Mercy, where penitents applied to be rescued, initially at Yale the sisters had to seek out pupils to attend the school. Thus, in an effort to establish firmer relations with the Interior Salish, the sisters often embarked on extensive missionary expeditions. These journeys served a vital purpose to the sisters' mission, culturally, educationally, and spiritually. These camping trips are particularly instructive as they illustrate that although the vast territory of the region served to isolate the sisters, it also functioned as a means of bringing them into closer contact with the Interior Salish and therefore, helped them to understand the culture they were attempting to change. In their discursive representation, camp excursions are also highly significant, providing detailed accounts of how the sisters represented both themselves and the Native peoples of the Fraser Valley to the public in British Columbia and in England.

In their letters published in *East & West* the sisters rarely discussed in detail the Yale school, yet they wrote lengthy accounts of their missionary

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<sup>182</sup> *East and West*, Easter 1887. Local Christmas contributions came in the form of Christmas trees, candy and preserves, and an anonymous donation of 10lbs. of fruit and nuts.

expeditions. These travel narratives portrayed the exotic culture and landscape of this far-flung imperial territory to readers back home.<sup>183</sup> Such narratives were designed to generate support for the mission by demonstrating the extent of the sisters' influence and achievements beyond the school. They also served to refashion the landscape to British readers, and the sisters' identities in relation to it, by metaphorically domesticating the wilderness. Through utilising the discourses and practices of domesticity and maternalism in the camp, the sisters extended their civilising mission beyond the school. In so doing, they exposed the ambiguities of their relationship with Native culture and the instabilities of their identities as agents of imperialism.

The sisters' account of their first summer camping trip with several of their Native pupils to the mission house at Hope in 1886 was presented as a picture postcard: "Hope is a lovely little place, surrounded by beautiful woods...with delicious creeks for bathing."<sup>184</sup> The environment served to delight, but, significantly, also to cleanse.<sup>185</sup> For the sisters, and for pious Victorian readers, such cleansing rituals worked to shore up these women's identity as "civilised" in the colonial context. Just as the sisters relied on the landscape for cleaning rituals, they depended on their Native guide to teach

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<sup>183</sup> On the significance of travel narratives to the infrastructure of imperialism, see Sara Mills, Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism (London: Routledge, 1991) and Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 1992). Myra Rutherdale also explores this form of writing in Women and the White Man's God. She notes that female missionaries in the North did not romanticise the environment in which they lived and worked but did so with the British environment. She does, however, describe the ways in which the North was perceived and experienced as a site of adventure for these women. 73 -87.

<sup>184</sup> East and West. All Saints, 1886.

<sup>185</sup> In Imperial Leather. Anne McClintock highlights the Victorian fascination with clean bodies and argues that soap operated as a fetish to transform 'unclean' bodies into pure white ones. Significantly, the sisters did not comment on Native bathing rituals. On the Canadian context, see Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light. Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885 - 1925 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991).

them the domestic practices of the camp, such as meat tied in trees to allude predators, and tins of butter buried in the earth. These domestic rituals, coupled with the evening entertainment supplied by a chorus of coyotes, romanticised life in the Fraser Valley and served to differentiate it from that of civilised, white society. Even the raging forest fire was transformed into a spectacle of delight: "The heat...was intense, aggravated by fires on the mountains; but they were very beautiful at night, having the appearance, as tree after tree caught fire, of lamps on a terrace walk."<sup>186</sup> This postcard of cultural difference portrayed the landscape of Native peoples as exotic, wild and primitive, yet it was also domesticated, civilised, and made familiar by the tins of butter, and the evening 'concert' - even the burning forest was re-imagined as a terrace walk.<sup>187</sup>

Far from being purely recreational, missionary expeditions performed the vital function of providing an opportunity for the sisters and the Native girls to interact away from the close environment of the school and were crucial in shaping the sisters' understanding of Native culture. In the winter of 1886 one of the sisters travelled "up country" to attend to the illness one of their former Yale pupils, Annie, and to hold impromptu classes among the Interior Salish. Her account of the mission in a letter to the Mother Superior at Ditchingham, Lavinia Crosse, reflects the multi-dimensional nature of the sisters' identities in BC and the various ways in which they were performed. Annie had been a pupil in the sisters' class for Native women and her daughter, Christine Macdonald was currently a student at the Yale school.<sup>188</sup>

In her attempt to care for Annie, suffering from severe cold and rheumatism,

<sup>186</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1886.

<sup>187</sup> See Coburn and Smith, Spirited Lives for the ways in which Catholic nuns functioned as doctors in the American West.

<sup>188</sup> East and West, Easter, 1886. A sister's letter of Feb 13, 1886 to the Mother Superior. This sounds very much like Sister Amy. Annie was referred to as one of the sisters "former pupils."

the sister explained, "We have neither doctor nor 'drug-store' here now, so I could only give her homœopathic medicine."<sup>189</sup> Her description of her experience reveals that mission work required considerable adaptability:

I had about fourteen Indians for instruction that afternoon; but the next day, when it got about that a Sister was there, they poured in in such numbers, that there was hardly room for them, even on the floor, and I could not have a class for them in the church, as they desired, because there was no stove. I had intended sleeping in the vestry, but for this reason was unable to do so, so I rolled myself up in blankets on an Indian mat by the stove, and got as much sleep as the *rats* and the keeping in of the fire allowed, sharing the room with the old Indian father and blind mother, and with Christine and *her* mother!<sup>190</sup>

This letter helps to pinpoint the nature of the relationship between the All Hallows sisters and the Interior Salish. In keeping with their identity as women religious, the sisters viewed their mission in British Columbia as extending not only to the pupils of their school, but to the Native community more widely. Although it could be argued that this sister's involvement merely reflected an attempt to ingratiate All Hallows with the Native people of the area, the manner in which she attended to her former pupil suggests a practical approach and genuine concern. Certainly, her promise to visit the tribe during the warm weather "once in a moon" indicates, if nothing else, that some form of cultural dialogue existed.<sup>191</sup> Due to the nature of the source, Native perspectives, on the other hand, are harder to gauge. Their willingness, however, to attend make-shift classes, to receive medical care and instruction from the sister, and to share their accommodation with her, reveals, at the least, that her presence among them was not unwelcome.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., *Emphasis in original.*

<sup>191</sup> See Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, for a discussion of how nuns adapted to the American outback and the ways in which they were forced to negotiate among varied cultural contexts.

Expeditions "up country" also performed a vital spiritual function in the sisters' lives. Each year, members of the Community of All Hallows, in BC and England, as was the custom of Anglican sisters, spent time on retreat. Retreat was a time of contemplation and spiritual renewal: to the sisters, it was an essential element of their religiosity. While in England, the All Hallows' sisters would often spend their retreat at the Community house by the sea at Alderburgh, in British Columbia they were forced to improvise. Not only did they spend their retreat camping in the wilderness, but to do so, they depended upon the cooperation and consideration of the Interior Salish. Although members of the Native communities who guided, hosted, fed, and sheltered these women while on retreat may not have been aware of their significance to the sisters' spiritual lives, certainly the sisters must have acknowledged how both the functional and the spiritual aspects of their identities as women religious relied upon the efforts of those who supported their annual retreat.

In the spring of 1887, Sisters Amy and Alice Louisa embarked on a ten-day excursion with their pupils to the mission house at Lytton, forty-eight miles from Yale, and from there to Pretannie, at the junction of the Fraser and Thompson rivers. This trip functioned both as the sisters' retreat and as a showcase of their pupils' talents. Unlike the "imperial spectacle" which characterised the Sillitoe's camp at Pretannie described earlier, the sisters' camping excursions were more modest affairs, but just as the camp allowed the Bishop to exercise his powers as judiciary, it served too, as a venue for the sisters to extend their influence. At the same time, however, such expeditions could also destabilise the power relations which existed between the sisters and the Interior Salish, exposing the sisters' physical vulnerability



in relation to their environment and highlighting their dependence upon their hosts. Although they proceeded initially by train, part of the journey was undertaken on horseback. The sisters were amazed that the Native woman who served as their guide carried her baby in a basket strapped to her side: "Occasionally she casts a glance of surprise or compassion at us, when at some unusually steep pass we exhibit signs of fear."<sup>192</sup> At the Pretannie camp, domestic rituals were transformed, as these choir sisters found themselves taking on the tasks of lay sisters, collecting their own firewood, cooking over the open fire, and sleeping in tents.<sup>193</sup> Significantly, however, they noted that Native helpers were required to supply "some real logs." The children passed the days swimming and fishing, punctuated by the frequent round of religious services, the sisters' attempt to bring Christian order to the backwoods.

In the evenings, following long periods of spiritual contemplation, the sisters joined the Interior Salish at their campsite. Sister Alice Louisa's description of the site, reprinted in *East & West* was careful to point to the ways in which their indigenous hosts catered to the special status of their guests:

The scene is a very striking one. In the centre burns cheerily a camp fire, piled with cumbrous logs, and around it, in a large circle, is ranged the dusky congregation; the trunk of an old tree just in front of one of the tents being converted, with the aid of shawls, into a comfortable seat for Sister Amy and myself....This evening is spent quite sociably with the 'Braves,' our children reading and singing to them, exhibiting their skill in writing, and acquitting themselves very creditably in the 'Evangelist Catechism.'<sup>194</sup>

<sup>192</sup> *East and West*, All Saints 1887. In contrast to the sisters' accounts, Myra Rutherford notes that missionaries in the North frequently downplayed their reliance upon Aboriginals in their correspondence. See *Women and the White Man's God*, esp. 82.

<sup>193</sup> It is important to bear in mind that domestic practices were not the same for women religious as they were for the many Victorian women who devoted their lives to the rituals of home.

<sup>194</sup> *East and West*, All Saints 1887.

This account was designed to highlight the success of the sisters' work in the Fraser Valley, allowing supporters of the mission to feel that indeed such work was justified. The "dusky congregation" was situated as the English might imagine - around a cheerful camp fire. Readers could take comfort that Native peoples respected the special status of the English women religious in their midst by accommodating them in comfort around the fire. The success of the School was also clearly reinforced: one might imagine the children lined up by the fire, voices raised in unison as they gave thanks to Christ, then turning to recite their mastery of Scripture.

At the same time, however, the camping trip and its representation exemplifies the ambiguities inherent in the sisters' relationship with the Interior Salish: the sisters occupied a privileged position based on race, class, and gender, but they were also dependent on their Native hosts. Their sense of privilege and their cultural status as 'other' were reinforced by their luxurious accommodation around the fire. As well, through their religious services with the Natives, along with the fireside display of the children's educational prowess, the sisters exerted their own brand of cultural hegemony. Against this, their physical dependency was reinforced by their reliance upon the Interior Salish for food, warmth, shelter and directions. For the sisters, these camping trips functioned as a form of cultural exchange: the sisters received an education in Native culture while imparting to the Interior Salish what they believed were the benefits of Christian culture. The fact that this exchange involved one party's physical sustenance and the potential transformation of the other's culture and belief system, however, exposes the highly-uneven nature of this exchange. The sisters' experiences in the wilderness shaped their identities in profound ways by exposing their

physical vulnerability to the environment. Their camping trips among Native peoples further determined how their identities were constructed ambiguously: their sense of spiritual and cultural superiority was reinforced by the apparatus of Christianity even as their physical dependence on the Interior Salish was intensified. Most significantly, their identities were crafted by the belief in the certainty of their mission, expressed pointedly and poignantly by Sister Alice Louisa, who, while surrounded by the congregation of Native families, referred to the pupils as "our children."

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### **Anglican Sisters and the Ambiguities of Imperial Identity**

By extending the analysis of the sisters' mission beyond the school, the complexities of their experiences and the diverse forces by which their identities were constructed emerge more fully. These women viewed their position at Yale not just as the educators of Native girls, but as Christ's emissaries more generally. In British Columbia the sisters' lives and their collective sense of self were shaped by their interaction with the Interior Salish, as well as by their interactions with the white community at Yale. The precariousness of their existence, and their reliance physically and spiritually on their host societies - Native and white - for the survival of their mission complicated the sense of privilege afforded these women based on race, class, and gender. The collective identity of these women also was fashioned by the manner by which they represented themselves and were represented by others. Both in practice and discursively, the sisters appear as teachers, missionaries, health care workers, and surrogate mothers. Rarely, however, do they appear explicitly as Anglican sisters. The conditions of the Canadian West, whether by depriving these women of daily Communion, or

rendering their retreat a challenge, complicated their ability to perform their identities as women religious. The cultural, physical, and spiritual contexts in which they lived and worked challenged their identity not only as imperial agents, but also as Anglican sisters.

Within a wider framework, in British Columbia conditions were such that women religious were welcomed by the Church and the state on the basis of their social function as teachers. In this context, their identity as women religious underlined rather than undermined their social utility. Unlike their frosty reception in the English Church at mid century, sisterhoods were seen by the Anglican Church in BC as an important asset to its work. While the Church's acceptance of sisters as teachers derived from religious motivations, the state had its own agenda in its endorsement of these devoted, unpaid workers.<sup>195</sup> In BC, therefore, to a far greater extent than in Britain, there existed a culture of acceptance for these women as Anglican sisters, not only as volunteer workers. This culture of acceptance, like that which existed marginally in Britain, was not premised, however, specifically on the validation of female monasticism, but rather, paradoxically, on the regulation of other socially marginalised and powerless groups. In Canada, both Church and state viewed the All Hallows' sisters as their agents: their official purpose was to transform Native culture on a religious and secular basis respectively. Thus, while their gender enabled them to work as teachers and to act as surrogate mothers to little girls, and their ethnicity afforded them authority over these girls and their families, their identity as women religious also ensured that they were supported by the Church and, at least nominally, encouraged by the state.

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<sup>195</sup> This theme will be explored more fully in Chapter Seven.

This chapter has explored the context of Native education in the Fraser Valley, the formation of the All Hallows' School at Yale, and the ways in which the sisters adapted to and positioned themselves within this new climate. The relationships they formed with their host societies were central not only to their strategy of adaption and survival, but also to the construction of their identities. The remote, challenging environment of the Fraser Valley intensified the sisters' mission and resulted in the creation of more innovative monastic identities. In the absence of financial assistance from the DIA, and with intermittent clerical presence, the sisters looked to the local white community for support. As well, they developed complex, multi-faceted relationships with the Interior Salish, both at Yale and throughout the Fraser Valley. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the development of their relationships with the Church, state, white and Native societies influenced the sisters' mission and the school's evolution dramatically. In particular, requests from white parents living at Yale and throughout the Canadian West to send their daughters to the school created fundamental changes in its character. Faced with such requests, and with the Bishop's obvious support of such a scheme, the sisters refashioned their educational imperatives. Moreover, in light of increasing interference from the DIA, the sisters were forced to realign their mission to Native society. In so doing, they drew upon their multifarious identity as women religious and upon the discourses of imperial philanthropy to challenge the increasing attempts of society and the state to shape Native education at Yale.

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CHAPTER SEVEN "Pioneers of Civilisation:" The All Hallows' School  
for Girls and the Politics of Place

I suppose the Services in our present little Chapel are unique in many ways, where the conquering and conquered races sing antiphonally, where one sings in the closing words of the Sunday Vesper Psalms 'The Lord shall increase you more and more,' and the other race responds, 'Ye are the blessed of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.' What a world of pathos there seems in the words.<sup>1</sup>

Althea Moody, CAH, 1899.

By 1901 the "All Hallows' School for Canadian and Indian Girls" was one of the most prestigious educational institutions for young ladies in British Columbia. Along with five sisters, the staff included three certified teachers, an art instructor, and a bevy of housekeepers and servants.<sup>2</sup> Forty 'Canadian' and thirty Native pupils received segregated but similar instruction in a variety of subjects and enjoyed the fresh mountain air on the tennis courts and spacious playing fields. Writing for the Community magazine, *All Hallows in the West*, in 1901, Katherine, a fourteen-year old Native pupil, explained the school's ethos of moral reform and how the School's multi-racial character had developed:

[T]here never used to be a White School then, now there is, great many of them do come [to] this School too, because it the best School in the whole of British Columbia, this is a School...where we can be taught to be nice and tidy, to keep our nails clean, to keep our skirts and blouses together and our buttons on our boots, to be tidy."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of its reputation and increased size, the school retained its original character as established in the 1880s and examined in the previous chapter,

<sup>1</sup> *All Hallows in the West* (AHW) vol 1, no 3 (1899) Althea Moody formally joined CAH in 1898.

<sup>2</sup> *All Hallows in the West*, vol 3, no.3, Christmastide, 1901. The sisters were Amy, Alice Louisa, Margaret, Agatha and Constance

<sup>3</sup> AHW, Michaelmas, 1899.

according to Adela, a former white pupil:

All Hallows is more the happy family that ever it was before. The present generation see just as much of the dear Sisters as we used to do, and there is not the least bit stiffness and grandeur which seems to mark other large girls' schools - simple, home-like, and dearer than ever I find this old School.<sup>4</sup>

Such testimonials speak to the underlying mission of the school: the inculcation of manners and morals, practical and academic instruction, all with an affectionate "happy family" atmosphere. The sisters too reinforced this rhetoric: when asked by a friend if they were not "rather dull and lonely at Yale?" they replied, "it is quite impossible to feel either dull or lonely in the midst of this very lively family of nearly sixty children."<sup>5</sup> The accomplishments of their "children" provided an acute source of pride for the sisters. Native girls' successes were particularly highlighted. In 1900 Native girls' handwriting had been displayed at the Provincial Exhibition and they had won several prizes for their home-grown fruit. Of equal significance, that same year the sisters boasted of their Native pupils' academic achievements. Only eleven of the 1,000 Native students in boarding schools across Canada had reached the Sixth Standard: "no less than 5 of these attend the Yale School."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> AHW, 13, 1, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> AHW, vol. 1, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> AHW, Michaelmas, 1900. Not all Native girls achieved such academic distinction. Althea Moody noted that 3 children were discharged in 1900 "two desired to go into service, and one returned to her own home." AHW vol 1, no. 3, 1900, The Church of England ran four Native schools in BC, located at Metlakatla, Albert Bay, Lytton, and Yale. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to those described as "Indian" in nineteenth-century discourses as "Native" or according to their identity as Interior Salish. On the usage of these terms, see Daniel Francis, The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992). When referring to the All Hallows' School's 'Canadian' and 'Indian' departments, I will, however, maintain the original usage. Schools for Native pupils were referred to as Indian residential schools in the nineteenth century and are also referred to currently as such by the Canadian government at the request of Native peoples.

Across the globe the British empire presented as many challenges for those struck with missionary zeal as it created opportunities. As the previous chapter demonstrated, although the three sisters who came to Yale had not been sheltered at their English convent, nothing had prepared them for the overwhelming culture shock presented by life in the Canadian wilderness among diverse groups of Native peoples. In their work at Yale, in southern British Columbia, the sisters discovered that their most serious hardship was not physical, spiritual, or even material, but ideological: they were forced to negotiate their own Christian and philanthropic ideals with white and Native cultures in British Columbia and the policies of the Canadian government. This chapter builds on the context established in the last chapter, analysing the sisters' mission to the Interior Salish of the Fraser Valley and the development of the All Hallows' School at Yale from 1886 until 1901, during which the school's identity - and that of its programme of education for Native pupils - was being negotiated.<sup>7</sup> It examines the ways in which the sisters' missionary and educational work was shaped by the monastic culture of reform and rehabilitation at the Community of All Hallows in England, and also by the politics of race in the colonial context.<sup>8</sup> These racial politics were manifest externally in two specific ways. The increasing institutionalisation of the school after 1886, which occurred as a result of the growing presence of white pupils, fundamentally changed the school's character. As well, the acceptance of federal government funding challenged the sisters' educational authority.

Despite the constraints imposed by Church, state, and society, however, the sisters fashioned their own brand of imperial discourses and

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<sup>7</sup> The Interior Salish was composed of the Thompson, Lillooet, Okanagan, and Shuswap linguistic groups.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapters Three, Four and Five for discussions of this work in England.



practices which drew upon English traditions while incorporating the lessons of Canadian Native and white cultures. Identity politics were central to this process: the ways in which the sisters constructed their own identities, as well as how their collective identity was fashioned by others, determined not only the development of the school, but also how these women experienced and interpreted their mission. Unlike in Britain, where Anglican sisters were subject to intense criticism based on their spiritual identity as women religious, in the Canadian West, their religiosity was welcomed, especially by the forces of the Church and the state. The moral, Christian, and devoted character of these women defined them particularly in their mission among Native peoples: in this capacity, both the functional and the spiritual aspects of their identity were perceived as highly significant to their identities as "imperial agents."<sup>9</sup> In the ways that they experienced the empire, and constructed their identities in relation to it, the sisters were profoundly influenced by the ideological landscapes of both the Fraser Valley and their convent home in England. These dual forces often led the sisters to perform their identity as "imperial agents" ambiguously as they attempted to negotiate between the familiar and the exotic. Nowhere, however, were the ambiguities of these identities, and of the sisters' missionary enterprise, more dramatically exposed than in the complex relationships these women forged

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<sup>9</sup> On the complex interaction between white women and colonial subjects, see the studies by Iron Ware, Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History (London: Verso, 1992); Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865 -1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995). For the Canadian context, see Myra Rutherdale, Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field(Vancouver, UBC Press, 2002); Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849 -1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); and Rosemary Gagan: A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881 -1925 (Montreal/Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1992).

with the Interior Salish with whom they lived and worked for over thirty years.

This chapter opens with an analysis of how the development of the All Hallows' School was shaped by the culture of the Sisterhood combined with that of the Canadian context. Specifically, it traces the reasons behind the formal introduction of white pupils, the practices of moral reform set out at the Ditchingham House of Mercy and applied at the school, and the effects of the policies of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) - the federal body responsible for administering Native peoples in Canada. It then turns to an examination of various representations of the school, highlighting the significance of the discursive construction of the sisters' identities to the school's development, and charting its increasingly segregated character. The final section shifts from a consideration of how pupil/sister relationships were structured discursively to how they operated in practice, focusing on the impact of the sisters' mission upon pupils, Native society, and the sisters themselves. By giving the Native pupils a voice, the effects of the relationship between coloniser and colonised can be more clearly examined. The interaction between sisters and Native peoples had a profound impact not only on the latter, but also on the sisters. Imperialism operated as a significant force in the lives of British subjects throughout the nineteenth century: its effects on a small group of sisters from East Anglia demonstrates not only the ways in which the empire served to both shore up and destabilise notions of cultural superiority, but also the radical potential of empire to affect the interpretation and performance of monastic identities.

The history of Native residential schooling defiantly exposes the

politics of race relations in Canada's past as well as its future.<sup>10</sup> Historians who engage with this subject are forced to negotiate their interpretations within a contemporary climate which unravels the extent of the abuses perpetrated at these institutions. In his authoritative study, historian J. R. Miller refers to residential schools as "strange, often perverse, and puzzling institutions."<sup>11</sup> John Webster Grant considers these institutions within the context of missionary work, arguing that "The residential school...represented the missionary program of Christianisation and civilization in its most fully-developed form."<sup>12</sup> Many other studies have been less objective, exposing the residential school system as malevolent, violent, and corrupt.<sup>13</sup> British Columbia in particular, due to the diversity of its population, as well as its extensive network of religious missions, has provided substantial research for investigation.<sup>14</sup> Vincent McNally's sensitive analysis of the Oblates in BC paints a disturbing picture of the ways in which many schools maintained a programme of "cultural genocide" in an effort to destroy Native culture

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<sup>10</sup> The Canadian government is currently negotiating claims with approximately 12,000 former residential school pupils who allege abuse under this system and seek compensation for these crimes.

<sup>11</sup> J. R. Miller, Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 11; Elsewhere he refers to these schools as "a dismal failure." On the wider context in which these schools operated, see J. R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada, second edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 226.

<sup>13</sup> Two such analyses, which rely heavily on oral interviews, are Celia Haig-Brown, Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School (Vancouver: Tillacum, 1989) and Elizabeth Furniss, Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995). Miller, Shingwauk also employs oral testimony.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Vincent J. McNally, The Lord's Distant Vineyard: A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000); Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert and Don McCaskill, eds., Indian Education in Canada. Volume 1: The Legacy (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986); Nancy Sheehan, et. al. eds., Schools in the West (1986); James Redford, "Attendance at Indian Residential Schools in BC, 1890 -1920" BC Studies 44 (Winter 1979/1980).

within their pupils.<sup>15</sup> Most accounts, including those by Miller and McNally, reveal the extent to which Native residential schools were shaped by the complex and often conflict-ridden relationship among church, state, and Native society. Within the strictures of church/state authority, many schools were administered with little imagination, and without compassion or consideration for their Native pupils. On the other hand, according to Paige Raibmon's analysis of the Coqualeetza Indian Residential School in Sardis BC, room to manoeuvre within the system did exist and individuals could make a difference by challenging the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>16</sup> Raibmon suggests that her case study "hints at new possibilities of diversity behind that deceptively homogeneous label, the 'residential school experience,'" by exposing the ways in which Coqualeetza school principal George Raley embraced elements of Native culture in his educational programme.<sup>17</sup>

In her analysis of the "separate and unequal" character of the All Hallows' School, historian Jean Barman argues that the school was essentially divided according to race.<sup>18</sup> Barman places the school within the wider context of the policies of the Anglican Church and the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>19</sup> As such, the school's genesis, subsequent segregational structure, and ultimate demise, rest primarily, in her analysis, on the policies of these

<sup>15</sup> McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard*, 144. Here he refers to the residential school at Kamloops, 144.

<sup>16</sup> Paige Raibmon, "A New Understanding of Things Indian': George Raley's Negotiation of the Residential School Experience" *BC Studies* (1996), 69 -96.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. For example, pupils were encouraged to develop traditional skills such as basket weaving and carving totem poles. Boys were also taught the practical skill of boat building. Raibmon cites the ways in which Raley attempted to "keep Native culture in front of us." 87.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Barman, "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows School, 1884-1920," in *Indian Education in Canada, Volume 1: The Legacy*, 110 -131.

<sup>19</sup> Barman is the only historian that I am aware of who has examined the school in any detail. Most accounts of Native residential schools in BC do not refer to the All Hallows School. Miller, for example, includes photos of All Hallows pupils, but there is no mention of the All Hallows school in the text of *Shingwauk's Vision*, 254, 263.

two institutions. The sisters, who created and ran the school, remain peripheral figures and their politics are generally left unexplored.<sup>20</sup>

This chapter, in addition to considering the significance of the operations of Church and state upon the All Hallows' School, contextualises its within the wider framework of female monasticism and of the sisters' mission in the Fraser Valley more broadly. Such an emphasis allows for an investigation of how the educational and moral instruction at the school was determined fundamentally by the practices of the Sisterhood in England, as well as how these practices were in turn influenced by the relationships the sisters formed with Native peoples in BC. In this sense, this study of the All Hallows' School hopes to further broaden an understanding of the diversity of the residential school system through a consideration of how its racially-diverse complexion together with its monastic connection affected its operations and its public representations. At Yale, the sisters branded the school with their own ideological imprint based on imperial discourses, personal experiences with the Interior Salish, and monastic culture.

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### **"All Hallows' School for Canadian and Indian Girls in Yale, British Columbia"**

The foundations of character are laid in School, and what may be built up after-wards will depend on its strength and durability, on the base from which it springs.<sup>21</sup>

*All Hallows in the West, 1899.*

As its official name suggests, racial politics defined the "All Hallows' School for Canadian and Indian Girls," the only mixed-race institution of its

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<sup>20</sup> Barman does, however, note that the Mother Superior did try to oppose federal policy on at least one occasion. 121

<sup>21</sup> All Hallows in the West, Ascension-Tide Number 1899.

kind in British Columbia.<sup>22</sup> Its development showcases the complex ways in which the sisters negotiated their own ideals regarding Native education and culture with those they encountered in Canada. Begun rather haphazardly in 1884 by three sisters of the Community of All Hallows, the original school, located at the cramped mission house at Yale, was intended to cater solely to Native girls, including those labelled "half-breed" by the DIA.<sup>23</sup> Although these girls were not officially identified as "Indian" by the federal government, the sisters willingly admitted them to the school from its inception. The gradual acceptance of white girls at the school, however, resulting in its eventual division along racial lines, fundamentally altered the sisters' original vision. Over the next few years, the evolution of the small Native mission school into the prestigious and racially-divided "All Hallows' School for Canadian and Indian Girls," was shaped largely by forces beyond the sisters' control.<sup>24</sup> Beginning in 1888 with the school's relocation into larger facilities and then more formally from 1891, with the completion of the "Indian School" building, the school operated as an officially segregated institution until the costly demands of provincial educational standards forced its closure in 1918. Throughout this period, the practices within the school and its various representations suggests how the racial distinction between "Canadian" and "Indian" education was complicated by the discourses of imperialism and Victorian gender ideology, and in particular,

<sup>22</sup> Certainly the Church of England did not operate other mixed-race schools, and I have found no mention of such in Shingwauk's Vision, the authoritative study of these institutions in Canada.

<sup>23</sup> See Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire on the construction of 'half breed' as a distinct, and often perjorative, identity in imperial discourse. The Indian Act of 1867 excluded children of mixed race parents from receiving federal funding for education. On the DIA 's reference to 'half-breed' pupils, see DIA School files, AHS Report, 1885. The sisters did not differentiate between their "Indian" pupils and those of mixed-blood. In this chapter, I will refer to both groups of students as "Native" unless the sources explicitly differentiate between the two.

<sup>24</sup> On the culture of girls boarding school in nineteenth-century Britain, see Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850 -1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), Chapter Five.

their emphasis on Christian morality.

The process by which the school diversified racially reveals the extent to which these ideologies, together with the financially precarious position of Native education in British Columbia, shaped the All Hallows' School from its inception. Through the emphasis the sisters placed on respectability, industriousness, morality and above all, Christianity, the school had attracted the interest of some of Yale's white residents since the sisters' arrival in 1884.<sup>25</sup> Although Yale maintained its own public school - a secular institutional administered by the province - white girls attended the sisters' school as day pupils from as early as 1884.<sup>26</sup> While Native children had been banned from attending tax-supported public schools in British Columbia in 1866, no legislation had been passed to prohibit white children from joining privately-run Native schools.<sup>27</sup> In 1886 the introduction of Miss Hardy, an English governess, at the school no doubt heightened its appeal in the eyes of well-to-do white parents. By the end of the year, their increasing demands forced the sisters to reevaluate their mission. In their Community magazine, *East & West*, they explained that they had received "urgent request[s]" from white parents in Yale for their daughters to be admitted formally to the school as day pupils with the "half-breed" girls.<sup>28</sup> The sisters had initially refused, but

<sup>25</sup> The All Hallows' School register for 1884 at the Yale museum includes the names of six white pupils. One of these, Alice Teague, was a long-time pupil at the school. For details of Alice's wedding, see *AHW*, midsummer 1911. Alice had been the organist at the Yale Church for twelve years.

<sup>26</sup> See the records of the AHS at the Yale Museum, Yale, BC. The Yale public school had 40 pupils in attendance in 1884. See the *Inland Sentinel*, Sept. 4, 1884. It is likely that these white girls received religious instruction only from the sisters at this time. See *East & West*, Easter 1886. During her visit to the school that summer, Mrs. Pelly, the Bishop of New Westminster's wife, noted that white girls and 'Indian women' also attended the school.

<sup>27</sup> B C had formally banned Native children from attending tax-supported public schools in 1866. See McNally, *Lord's Distant Vineyard*, 141. That white pupils might desire to attend Native schools may not have occurred to educational policy makers.

<sup>28</sup> Sister Amy to the Mother Superior, March 1, 1887. *East and West*, Easter 1887. See also the explanation by Charles Woods. Extracts from the journal of Charles Thomas Woods, 1887. (privately printed) PABC. Woods died in 1895.

in the spring of 1887, they bowed to local pressure and decided to establish a separate class for white girls as day pupils at the school. Sister Amy took over Sister Alice Louisa's class of Native girls at the mission church leaving her to instruct a class of white girls at the small mission house where the sisters lived.<sup>29</sup>

The sisters were no doubt highly motivated by the financial incentives which accrued from the acceptance of paying pupils. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the funding secured for the school's creation depended on the ways in which the identity of the sisters was crafted and promoted; so too did the funding for the school's subsequent development. In the absence of government assistance for Native girls, and with little support from the white fathers of their "half-breed" pupils, the school fees which the sisters could charge white parents were most significant to their work.<sup>30</sup> In their decision to accept white pupils, the agenda of Bishop Sillitoe of New Westminster was also highly significant: as documented in the previous chapter, Sillitoe was determined to extend the sisters' educational influence to white girls as well. Even prior to the sisters arrival in BC, he had negotiated with the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) to provide funding for white girls to be educated by these women. Indeed the diocese was quick to capitalise on the school's newfound character. Advertisements which ran during the summer of 1887 in provincial newspapers, such as the *Kamloops' Inland Sentinel*, referred to All Hallows as a "Church of England

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<sup>29</sup> Sister Amy to the Mother Superior, March 1, 1887. East and West, Easter 1887. Sister Amy's letter noted that the government would take over, that is, assume responsibility for, the class of 'half-breed' girls, but this did not take place. Jean Barman places the formal division of the school as occurring in response to a letter in a New West newspaper in 1890, but the evidence reveals that from 1887 white children were taught separately and that the school was identified publicly as an institution for white girls.

<sup>30</sup> Details of government funding for Native education in BC will be discussed below. The government advocated that 'half-breed' girls should be maintained by their white fathers.



School for Girls. Under the management of the English Sisters and an English Governess."<sup>31</sup> Fees were set at \$50 for those under the age of eight, \$100 for older girls. No mention of the school's Native pupils was made. The paper also ran an advertisement for an unidentified Church of England "Private Ladies' School" elsewhere in the province, noting meaningfully that "this School is restricted to the children of white parents only."<sup>32</sup> Though race and gender thus played an important role in the introduction of white pupils at the school, so too, significantly, did the identity of the sisters: their identification in the school's advertisement reflects how both the national and the spiritual aspects of their identity as sisters was utilised to promote religious education for white students in the province. The ad also reflects the ambiguities within the school's identity from an early stage: although promoted in the press as a "Church of England School for Girls," the presence of white pupils was not recorded either in the early reports of the diocese of New Westminster or in those of the DIA.<sup>33</sup> In fact, for several years, until its formal division in 1891, both agencies viewed the school primarily as an institution for Native and "half-breed" girls. Certainly, in their repeated references to "our school for Indian girls," this was how the sisters viewed it as well.<sup>34</sup>

While the cultural context in which they lived and worked strongly affected the education of Native girls at Yale - specifically through the introduction of white girls - the nature of this education was modelled primarily upon that of the schools operated by the sisterhood in England.

<sup>31</sup> The Inland Sentinel. Kamloops BC, August 27, 1887. The first ad appeared on April 23, 1887. Similar ads ran throughout several years.

<sup>32</sup> The Inland Sentinel, April 23, 1887. This may have been the school run by Miss Boyce at Kamloops.

<sup>33</sup> See the Churchman's Gazette and New Westminster Diocesan Chronicle; DIA Annual Reports.

<sup>34</sup> See East and West, 1886 through 1888.

The Community of All Hallows operated two class-based orphanage schools in Ditchingham predicated on Victorian discourses of gender and class: All Hallows' Orphan School for Girls of the Upper Class, and St. Ann's Industrial School which trained working-class girls for domestic service and the position of governess.<sup>35</sup> Although two separate schools existed, the education of the two groups of girls was not mutually exclusive, as the Community magazine explained, "The higher terms which [the wealthy girls] pay enable the Sisters to improve the educational standard of the orphans with whom they are instructed."<sup>36</sup> The most promising of the "Industrial class" assisted the sisters at the farm and as teachers to the younger pupils. In keeping with Victorian beliefs, the children were clothed and educated according to their station in life, with marriage or service as the ultimate sign of success. At the All Hallows' School at Yale, a similar model was adapted. Thus, when white pupils were introduced more formally, it was on the grounds that their fees would help defray the expenses of the Native girls. Moreover, 'successful' Native pupils were utilised at the school as 'pupil-teachers' until they too would marry, move into service, or find suitable employment. The addition of the English governess in 1886 may have been instrumental in preparing some of the older Native girls for work as domestic servants; the first one of whom was sent out to service that same year. Native girls were expected to act as agents not only to recruit others to the school, but also to imbue members of their own tribes with the lessons of Christian morality they had learned from the sisters. This ideology was reflected by Mrs. Pelly, an associate of All Hallows, and the mother-in-law of Acton Sillitoe, Bishop of New Westminster. She hoped that some of the Native girls would become

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<sup>35</sup> East and West, Easter 1886.

<sup>36</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1886.

"teachers in their respective tribes; or, at any rate, wives and mothers, pioneers of civilization among them."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the social and ideological divisions which differentiated the education of girls according to class in Britain were redrawn according to racial difference in the context of the empire. As at Ditchingham, however, alongside these class and racial differentiations at the Yale school, both sets of pupils were equally subject to the Sisterhood's emphasis on morality, spirituality, and propriety which sought to unite rather than segregate the two groups of students.<sup>38</sup> Such an emphasis was highlighted by Rev. Richard Small, who conducted the school's annual inspection in the summer of 1886. Small, an Anglican missionary based in Lytton and former subwarden of the Community at Ditchingham, was by no means an unbiased inspector, and his report testifies to the particular imprint of the Sisterhood at the school. Based on two days of student exams, Small's report highlighted the diversity of the school's programme, which featured academic, religious, and practical instruction.<sup>39</sup> While the previous year, the academic curriculum featured only reading, writing, arithmetic, and scripture, by 1886 the fifteen Native pupils, in addition to at least one white girl, received instruction in the additional subjects of English history, grammar, dictation and geography.<sup>40</sup> The girls spent half the day receiving academic instruction and devoted the balance of their time to more artistic and domestic pursuits such as music,

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<sup>37</sup> East and West, Easter 1886.

<sup>38</sup> On the discourse and practices on moral reform in Canada, see Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885 -1925 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> According to Michel Foucault, the examination enables subjects to be differentiated, judged, and compared in a ritualised ceremony of power. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 184 -192.

<sup>40</sup> DIA School files, AHS Report, 1886. Students in 1886 came from regions throughout the lower mainland, including the Nicola and the Kamloops district. Only 1 pupil was a Yale Native. Four girls were classified as "half-breeds."

baking and needlework.<sup>41</sup> The school year extended for 43 weeks, with vacations at Christmas, Easter and during the summer for six weeks. Small was keen to emphasise the Christian character of the school's extensive academic programme, explaining that "[s]ecular education is not the primary object of the Sisters' work in their school for Indians and Half-breed girls."<sup>42</sup> His evaluation expressed a sensitivity not only toward the sisters' mission, but also regarding the girls' progress: "Scripture, as was right, preeminently took first place. The answers given by the elder class on the subject were clear and accurate. In the junior class it was at first a matter of difficulty to elicit audible answers, nor was this unnatural considering it was their first formal examination."<sup>43</sup> Although Small noted the need "for improvement" in grammar and arithmetic, he highlighted an excellence at needlework: "One of the pupils who is very skilful in making moccasins and gloves, has received orders for several pairs, and executed them most satisfactorily." Significantly, this twenty-year old student was being pressured by her father to leave the school and marry, yet she was determined, the sisters explained, to remain at the school, supporting herself through her handiwork.<sup>44</sup> Thus, from the earliest years of the school, Native girls not only received academic and Christian instruction, but were also encouraged to utilise Native skills in order to become self-sufficient. Yet in enabling this student to remain at the school, the sisters not only provided her an alternative to marriage, but they also provided a space for her to defy her father's wishes. The programme of education for Native girls at Yale was thus underpinned by the complexities

<sup>41</sup> Nearly one hundred years later, I received a similar education in Ontario public schools.

<sup>42</sup> The Churchman's Gazette, August 1886. See also "All Hallows" Indian Mission School, Yale, B.C. Report for 1886, DIA School files, PABC.

<sup>43</sup> "All Hallows" Indian Mission School, Yale, B.C. Report for 1886, DIA School files, PABC. See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) for an analysis of the examination as an "exercise in power," 184-92.

<sup>44</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1887.

of cultural syncretism, Christian morality, and Victorian self-sufficiency.

The following year, school exams were conducted by Charles Woods, the Archdeacon of Columbia, whose very presence would have been viewed by the sisters as an honour. His report indicates that, initially at least, the racial diversity of the school seems not to have attracted attention or concern among the people of Yale. It also reveals how the school had established a reputation for academic excellence and had become a source of pride among the Anglican hierarchy. The Archdeacon was noticeably impressed, recording in his journal, which was subsequently printed, "The most deeply interesting part of my work soon after my arrival, was the examination of the girls' school carried on by the Sisters of All Hallows."<sup>45</sup> The fourteen pupils were tested in Catechism, grammar, history, geography, arithmetic, reading, dictation, parsing, and recitation over two days in the middle of July. Woods' description of the exam reveals much more about his expectations and attitudes than it does about the capacities of the girls:

I soon laid [the textbooks] aside and took up the examination just as I should do in any school...and I was more surprised and gratified than I can say when I found the intelligent, ready, quick answers. The children themselves seemed to brighten up and look pleased when I laid aside the books and appealed to their intelligence rather than to their memories.<sup>46</sup>

While Jean Barman reads such evidence as indicative of the initial educational parity at All Hallows, it can also be viewed as part of a more general attempt by the clergy to influence both social and governmental

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<sup>45</sup> Extracts from the journal of Charles Thomas Woods, 1887. (privately printed) PABC, Victoria, BC. See also the Churchman's Gazette, June 1887. DIA Schools files 1887 lists 14 pupils, 2 'half breed' girls.

<sup>46</sup> Woods' Journal, 1887.

attitudes towards Native education in British Columbia.<sup>47</sup> Woods - whose eldest daughter Sara was about to be admitted as a novice to All Hallows in England - was keen to demonstrate the value of Christian education, particularly that of Anglican sisters.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, his highest praise fell on the school's moral tone, rather than its academic standards: "but what are these" he inquired, "compared with the conviction that could not but come home to my own heart, of the love, the trust, the patience of the Sisters; so devoted to their work, so fully answered by love and trust and quiet gentle obedience on the part of the children under their care."<sup>49</sup> Nor, in Woods' opinion, were such benefits confined to the Native girls at the school. Rather, he applauded the behavioural and moral effects of education at All Hallows upon white girls at the school as well:

I know I do but express the feelings of the parents when I say that they are more than satisfied with the progress their children have made, not only in general knowledge, but also in the increased gentleness of demeanor and quietness of manner we all love to see so much of in our daughters.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, by repeated emphasis to the character of convent-based education as loving, patient, and designed to produce obedient, quiet, and gentle daughters, regardless of race, Woods drew upon Victorian discourses of gender and religion in order to support the Christian ethos of the sisters' school in contrast to the state-supported, secular education of the province. The education of Native girls at Yale must then not only be viewed in terms of racial ideologies, but also the ideals which operated in late-nineteenth-

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<sup>47</sup> Barman, "Separate and Unequal," 115-19. In her analysis of the school, Jean Barman agrees that "in All Hallows's first years, inequality remained relative, with parity existing to the fullest extent possible given the assumptions of the age." p. 115.

<sup>48</sup> See the Churchman's Gazette, October 1887. See also the Profession Roll, CAH Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Woods' Journal, 1887..

<sup>50</sup> Extracts from the journal of Charles Thomas Woods, 1887. PABC

century Britain and Canada towards girls of the white elite.<sup>51</sup>

In their moral training of Native girls, however, the sisters did not rely purely, or even primarily, on imperial discourses or those based on education, rather, they relied upon the practices and beliefs which shaped their rescue work with “fallen women” at the House of Mercy in Ditchingham. As at the House of Mercy, the process of “rehabilitation” at Yale encompassed much more than classroom teaching: it involved providing such practical necessities as housing, food, and clothing, as well as creating a programme of religious, moral, and cultural indoctrination. Both mind and character were submitted to fundamental change. Specifically, the sisters imparted their particular brand of English middle-class ideology which emphasised moral virtue, sexual propriety, individual self-reliance, and, most significantly, the power of transformation through Christian redemption.<sup>52</sup> Just as fallen women could actually join the Sisterhood in England - as members of the Third Order - so too, the sisters believed, could Native girls transform their identities by embracing Christianity and English culture, in order to serve as pupil-teachers and models of civilisation.

In this sense, the House of Mercy served as the spiritual and moral template for the All Hallows’ School.<sup>53</sup> The rescue of prostitutes was the Sisterhood’s original and most important work: the approach taken toward saving these women most directly informed the work of the sisters at Yale. Foremost among the sisters’ arsenal was prayer: only through a steady regime of religious instruction would penitents, the sisters believed, be prepared for

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<sup>51</sup> See Vicinus, Independent Women, for an analysis of these ideologies in British schools.

<sup>52</sup> For a related discussion of the agenda of missionaries toward residential schooling, see Miller, Shingwauk’s Vision; for that of Catholic sisters in the American West, see Coburn & Smith, Spirited Lives.

<sup>53</sup> The Community of All Hallows derived from the work of rescuing ‘fallen women’ just as the sisters’ mission in BC derived from the need to educate and civilise Native society.

what lay ahead. Similarly, at Yale, the Native pupils received a thorough indoctrination into Christian beliefs and culture. They studied the lessons of the Bible, and, like the penitents, were prepared for confirmation into the Church. Morality formed a key component of this instruction, and it was on these grounds that the sisters waged their most crucial battles. At the House of Mercy emphasis was placed on creating a healthy atmosphere where the penitents - many as young as fourteen - could reap the benefits of the Sisterhood's pastoral setting free from the temptations of the city. The removal of these women from a sexually dangerous environment was seen as a vital first step in the path to redemption.<sup>54</sup> As at Ditchingham, at Yale the sisters recognised the need to separate their Native charges from what they perceived could be a potential source of sexual corruption within their own society. Here they met with mixed success. When one thirteen year-old pupil wrote to the sisters after spending her summer holidays at home, that she was to be married and would not be returning to the school, the sisters were made to face the limitations of their mission. "How impossible it was to protect our children and keep them good and pure," one sister lamented, "without cutting them off to a great extent from intercourse with their own people while they were young."<sup>55</sup> Significantly, while the sisters were unequivocal concerning the deleterious effects of 'immoral' families upon penitents in England, their attitudes toward the effects of Native culture upon young girls were ambivalent.

Although penitents sometimes returned to their wayward life, and Native girls could not always be 'protected' upon their departure from the House, while in their care, the sisters made every effort was made to ensure

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<sup>54</sup> Refer to Chapter Five for an analysis of this work.

<sup>55</sup> East and West, Michaelmas, 1899.



that their charges became industrious and respectable. This was achieved through an emphasis on physical appearance, decorum, and good manners. In a similar fashion to that of House of Mercy penitents, Native girls at the Yale school were transformed into models of female propriety. As one eleven-year-old pupil explained: "We are taught very nicely too [sic]...learn our manners and...to behave ourselves when we leave here and go out into the world."<sup>56</sup> The most successful and diligent pupils received monetary gifts from the Mother Superior in England, such as Christine Macdonald who intended to use the pound she received to purchase a Bible and a dress.<sup>57</sup> Pupils who entered service upon graduation and whose behaviour was exemplary also received financial rewards from the Superior. One former pupil exceeded expectations by returning the five dollars she received; *East & West* proudly exclaimed "This trait is the more gratifying that, when this girl first went to the Sisters, she was very troublesome."<sup>58</sup>

For penitents and Native girls alike, a key element in the sisters' programme of inculcating civility was the tending of gardens. Gardens, as Davidoff and Hall have shown, embodied civilised English middle-class virtue.<sup>59</sup> Just as at the House of Mercy, where penitents who succeeded in their probation were given a small plot of land in which to tend a garden, at Yale, the pupils of the Native school also were encouraged to cultivate fruit,

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<sup>56</sup> *AHW*, Michaelmas, 1899.

<sup>57</sup> *East & West*, Whitsuntide, 1890. Christine Macdonald to the Mother Superior, April 10, 1890. Upon the completion of their reform, "successful" penitents were required to serve a two-year probationary term at one of the community's works: the farm, hospital or orphanage. From there many went into service. Financial rewards served as an incentive to remain in their situations: former penitents who served the same employer for a year were rewarded with one pound from the Mother Superior.

<sup>58</sup> *East & West*, All Saints, 1889; *Diocese of New Westminster Monthly Record*, December 1889.

<sup>59</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

vegetables, and flowers in their own gardens.<sup>60</sup> Not only did these gardens provide recreation and food, but they also allowed pupils to experience the pride of ownership and the principles of capitalism. One of the sisters described the gardens as "brown earth, divided into sections by stones, large or small twigs sticking up here and there...But these sections denote proprietorship, and are the joy of our hearts."<sup>61</sup> Patrons were requested to contribute to the garden fund and through various sales "a thriving trade" of up to \$40 a season was reaped.<sup>62</sup> Children received prizes for gardening each season and the fruit of their efforts was exhibited annually at local fall fairs. In many ways, the gardens symbolised the work of the school: under the proper care both plants and children could thrive in such a carefully-controlled environment, and, ideally, would go on to win prizes and be a source of pride to their respective nurturers. As one sister insightfully noted: "The hot-bed is like the school for the plants, and they grow very fast, very much faster that they would grow in the open ground."<sup>63</sup>

The institutions run by the sisters in England thus served as complex models for the All Hallows' School at Yale. In the colonial context, however, the politics of race complicated those of morality and class. At the House of Mercy, the sisters' goal was to reform the identity of the penitents: fallen women would ideally become redeemed, recognising and abandoning their 'sin'. In their work with Native girls, however, though the battleground was also that of morality, the process of reform was less straightforward. Although the eventual outcome of this process was supposed to be the same - the creation of Christian models of propriety and useful members of society -

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<sup>60</sup> East and West, Easter 1888.

<sup>61</sup> AHW, Ascentiontide, 1899.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> AHWMichaelmas, 1899.

unlike their fallen counterparts at Ditchingham, the Native pupils had committed no 'sin'. Rather, they were perceived as 'victims' of their culture in a similar manner that fallen women were viewed as victims of a more widespread cultural malaise in England. As such, in both cases the sisters viewed their mission as to "rescue" and "civilise" these girls from the cultural perils to which they were exposed. Yet the imperial context ensured that the sisters initially perceived their relationship to English and Native culture in significantly different ways: while both cultures were perceived as potentially harmful, the sisters personally did not attempt to reform English culture, yet they *were* actively engaged in a process of cultural reformation at Yale. Through their experiences with the Interior Salish, however, the sisters' attitudes toward their culture became more flexible, characterised by an increasingly syncretic approach to education and reform.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the 'sin' of extramarital sex, which defined the penitents' identities in England and was cast off through redemption, in the colonial context, while Native culture also served to define the pupils' identities, it could not be so easily cast off - nor did the sisters believe it was desirable to do so. As a result, in their mission to 'reform' Native girls, the sisters recurringly found their opinions to be at odds with those of the dominant white society of the Fraser Valley, and of the federal government. Thus, their project of "separa[ting] the fallen from their opportunities for sin [among] the red Indians" became fraught with ambiguity.

The ideological difficulties increasingly facing the sisters were intensified in their work at Yale by the policies of the Department of Indian Affairs. During the second half of the 1880s, government attitudes toward the

<sup>64</sup> For an analysis of the ambiguities within missionary attitudes and mission work, see Grant, Moon of Wintertime, esp. Chapter Eleven. Myra Rutherford notes a similar development among female missionaries in the Canadian north in White Women and the White Man's God, esp. 118 -124.

value and purpose of residential schools had become more rigid. Increasingly, the DIA advocated a system of boarding-school education which emphasised industrial and domestic pursuits for Native children. The 1887 report of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Thomas White, reveals an ambivalence toward the aims of Native schooling as set out by the Anglican Church. White questioned the notion that Native children, after completing their education in a residential school, should return to their tribes with an occupation or as teachers of Native day schools. Instead, he argued:

every possible legitimate means should be used to prevent those whose education at an industrial institution or high school has been completed from returning to the reserves, and that strong inducements...should be held out to them, so as to cause them to reside in towns, or...in settlements of white people, and thus become amalgamated with the general community."<sup>65</sup>

According to such a policy, Native education should serve to remove and subsequently alienate Native children from their homes and communities in order that they may become assimilated into white society. To do this, White co-opted Christianity, recommending that teachers should have "a consistent Christian character...and one object in view--the good of the souls of those to whom he preaches."<sup>66</sup> In the following years, Superintendent Edgar Dewdney endorsed these sentiments, noting the superiority of the boarding school for the "enlightenment and elevation, both morally and intellectually, of Indian youth."<sup>67</sup> In Dewdney's opinion, the physical separation of Native children from their own culture was essential:

The boarding school dissociates the Indian child from the deleterious home influences to which he would be otherwise subjected. It reclaims him from the uncivilized state in which

<sup>65</sup> Report of Thomas White, lxxix-lxxx. DIA Annual Report, 1887. PABC.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., lxxxi.

<sup>67</sup> Report of E. Dewdney, DIA Annual Report, 1888, p. xiii; 1889, xi. PABC.

he has been brought up. It brings him into contact from day to day with all that tends to effect a change in his views and habits of life. By precept and example he is taught to endeavour to excel in what will be most useful to him.<sup>68</sup>

Although gendered male in Dewdney's discourse, Native children of both sexes were viewed in relation to enlightened Victorian racial ideologies which emphasised their capabilities to become useful citizens.<sup>69</sup> J. R. Miller explains how such capabilities required the appropriate white guidance: "Underlying these attitudes was a racist predisposition, one that was widely shared in Canadian society, that Aboriginal peoples had to be controlled and have decisions made for them because they were incapable of making what non-Natives considered sound choices on their own."<sup>70</sup> The solution to "the Indian question" was made explicit in Dewdney's 1890 report which advocated obtaining "entire possession of all Indian children after they attain to the age of seven or eight years...at schools of the industrial type."<sup>71</sup> As the current residential school system reached less than 700 pupils in British Columbia, he proposed that Native education be enforced by law.<sup>72</sup> "It goes without saying," he added, "that the Department should be able to afford accommodation in such institutions for as many children of the proper age as may be offered for admission."<sup>73</sup>

The diverse character of education and pupils at the All Hallows'

<sup>68</sup> Report of E. Dewdney, DIA Annual Reports, 1888, p. xiii; 1889, xi. PABC.

<sup>69</sup> Such progressive ideologies were in circulation throughout the empire and in Britain. They were promoted by J S Mill, for example, in response to the Governor Eyre Controversy which erupted in Jamaica in 1865. See Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1988), as well as her more detailed analysis of this debate in *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (London: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Report of Superintendent E. Dewdney, DIA Annual Report, 1890. xii.

<sup>72</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1891. For provincial statistics, also see McNally, 142. The Native population in BC in 1880 was about 25,000, by 1901 it had risen to almost 29,000.

<sup>73</sup> Report of Superintendent E. Dewdney, DIA Annual Report, 1890. xiii.

School testifies to its complex identity and the ways in which the sisters both drew upon and challenged educational policies in British Columbia. Certainly, in its capacity as a residential institution, designed to make Native girls into productive members of society, the school conformed to the DIA's agenda. Yet through the school's comprehensive curriculum, mixed pupils, religious ethos, and wide range of objectives, the sisters attempted to create their own educational programme. While older Native girls were prepared for service, younger ones were taught a full range of academic subjects. By comparison, at St. Eugene's Residential School in Cranbrook, administered by the Roman Catholic Sisters of Providence, the education of the girls emphasised domestic arts, supplemented by basic English language skills.<sup>74</sup> Toward the end of the century, the gap between the range of subjects at All Hallows, and those taught at other Native schools, had expanded even further. In his comprehensive study of these schools across Canada, J. R. Miller illustrates how the education most girls received prepared them "for a future as wives, mothers, and homemakers."<sup>75</sup> At All Hallows girls were taught domestic lessons, in addition to academic lessons. By training girls as "pupil teachers," the sisters challenged the DIA's policy of cultural assimilation: these pupils were expected to return to their people rather than abandon them. The racial composition at All Hallows also suggests its unorthodox nature as does the way in which spiritual and moral training was applied universally to Native and white girls at the school.

<sup>74</sup> McNally, 148. Students at the St Albert Mission School, staffed by the Grey Nuns of Montreal, received education in academics and domestic science, see DIA Annual report, 1885.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 220. Miller explains that most schools taught girls 'domestic science' and 'sewing,' not academic subjects. At the Crosby Girls' Home run by the Methodists at Port Simpson, B.C., for example, girls were primarily taught sewing, cooking, and domestic skills in the 1880s, 93. As well, at the eleven government funded Native schools in BC in 1886, none provided instruction in history.

The All Hallows' School thus incorporated both a traditional view of missionary work and a progressive one in relation to the DIA. In the importance the sisters placed on cultural indigenisation and civilisation in their work with the Interior Salish, they held to a more-traditional view of missions as set out by the Anglican Church Missionary Society in the nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> This traditional approach set the school apart from DIA policy which increasingly stressed assimilation. However, the school's emphasis on academic instruction and the provision of training for domestic service for Native pupils rendered its educational policies more ambiguous. Although the sisters utilised the institutional form recommended by the DIA, the residential school, they did so not in order to conform to its agenda, but because this was the model the Sisterhood had developed in England. For the sisters, the residential school provided the surest means of round-the-clock moral and spiritual training. Ultimately, as will be discussed further in the chapter, the sisters hoped to prepare their Native pupils for life beyond the school as Christians. Ideally, students would then choose in which environment they would exert their moral and spiritual influence upon those around them.

By the summer of 1887, DIA policies regarding Native education were becoming increasingly relevant to the sisters. While the school had remained financially independent of the state until this time, the sisters struggled increasingly to support themselves and their pupils. The previous summer, Sister Amy had embarked on a begging tour with Sister Elizabeth leaving

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<sup>76</sup> See Grant, Moon of Wintertime, for these policies as promoted by Henry Venn and the CMS, 129 -131. See also, Andrew F. Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

Sister Alice Louisa in charge of the school.<sup>77</sup> Despite their efforts, £600 was still required to facilitate the purchase of a school building.<sup>78</sup> Until this sum could be obtained, the sisters and their Native pupils continued to live and work in the cramped, uncomfortable conditions of the mission house.<sup>79</sup> The sisters' concerns about the financial problems facing the school finally prompted them to turn to the DIA. As of 1887, twelve schools in the province received regular annual grants for Native children: All Hallows received nothing. St. Mary's Mission school, for example, a boarding school in Chilliwack run by the Oblates, had received a grant of \$500 since 1875.<sup>80</sup> Sister Amy thus took it upon herself to write directly to the local Indian Agent explaining why she believed the sisters' school should qualify for government funding. Her appeal was based on the construction of specific identities for both the sisters and their pupils:

By great personal efforts we have so far maintained the School by obtaining voluntary subscriptions for it from New Westminster, Vancouver and Victoria, but we find the work sorely crippled for want of more definite support. Our number of Indian pupils has been few in comparison with that of the "Half-breed" girls, from the difficulty we encounter in extracting payments of School fees from their Parents. In most instances the "half-breeds" have been taken from the Indian reserves where they were living with their mothers, they have consequently the same need of maintenance from the Government as their Indian Sisters. We hope by having persevered unsupported in this work for so long a period, to have now justly earned some claim to the consideration of the Government of the Dominion.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> East and West, Easter 1887. See also The Churchman's Gazette, August 1887. The sisters collected enough money to carry out renovations to the school room and to purchase a sewing machine and a cooking stove.

<sup>78</sup> NWOP, March 1888. As Chapter Six explains, this was CPR contractor Onderdonk's house.

<sup>79</sup> By 1887, white pupils were taught in the abandoned CPR hospital which the sisters had obtained in 1886.

<sup>80</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1886, 1887, 1888. Although McNally notes that the grant "fluctuated greatly" over the years, it remained steady from 1886 - through 1888 at \$500. Ironically, McNally points out that the Oblates "in a rare show of ecumenism" used the example of Yale's grant of \$60 per pupil in 1888 in order to attempt to have St. Mary's grant raised to \$2000. McNally, 159 -160.

<sup>81</sup> DIA School Files, AHS. Sister Amy to Indian Agent Benson, August 5, 1887.



Sister Amy's appeal for assistance drew upon the racial and gendered discourses of Victorian philanthropy in the imperial context. Specifically, she realised that the most effective way to solicit funds was to highlight the sisters' independence in relation to the dependence of the girls in their care. In her argument that "half-breed" girls were deserving of support, she challenged existing DIA policy which excluded "half-breed" pupils from government assistance on the basis that they were supported by their white fathers. Rather, she maintained that as these girls had been raised on the reserves by their Native mothers - and thus were subject to the same deleterious conditions - they should be as eligible to receive support as other Native girls. Of equal significance was the manner in which Sister Amy characterised the identity of the sisters, stressing their diligence, industriousness and financial independence since their arrival in the country. Moreover, in her assertion that "among the Indian Congregation of the English Church, we have a large and hopeful field of labour" she emphasised the sisters' broader role as Christ's missionaries. Within such a discourse, the identities of both "half-breed" girls and the sisters were fashioned as deserving, the former due to their vulnerability, the latter as a result of their self-sufficiency.

The response generated by the appeal sheds light on the ethos of the DIA and its expectations for Native education during this period. Upon receiving a copy of Sister Amy's letter, Superintendent Powell, who had previously rebuffed Sillitoe's appeal, now took a more benevolent view of the school. His decision to recommend funding the school seems to have been influenced by Indian Agent McTiernan who reported that of the seventeen girls at the school, ten were "full-blooded indians" and seven were "half-

breeds...who had been deserted by their [white] fathers, and have always lived on reserves."<sup>82</sup> As such, Powell too argued, in his recommendation to the Superintendent General, that the "half-breed" girls were entitled to a government grant.<sup>83</sup> The school appeared to cater to the Department's goals for Native education, as Powell, referring to McTiernan's report, noted that three former pupils have found situations "where they are now earning a respectable living" with four others ready to be sent out. Although inundated with applications, the sisters were turning girls away owing not to their dedication - here Powell referred to the sisters' recent begging tour - but to their lack of resources. Nor should the school's funding be restricted to the regular grant of \$12 per pupil he maintained, explaining that the Yale sisters "devote their whole time to the education and providing the means for the maintenance of the Mission, they receive scarcely any assistance from the parents or friends of these children, besides educating them, they board, lodge, and clothe them."<sup>84</sup> Thus, as did Sister Amy, Powell took pains to represent the independence of the sisters, the dependence of the girls, and to stress the service they provided to the Native community. Significantly, he did not focus on the religious aspects of the instruction at All Hallows, but on ways in which the school produced useful, productive members of society, namely, domestic servants who could cater to the needs of the province's elite. Central to this representation was his construction of the sisters' collective identity as devoted, enterprising, and economical. In negotiations with the federal government, the functional aspects of the sisters' work, rather than its spiritual component, legitimated their existence and assisted their survival.

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<sup>82</sup> McTiernan's report, quoted in Powell to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, April 10, 1888. DIA School Files, AHS.

<sup>83</sup> McTiernan's report, DIA School Files, AHS.

<sup>84</sup> DIA School Files, AHS. Powell to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, April 10, 1888. He maintained that the sisters were "deserving of some special assistance from the Government."

On April 21, 1888 Bishop Sillitoe was informed that a request had been tendered to Parliament for \$1,500, representing a per annum grant of \$60 for each of a maximum of 25 students. The sisters had thus influenced the federal government's financial responsibility toward "half-breed" girls at the school. Unsurprisingly, Louis Vankoughnet, the deputy superintendent general for Indian Affairs, chose to deal with the Bishop rather than the sisters, although they had been responsible for the request.<sup>85</sup> Sillitoe received word in July that the grant had been accepted, payable on receipt of quarterly school returns. Not only did the grant ensure the school's future, but it also represented a substantial increase over that which was paid out to other residential schools, most of which received \$12 per student up to a maximum of \$300 per year.<sup>86</sup> Significantly, however, Ottawa's support also ensured that the school would no longer be in control of its future. By agreeing to participate in the government's scheme of Native education, the sisters also implicitly agreed to abide by governmental dictates. Thus, in their efforts to secure the future of Native education at Yale, the sisters relied on the financial contributions of both white society and the federal government. Eventually, however, as will be discussed later in the chapter, the acceptance of both forms of funding created serious repercussions for the sisters as well as the progress of Native education in the Fraser Valley.

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<sup>85</sup> On Vankoughnet's interference with curriculum in Roman Catholic schools, see McNally, Lord's Distant Vineyard, 148. He tried to impose a purely industrial curriculum. Vankoughnet's paternalism was shared by Sillitoe, who wrote to Vankoughnet two months later: "I am very anxious to know if the proposed appropriation from *my* Indian School at Yale was duly voted." Bishop Sillitoe to Louis Vankoughnet, The Grosvenor Club, [June] 1888. DIA School files. Emphasis added.

<sup>86</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1889. Elsewhere, the Bishop referred to the "good many conditions" attached to the grant, but did not list these specifically.

### **"No mere cram shop": Representing the All Hallows School**

In the summer of 1888, the new school, named "Brookside," opened its doors at the former home of CPR official Andrew Onderdonk. As noted in Chapter Six, its purchase had been made possible by a grant from the SPCK, funds raised by the sisters' appeals in Canada and Britain, and by the knowledge that Native pupils would be supported by the DIA.<sup>87</sup> Located alongside the river on three acres of land, the site allowed ample space for work and recreation, and for an increasingly-segregated student body. The formal benediction of the school took place on June 30th, with Bishop Sillitoe proudly officiating. Discourses of race were central not only to the construction of an identity for the new school, but to its representation in the local media. The natural setting of the institution was emphasised in the decorations which adorned the school, including the "thick curtain of hop vines" which covered the verandah. The children's costumes were also designed to reinforce their identities. While the white girls led the procession in white veils, the Native pupils' attire presented a more natural form of purity: "their uniform costumes, consisting of red skirts covered with red-striped pinafores, straw hats, being most becoming in warmth of colouring and simplicity of fashion to their dusky faces--dear faces--glowing just then with innocent pleasure and interest," reported the *Churchman's Gazette*<sup>88</sup> Readers of the paper were assured that such racial distinctions extended inside the school as well. "The possession of such a thoroughly well-built and comfortably furnished house, enables the Sisters to offer accommodation to a small number of 'white' pupils," the paper explained; "A pleasant room already designated as the 'white dormitory,' is prepared for

<sup>87</sup> The previous chapter sets out the conditions of the SPCK grant.

<sup>88</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, July 1888.

them and in a literal sense deserves its name.”<sup>89</sup> Complete with snowy quilts and white toilet seats, the “white dormitory” served to clearly demarcate the racial politics of the school to outsiders as well as to its inhabitants.

Not only did the completion of ‘Brookside’ enable a few white girls to attend the school as boarders alongside Native pupils, but it also, in the discourse of evangelical missionaries, created an atmosphere conducive to better learning. In his official report of 1888, Archdeacon Woods was typically effusive in his praise of the new facilities:

[T]he roomy, well-built house and extensive grounds of Brookside, afford[s] as it does, not merely better and more spacious sitting rooms, dormitories, and school room, bath room and a never-failing supply of water, but what I consider a special advantage to a girls’ school, that you are now a little outside the town, and have ample space within your own fence for exercise and recreation.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, just as the rural location of the House of Mercy at Ditchingham was extolled as contributing to the development of character, the rural setting of ‘Brookside’ was represented as especially beneficial to the girls at Yale. As he had done in other years, Woods noted the “considerable aptitude in the children as well as careful painstaking by the teachers during the past year.”<sup>91</sup> It was not this academic success, however, which in the Archdeacon’s mind, marked the school’s greatest achievement. To explain this, he related an incident which had occurred as he was leaving Yale by train after his visit:

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<sup>89</sup> Churchman’s Gazette, July 1888. In her analysis of the physical separation of pupils at All Hallows, Barman contends that white and Native students were not officially separated until late in 1890 due to the publication of an anonymous letter in a New Westminster newspaper (she does not specify which one). See below. However, other records indicate that even prior to the move to ‘Brookside’ care was taken to maintain the physical separation of white and Native girls at the school.

<sup>90</sup> Archdeacon Woods’ report, July 25, 1888. Reprinted in the Churchman’s Gazette, July 1888.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Pupils were taught scripture, church doctrine, geography, history, grammar and arithmetic.

The train had drawn up at the platform when I recognized amongst the passengers a former pupil, who about two years ago had gone from the school into service in Victoria; she told me, with such a glad look, that she had come "Home" to spend her holiday. Yale was not her home, but the care and loving guardianship she had experienced while in school had taught her to look upon the school and the good "Sisters" house as her best home. She is now a teacher in the Cathedral Sunday School in Victoria, having last year obtained the first prize.<sup>92</sup>

For Archdeacon Woods, as well as for the sisters, this former Native pupil's 'success' was revealed variously: through her conversion to Christianity, her identity as a Sunday school teacher, and her association of the school with "Home." As a prize-winning Sunday school teacher in the province's capital, she was perceived by the sisters and the clergy as a 'success.' Just as the most successful penitents in England were those who joined the Sisterhood as members of the Third Order, so the prize pupils at Yale were the girls who conceived of the school as 'home' and for whom Christianity defined their identity. Woods' assessment also speaks to the crafting of the sisters' identity as maternal and how their school was imagined as "home," even by this former pupil who had never seen "Brookside." The sisters had created, in historian Anne Summers' terminology, "a home from home," where they served as an alternate family, as moral mothers providing "loving guardianship."<sup>93</sup> Such identifications highlight the ambiguous nature of the sisters' work. In particular, the association of Brookside as the pupil's "best home" raises uneasy questions about the extent to which the sisters' home had supplanted her Native home, not just figuratively but literally. Further, her status as both Sunday School teacher and domestic servant in distant

<sup>92</sup> Archdeacon Woods' report, July 25, 1888.

<sup>93</sup> See Anne Summers, "A Home from Home." *Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century* in S. Burman, Ed. *Fit Work for Women* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979). On the construction of motherhood, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914" *Women's History Review*, vol 8, no 2 (1999).

Victoria reveals the extent to which the operations of religion, class and gender had shaped this pupil's future.

Relocation to "Brookside" had a significant effect on the nature of the school's development. From 1888 until its closing in 1918, the All Hallows' School gained a reputation as one of the province's preeminent girls schools. Applications, particularly from members of the privileged white community, continued to increase, forcing the sisters to seek funding for an additional residence in order that Native and white pupils could be housed separately. By 1889, the school boasted a higher average daily attendance than all other Native residential schools in the province except one.<sup>94</sup> According to Violet Sillitoe, the influence of the school upon Native society was most impressive: "The Indian missionaries say that the influence the [Native] girls exercise on their parents and their home is *wonderful*, and were we able to take in double the number, how much more widespread would be the good influence!"<sup>95</sup> Later that year, the Bishop requested \$2800 from the Department of Indian Affairs to build an extension, buy furnishings, and secure an additional six acres of land, all in the name of Native education.<sup>96</sup> In order to distinguish the All Hallows' School from other religious-run institutions in the province, the Bishop again framed his appeal within the context of the sisters' financial position: not only had the sisters raised \$2000 of their own, he pointed out, but they, unlike many of their Roman Catholic counterparts,

<sup>94</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1889. Yale's average was 17 pupils, by contrast, the Church of England School at Albert Bay had an average daily attendance of six pupils. The exception was St. Mary's Mission School, Mission City.

<sup>95</sup> Violet Sillitoe, Jan 1, 1889. *NWOP*, no. 11, March 1889. Original emphasis. In 1889 the Yale school recorded an average daily attendance of 17 pupils. By comparison, the Church of England school at Alert Bay had 15 students on its roll, but its average daily attendance was only 6. See DIA school files, 1889.

<sup>96</sup> Bishop Sillitoe to Dewdney, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sept 26, 1889. DIA School files, 1889. PABC. See also *AHW*, Ascension-tide, 1899. The Bishop also wanted money to fund the school at Yale together with medical aid in the form of a resident doctor in the area.

received no salary for their labours.<sup>97</sup> Receiving a promise of \$2000 from the DIA, the sisters began construction of a new wing in 1889 to house the Native girls.<sup>98</sup> Sillitoe proudly announced the project's completion in May 1891: "The All Hallows' School for Indian girls continues to prosper under the management of the Sisters...and we have just completed the erection of an additional building at a cost of nearly \$4000, including schoolroom and dormitory, whereby we have almost doubled our accommodation."<sup>99</sup> DIA Superintendent Powell, who visited the school in 1890, was duly impressed, commenting on the conversion of a stable into "a pretty little chapel...an addition of no little importance."<sup>100</sup>

Thus, the All Hallows' School represented the marriage of the educational interests of Church and state in western Canada: the Bishop had secured reputable moral and academic instruction for Native and white girls alike, while the government believed that Native civilisation was being conducted according to plan. Although the sisters' status as devout teachers was clearly important to both of these agencies, their identity as unpaid, enterprising female workers was utilised by the Bishop to secure additional government funding. An article entitled "Indian Work in the Diocese of New Westminster," by E. L. Wright, the missionary at Lytton, emphasised these themes, placing the success of the sisters' work in the context of other educational attempts in the region. Whereas the Anglican residential school for boys south of Lytton was a "failure" with never more than five pupils, and Wright's own facility at Lytton was faltering, he noted that "We have a

<sup>97</sup> Bishop Sillitoe to Dewdney, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Sept 26, 1889. DIA School files, 1889. PABC. As will be discussed below, most Roman Catholic nuns received teaching salaries.

<sup>98</sup> The grant which the sisters received was only \$1500 and came with "a good many contingent requirements." East and West, Whitsuntide, 1890. See also Churchman's Gazette, February 1891.

<sup>99</sup> The Mission Field, 36. May 1, 1891.

<sup>100</sup> Powell to Vankoughnet, Dec 16, 1890. DIA School files, 1890.



most satisfactory and successful school for Indian girls at Yale, carried on by a community of Sisters who have been doing excellent work for nearly four years. It has required the utmost economy on the part of the Sisters to maintain the School."<sup>101</sup>

The sisters' reputation as economical was of course not purely discursive. Not only was their effective management of resources essential to the school's survival, but so were their continual and wide-ranging fund-raising efforts. Each year the sisters travelled extensively to raise money for the mission school. In March 1889, two of the sisters embarked on a fund-raising tour to Victoria and along the American west coast.<sup>102</sup> Although opposition to the sisters based on their identity as women religious was rare in the West, this tour suggests that it was not completely absent. While in Portland, Oregon the sisters were accused of impersonating Roman Catholic nuns in order to collect money for their school.<sup>103</sup> A statement in the *Oregonian* by Roman Catholic Archbishop William Gross explained the cause for alarm: "We are informed that persons representing themselves as Catholic Sisters are collecting money in this city and elsewhere in this archdiocese....the Sisters above referred are evidently impostors."<sup>104</sup> To the sisters' defence rushed Bishop Morris, the Episcopal Bishop of Oregon, who targeted his Catholic counterpart's "unmanly cowardice which can attack

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<sup>101</sup> *NWOP*, no. 10, November 1888. The Church of England's other two Native residential schools were in Albert Bay, on the northern tip of Vancouver Island, and Metlakatla, mid-way up the BC coast. In his comments on the small school at Lytton, the Bishop lamented that he had no male religious order to conduct the work. See DIA School files, 1890.

<sup>102</sup> The sisters visited Victoria, Hope, Tacoma, WA., Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle, raising \$1640.50

<sup>103</sup> See Coburn and Smith for a discussion of the "constant begging" done by Roman Catholic nuns in the American west, 112.

<sup>104</sup> *The Oregonian*, March 15, 1889. Cited in the *Churchman's Gazette*, vol 9, no. 1 (April 1889). The story warranted front-page coverage in the *Gazette*. For hostilities toward Catholic sisters in the American west, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*.

women."<sup>105</sup> Morris sought to set the record straight by explaining the "impostors" were actually "two highly respectable ladies from Yale, British Columbia, members of the All Hallows Sisterhood in Ditchingham, England [who] pretend to be nothing more or less than what they are."<sup>106</sup> Although Morris' discourse pitted the magnanimity of the Church of England against the pettiness of the Roman Catholicism, the episode exposes the controversy that could surround the novelty of Anglican women religious in the West. Of equal significance was the extensive coverage which the scandal received in the New Westminster diocesan press, indicating that the Church was eager to capitalise on any misrepresentation of the sisters' identity which might increase support for their cause. The *Churchman's Gazette* gave front-page coverage to the scandal, reporting that "the result of the attack has been most profitable to the sisters' cause" resulting in increased sympathy and generosity.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, in the sisters' own letters the Portland incident was never mentioned, except to note that the trip had successfully raised over \$1500.<sup>108</sup>

Nowhere did the sisters record how this case of mistaken identity

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<sup>105</sup> Bishop Morris to the *Oregonian*, March 16, 1889. Reprinted in the *Churchman's Gazette*, April 1889. The sisters had also travelled to the "upper country" in British Columbia. Bishop Sillitoe noted "the extreme kindness with which they were received in every quarter by both clergy and laity of all denominations during their collection." *DNWMR*, Nov 1890.

<sup>106</sup> Bishop Morris to the *Oregonian*, March 16, 1889. Reprinted in the *Churchman's Gazette*, April 1889. The sisters had also travelled to the "upper country" in British Columbia. Bishop Sillitoe noted "the extreme kindness with which they were received in every quarter by both clergy and laity of all denominations during their collection." *DNWMR*, Nov 1890.

<sup>107</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, vol 9, no. 1 (April 1889). The Oregon incident appears to be the only case of its kind which affected the sisters during their time in BC, at least prior to 1901. For his part, Bishop Sillitoe showed no particular fondness for this particular fund raising technique, exclaiming in 1885 that "It is a degradation of our office to have to make 'appeals' to conjure pence out of people's pockets to do God's work with." *NWQP*, October, 1885.

<sup>108</sup> Bishop Morris to the *Oregonian*, March 16, 1889. Reprinted in the *Churchman's Gazette*, April 1889. The balance sheet for the AH School in 1890 reveals that the sisters raised \$1640.50 from their west coast fund-raising tour. Of all the cities they visited, they collected the most at Portland! *Churchman's Gazette*, Feb. 1891.

affected their mission, yet the constant need to worry over finances and the exhaustion of travel seriously impaired these women's ability to cope. While their work provided an unparalleled source of pride, purpose, and community for the sisters, it was not without its perils. At times this work exacted a high price on the sisters' health. Sister Elizabeth suffered from a serious and protracted illness early in 1888, and months later, the Sister Superior's health also failed dramatically.<sup>109</sup> The following year, *East and West* reported the "complete breakdown in health of the Sister Superior at Yale."<sup>110</sup> The rigours of running the school, coupled with the exhaustions of mission work and fund-raising tours had taken their toll. By the summer of 1889, the Sister Superior, Sister Amy had become a virtual invalid, physically and emotionally drained, and was moved to the Sillitoe's residence to convalesce.<sup>111</sup> In response to such health problems, the Sisterhood dispatched two of its members in England to Yale at the end of 1888. Sister Margaret, a lay sister, was engaged at the school while Sister Constance, herself frail, attended to Sister Amy at the Bishop's home in Sapperton. "It was an anxious charge" to restore the Superior's health, *East and West* announced.

The sisters' trials were intensified by diverse personnel changes at All Hallows and in the diocese. In addition to the school's governess Miss Hardy, extra teachers were employed to enable white girls to be educated separately from Native pupils.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, the expansion of the school meant that the sisters now had less time to devote to missionary work among the Interior Salish. Nor did the recent arrival of two sisters bolster the work force, as

<sup>109</sup> Sister Elizabeth's illness was probably a result of her journey to attend a pupil's funeral at a distance of nine miles from the school. See *NWOP*, March 1888.

<sup>110</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1889.

<sup>111</sup> Violet Sillitoe, June 5, 1889. Reprinted in the *NWOP*, no. 12 (August 1889).

<sup>112</sup> Two teachers were employed at a combined salary of \$220 in 1888/1889. *AHW*, vol 1, 1899. The sisters were also assisted by a housekeeping staff, domestic servants, a Chinese worker, and an interpreter.

Sister Elizabeth's departure to England in the summer of 1890, Sister Amy's recurring health problems, and Sister Constance's frail constitution weakened the overall influence of the Sisterhood. That same year, the death of the Mother Superior and foundress of the Community in England, coupled with the departures from the diocese of clergymen Croucher, Edwardes, and Small - who had provided spiritual guidance to the sisters since their arrival in the province in 1884 - created further anxieties for the sisters.<sup>113</sup>

Amid these difficulties, it appears that the sisters' Canadian mission was being called into question. In the spring of 1891 Sister Amy travelled back to Ditchingham to discuss the future of the school with the new Mother Superior. White pupils called for qualified teachers, and while in England, Sister Amy secured two teachers, in part to replace the departing Miss Hardy, and as she explained matter-of-factly in *East & West*, "partly to answer that call for higher secular teaching which seems ever enlarging its demands"<sup>114</sup> One of these teachers, Althea Moody, was the daughter of a prominent CPR official in London. She had recently been on retreat at the Sisterhood at Ditchingham and had subsequently "placed her services unreservedly under the Sisters' command."<sup>115</sup> Moody went to Yale as a volunteer in Native work and became one of the sisters' most trusted and loyal supporters, eventually joining the Sisterhood in 1898. Her presence helped to ensure, amid the increasing secularisation of provincial education, that Native education at Yale remained a priority.<sup>116</sup> Such concerns were clearly central to Sister Amy's

<sup>113</sup> Small left for Korea in November 1890, Edwardes departed for central Africa. Lavinia Crosse died on June 26, 1890.

<sup>114</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1891. The teacher for the white school was Miss Miller, see *Churchman's Gazette*, Sept 1891.

<sup>115</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1891.

<sup>116</sup> Moody entered the novitiate in 1898 but was not professed until 1906. She left BC in 1907 to return to the sisterhood in England, but eventually left the Community. She founded the Little Sisters of the Poor, and worked in India prior to her death in 1930. Althea's sister Rose was also a sister in CAH. CAH Archives

discussions with the Superior.

Announcing her return in August, the *Churchman's Gazette* noted somewhat vaguely that Sister Amy had "been completely successful in her endeavours to procure a settlement of the questions relating to the Indian School."<sup>117</sup> The *Community* magazine was decidedly less cryptic, explaining that "the School at Yale, which was founded originally for Indian and half-breed children alone, is now, through outside pressure, a mixed school, receiving white children also."<sup>118</sup> In the discourse of the Sisterhood, such a bold statement - with its reference to "outside pressure" - reveals that the sisters did not welcome the introduction of white pupils as boarders wholeheartedly. Having struggled financially for nearly seven years, and worked to the point of exhaustion raising money for the school, the sisters had been forced to diversify. Superintendent Powell explained that as the \$60 grant per pupil did not cover expenses, the sisters could only continue with their work "by means of fees paid by a few white children attending the school, of the latter there were seven when I visited the Institution."<sup>119</sup> The sisters' hand had been forced, and so, to a certain extent, had that of the Department of Indian Affairs: although mixed residential schools might appear to have promoted the DIA's goal of cultural assimilation, such institutions contravened the dominant ideologies governing race in the province. However, the government had to choose between either increasing its grant to this successful and economical school, or allowing white parents

<sup>117</sup> Churchman's Gazette, August 1891.

<sup>118</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1891.

<sup>119</sup> Powell to Vankoughnet, Dec 16, 1890. DIA School files, 1890. In 1890 school fees totalled \$688, approx. one-third of receipts. The education of Native girls was in part funded by scholarships from the SPCK. The organisation gave five scholarships of £10 each to five pupils over three years., AHW, 1899.

to cover these expenses themselves: it chose the latter.<sup>120</sup> At the end of 1891, the diocese happily announced that the "strain of mental anxiety" which had troubled the Yale Superior for a year "has been entirely removed," and that "the work of the School will now go forward without doubt or interruption."<sup>121</sup>

The mixed character of the school also had a substantial impact on the quality and nature of education, the experiences of the pupils, and the manner by which the school was represented. For example, Sister Amy informed readers of the *Community* magazine how one "half-breed" girl, "not in all respects a hopeful case - had been detained by her parents after the summer holidays last year. While thus detained at home she had been teaching her younger brother and sister, and trying to influence the Indian neighbours."<sup>122</sup> The sisters were delighted to report that on the occasion of the girl's Christmas communion, "her parents were married, after four years of procrastination, and there is the happy prospect of both the girl and her younger sister coming to the Sisters this spring, without causing any possibility of reflection upon the school on account of the irregular relationship of their parents."<sup>123</sup> Such comments reflect the manner in which the change in the school's identity - from a small mission school to an

<sup>120</sup> Correspondence in the DIA School files reports and the annual reports of this time on the racial mixing at All Hallows was concerned exclusively with financial rather than racial issues.

Vankoughnet was concerned only with whether the white students at the school had been included in the tally of grant-eligible pupils. The Bishop was outraged that his ethics were being questioned in such a manner: "the mere suggestion of the possibility that I could draw public money for any other than its lawful object is an affront both to me and the sister in charge of the Society" he wrote to Powell in Jan. 1891. See DIA School files, 1891.

<sup>121</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, September 1891. Although the CAH archives do not reveal the details of these negotiations, it seems plausible to suggest that Sister Amy was concerned about the future of the Indian school. Based on other comments in *East and West*, which stressed the "outside pressure" which resulted in the acceptance of white pupils, she may have felt that the Indian school may eventually be overtaken by the lucrative white school and thus endeavoured to secure its continuance.

<sup>122</sup> CAH Archives. Sister Amy's report to the MS, 1889.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

institution catering to the province's white elite - affected both the type of Native girl who gained admittance together with an intensified concern for the school's public reputation.

Public responses to the school appear to indicate that its mixed-race student body did not attract widespread controversy. However, in 1891, an anonymous letter in a local paper condemned the school's racial diversity in what Bishop Sillitoe referred to as an "abusive and slanderous manner." His defence, published in the *Churchman's Gazette*, clearly outlined the nature of racial politics at the school: the "few white boarders...are lodged in a separate building from the Indian children, they have a separate dining hall, a separate sitting-room, separate accommodation in the schoolroom, and a separate teacher. Even in the playground they only very occasionally mix with the other children."<sup>124</sup> The Bishop took pains to represent the school as formally divided along racial lines. Yet, his concluding remark that "There are certainly two classes of children in the Yale School, but, at all events, it is a school for girls only, and it is presided over by a lady," framed its identity in terms of gender rather than race.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, he connected the school's reputation with that of the sisters', which was beyond reproach. Although other ladies' schools may have resented All Hallows' success, as the Bishop suspected, and some parents may have been hesitant to send their daughters to this relatively new mixed school, the daughters of the clergy and prominent civic figures in the province provided a steady stream of white

<sup>124</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, February 1891. The actual letter of complaint was not reprinted in the paper. According to the data at the Yale museum, thirteen white pupils attended All Hallows in 1891, although it does not specify how many of these were boarders.

<sup>125</sup> *Churchman's Gazette*, February 1891. Jean Barman has interpreted the Bishop's remarks - together with those of the school examiner in 1891 - as evidence of the school's capitulation to outside pressure for the formal division of pupils according to race. Barman, however, does not focus on the sisters' politics, which reveal the existence of an opposition to such change.

pupils.<sup>126</sup> Genevieve Dickinson, for example, daughter of Robert Dickinson, former Mayor of New Westminster and member of the Legislative Assembly, attended All Hallows and served as a bridesmaid at the wedding of her sister to the son of Archdeacon Small, the sisters' former chaplain.<sup>127</sup> With connections to the province's elite such as this, the school's reputation was assured. However, the Bishop's heated response to one anonymous letter, with its repeated but somewhat ambiguous emphasis on the segregated nature of the school, does suggest that such opinions may have been more widespread.

School reports and examinations, taken over the period of the school's expansion and formal division, further illustrate the ambiguities by which Native education was represented and reveal how important the sisters' collective identity was in relation to the school's character. In the summer of 1890, the year prior to the completion of the Indian School wing, former Manchester School Board inspector Nicolai Schou performed the school's annual examination. Schou, whose dislike of the secular education of the province biased him in favour of the religious instruction at All Hallows, was impressed with the pupils' aptitude for Scripture, reading, choral singing, and academic subjects. Additionally, he was taken with the domestic arrangements of the household - "a model of order, cleanliness, and neatness" - as well as what he witnessed was the close bond between staff and students: "The tone of the School seems excellent and the children have

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<sup>126</sup> I have found no evidence, other than the Bishop's response to this letter, of animosity toward the school or reluctance among parents to send their daughters due to the presence of Native girls. Until the completion of the Indian school wing, most white girls at the school were day pupils.

<sup>127</sup> See the Churchman's Gazette, August 1, 1890. Dickinson also served as the President of the City Council, and was a member of the Legislative Assembly, the board of trade, and the local committee of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was also a Justice of the Peace.



evidently a loving regard for their protectresses and teachers."<sup>128</sup> His comments on the progress of the Native girls also reveal, however, that assumptions based on race and class coloured his expectations:

Excellent work is accordingly being done...for some of the many girl children of a most interesting Native race. The younger Indians of British Columbia are, as I conceive, capable by virtue of a naturally docile intelligence of becoming under Christian conditions, a very useful, permanent element of the working community of the Province....And that they belong to a race capable of the higher life is proven simply by the knowledge and the conduct of several pupils of this School.<sup>129</sup>

Schou's report brims with the optimism of supporters of the civilising mission of empire. As did the reports which outlined the progress of penitents at the House of Mercy, Schou's evaluation stressed the utility of Native pupils as workers. Moreover, he emphasised the significance of religious instruction to achieving this goal, thus validating the sisters' enterprise. In concluding his report, which noted the presence of "several intelligent pupils of white parentage," Schou looked forward to the expansion of this division, which would allow not only for the religious instruction of white girls, but also for moral influence they would have on the Native girls at the school. A less-biased account of the examination, recorded in Vancouver's *Daily World*, noted the pupils' academic skills together with their reading of Scripture "with more than usual intelligence."<sup>130</sup> In a similar vein as Schou, however, the paper stressed the harmonious spirit of the school, commenting that "the twenty-two Indian

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<sup>128</sup> Report on the Examination of the All Hallows Mission School, Yale BC, Midsummer 1890. PABC. See also *Churchman's Gazette*, August 1890; *East and West*, All Saints, 1890 which recorded the presence of 21 "Indian" girls and 4 white day scholars (white boarders would have gone home for the summer.)

<sup>129</sup> Report on the Examination of the All Hallows Mission School, Yale BC, Midsummer 1890. PABC.

<sup>130</sup> *Daily World*, Vancouver, BC. July 5, 1890.

[and] half-breed girls...some white children [and] the sisters...form a happy little community living in a pleasant home amid beautiful surroundings."<sup>131</sup>

By the following year's midsummer exam, also administered by Nicolai Schou, and conducted after the completion of the Indian School wing, the school was now formally divided. The report referred to the "Ladies school (white) and the Indian Mission School." Approximately ten white and twenty-two Native girls attended the school that year.<sup>132</sup> Schou's 1891 report illustrates a new way of viewing the school and specifically how the white girls served, in his opinion, to bridge the cultural gap between the races rather than extend it. Commenting on the tone of the white school, the inspector declared, "I was very much impressed by the lady-like demeanor of the pupils...[they] are clearly being educated for refined Christian gentlewomen, and the school a residential one of a highclass."<sup>133</sup> While Schou commented that the Native girls "are gradually acquiring a good English elementary education," he again reserved his highest compliments for their decorum: "I can certainly say, that I was on the whole favourably impressed by the progress of the pupils, still more so by their gentle, trusting habits and general demeanour."<sup>134</sup> Significantly, the inspector referred to the domestic training of Native girls and the existence of a "good pupil teacher" among their number. Thus, while the white girls were training to be "refined Christian gentlewomen," their Native counterparts were learning, in part, how to serve them, but also to carry on the sisters' educational mission. Schou was careful

<sup>131</sup> Daily World, July 5, 1890. Both Schou and the paper commented on the pupils' "sweet singing."

<sup>132</sup> DIA Annual Reports, 1891. For the number of white pupils, see the Yale museum All Hallows records.

<sup>133</sup> Churchman's Gazette, vol xi, no. 4, August 1891. The white curriculum was scripture, Canadian British and Roman history, geography, grammar, arithmetic, composition, reading, writing, dictation, elementary French, music and piano.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

to point out that although the school was indeed divided academically, moral training was more fluid:

The School is, having regard to racial and other prejudices, entirely distinct from the Indian Missionary work of the All Hallows Sisterhood. In one respect however, and that an excellent one, are the young ladies of the school influenced by the contiguity of the Indian Mission. They have thus occasional opportunities of showing little kindnesses of the Native protegees of the Sisters, and that those are not being neglected, the manner of some of the very young Indian children clearly showed.<sup>135</sup>

For Nicolai Schou, the symbiotic effects of educating the daughters of the province's white elite alongside Native girls hinged primarily on issues of morality, and it was important for him to demonstrate how both classes of children benefited from this arrangement. Specifically, he highlighted the ways in which the school's racial diversity strengthened its Christian ethos. While the white girls benefited from the religious and moral education provided by the sisters, these girls, in turn, would help to "raise up" the Native pupils, and all would thus be "improved." In Schou's discourse, the school thus served as both training facility and testing ground for the moral instruction of white girls. For their part, the sisters were keen to draw out the mutual aspect of moral instruction. *East and West* explained at the end of 1891 that although the pupils were formally divided in terms of sleeping and education, "much of the social and moral training they share and share alike."<sup>136</sup>

The moral training of all their pupils was paramount to the sisters, yet such an emphasis did not come at the expense of the schools' academic standards. Throughout its existence, All Hallows' standard of intellectual

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *East and West*, All Saints, 1891.

instruction for Native girls remained consistently high compared with other Native residential schools in the province.<sup>137</sup> These standards are impressive in light of the increasing emphasis on industrial education as set forth by the DIA and practised by other Native residential schools. In 1885, for example, Native pupils at St. Albert Mission School, operated by the Grey nuns of Montreal, engaged in a mixed programme of academic subjects and domestic skills, such as butter making and knitting.<sup>138</sup> Three years later, under Superintendent Dewdney, DIA policy recommended that Native pupils devote themselves primarily to the practical arts: "in short, a complete training in industries and in domestic economy."<sup>139</sup> This increased focus on the industrial nature of Native education can be seen in the curriculum of many residential schools. As Dewdney's report for 1891 explained, "The female pupils at the [Roman Catholic] institutions on Kuper Island and Kootenay are taught sewing, knitting, cooking, baking, washing, ironing, dairy work and gardening."<sup>140</sup> More generally, he extolled the schools for instilling in their pupils "the value of time...the routine of rising, dressing and washing themselves daily, reading the word of God" in addition to attending to their gardens, livestock, and homework.<sup>141</sup> By this date, most schools had pared down their academic instruction to just the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In contrast, by 1891, All Hallows was the only school in the province

<sup>137</sup> See DIA Annual Reports, 1884 - 1912. Many other girls' schools taught reading and writing only. For a list of subjects taught at All Hallows, see DIA School files, the Churchman's Gazette, and AHW.

<sup>138</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1885. The report noted the high standards at the school, located on the Saskatchewan River, 160.

<sup>139</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1888. For a discussion of the "cultural genocide" practised at the Kamloops School, see McNally, 144 -6. For a more general discussion of curriculum, see Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, 220.

<sup>140</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1891. xii.

<sup>141</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1891. xiii.

which retained a full complement of academic subjects.<sup>142</sup> Its Native school curriculum for 1893 included reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, history, music, drawing, composition, and scripture.<sup>143</sup> Toward the end of the century, Native girls continued to receive five to six hours of classroom instruction each day, and were increasingly serving as pupil teachers at the school. Sister Amy explained the benefits of this scheme: "A few of the elder girls take classes in reading, spelling, and arithmetic in the lower school, in order to develop and stimulate their own powers of teaching and influencing others."<sup>144</sup> As it had been from the inception of the school, the academic education of Native girls remained a priority at All Hallows throughout the century. Moreover, the continuing emphasis on academics should not be attributed to an increase in white pupils, as the only subjects on the curriculum in 1893 that did not appear in 1886 were drawing and composition.<sup>145</sup> The curriculum for white and Native students differed only in that the former had classes in elementary French and Roman history.<sup>146</sup>

The character of its teaching staff during this period also suggests ways in which the All Hallows' School differed from other Native residential schools in BC. By 1900, Sisters Alice Louisa and Amy had been working at Yale for over fifteen years. During this time, they established close relationships with those whom they worked, pupils and clergy alike. The stability of their mission to Native pupils stands in sharp contrast not only to the more temporary nature of secular female teaching in the province, but

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<sup>142</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1891. 233. Many schools taught reading and writing only. Bella Bella Methodist school was the only other school in BC to teach history.

<sup>143</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1893.

<sup>144</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1900. See also the 1898 Report, and East and West, All Saints, 1900.

<sup>145</sup> See East & West, DIA Annual Reports. Music was a "new" subject but musical instruction had been central to the sisters' regime since the beginning of the school in 1884.

<sup>146</sup> See the Diocese of New Westminster Monthly Record and its successor, Work for the Far West. For Native curriculum see DIA Annual Reports.

also to the disruptions which often characterised the schools operated by Roman Catholic nuns. According to J. R. Miller, the Sisters of St. Ann abandoned their new school at Williams Lake in 1888 due to a dearth of female pupils.<sup>147</sup> A few years later, they also withdrew from their operation at Kamloops. The 1891 DIA report explained that the sisters left because they were unable to find a clergyman who could attend as often as the rules of their Order required.<sup>148</sup> Their departure had a significant effect upon the pupils as the woman who replaced the sisters resigned the following year, forcing the closure of the school until April 1893.<sup>149</sup> By contrast, not only were the All Hallows' sisters a stable workforce, but they were also, again unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, willing to work without financial compensation. For example, at the Kuper Island School, Sisters Mary Joachim and Mary Celestine each received annual salaries of \$300 from the DIA.<sup>150</sup> At the Cranbrook school the sister-in-charge was paid \$400 a year.<sup>151</sup>

In 1892, the Reverend Allan Pitman of the diocese of Lichfield arrived in British Columbia to spend a year working among the Interior Salish. His

<sup>147</sup> Miller, Shingwauk's Vision, 244. He cites several other examples of similar actions by Roman Catholic nuns. See also McNally's account of the school, 150-54. Interestingly, McNally explains how this school, originally opened in 1872, admitted both white and 'half-breed' pupils. However, the sisters' insistence that Native parents pay for their children's education caused enrolment to cease. The school was eventually reopened in 1896 under the management of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. This school was characterised by student defiance: pupils would run away during the summer and not return. It finally closed in 1981.

<sup>148</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1891, 134. The sisters had taught 24 boys and girls prior to their departure. The work was subsequently taken over by a Mrs. Richardson and her daughter. McNally explains that the Sisters refused to work with a lay school principal, as Ottawa was insisting, 143.

<sup>149</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1893, 131. Not surprisingly, the DIA lauded the sisters' educational efforts at the various schools they operated in BC, such as Kuper Island and Kamloops.

<sup>150</sup> DIA Annual Reports, esp 1891. For details of the school, which opened in 1890, see McNally.

<sup>151</sup> See McNally, 147. The two teaching sisters each received \$200. McNally explains that the Sisters of Providence were attracted to the school by the promise that they would be in charge and would receive substantial salaries. See Miller, Shingwauk's for the discrepancy between male and female salaries at these schools, pp. 242-45. Sisters were also on the payroll at Qu'Appelle Industrial School, High River Industrial School, and the Kamloops School, where salaries ran to over \$2000. DIA Annual Reports.

representation of the school during a visit to its annual prize day, which appeared in *The Mission Field*, powerfully denotes the successful manner by which the sisters' work was being publicised:

There, each in their own wing, but beneath a common roof and inspiration, dwell the happiest band of children, "whites" and Indians, that it has been my good fortune to see. What struck me even more than the subject and manner of their recitations, music, and range of information--was the atmosphere of "home" prevalent everywhere. This evidently is no mere "cram shop"; here the principle evidently is to make education mean the drawing out of that "best" which is within every child of man--not the forcing in of so many facts, but the educating (if I may so speak) of the God-like spark which lights every man, if he will, in this complex world.<sup>152</sup>

To Pitman, the work of the sisters at Yale epitomised the potential of the civilising mission of British imperialism in the late-nineteenth century. The "delightful country home" which the sisters had created at Yale bore witness to the power of God, acting through the sisters, in Pitman's words, "to make all the inmates happy through the realisation of their better self."<sup>153</sup> The Community at Ditchingham must indeed have been proud of the sisters' efforts when it reprinted Pitman's accolades in *East and West*: "How those Sisters at Yale must have worked! how they must have prayed! how they must have loved to have produced such a marvellous change in the band of bright, well-mannered, easy-mannered children of the untutored Indian!"<sup>154</sup> The relevance of Pitman's rhetoric lies in the emphasis he placed not on the pupils' achievements, but rather those of the sisters, who had "worked" and "prayed" - here he evoked the Community motto "always praying, always working," - in order "to have produced" such success. Of course, such

<sup>152</sup> *The Mission Field*, vol 37, Jan 1, 1892. "Impression of Indian Missions in the Diocese of New Westminster" by Rev. Allan Pitman, 22.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Pitman, 22, Reprinted in *East and West*, All Saints, 1891.

rhetoric not only masks the students' diligent efforts, but also the ways in which both sisters and Native girls derived meaning from the "marvellous change" they had respectively, procured and endured. By creating a "home" in the Canadian wilderness, the All Hallows sisters attempted to extend the tenets of Victorian philanthropy and moral reform to the Native girls in their care. That this "home" was designed to serve as an alternative to the girls' existing homes - figuratively if not literally - bears witness to the sisters' identity as imperial agents. How then did the sisters interpret their mission, and how might the effects of this mission upon Native society begin to be understood?

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### **"Good Indians and Christians too": The Ambiguities of the All Hallows Mission**

A sense of these effects emerges dramatically within narratives written by Native pupils at the school. Through these accounts, the myriad ways in which the practices of the school were experienced by the students can begin to be addressed, as well as how the sisters influenced the identities of these girls. In 1889, Christine Macdonald, one of the school's original 'half-breed' pupils, now aged fourteen, was chosen to write the annual Christmas letter to the Mother Superior in England. Christine's letter brims with insights into the ways in which identity was constructed and relationships were experienced at the school. She explained that "there are twenty of us Indians and Half-Breeds and only two young ladies."<sup>155</sup> One of these 'young ladies' was selected as Father Christmas in the school pageant which took as its subject the annual school inspection. In the school's version of *A Christmas*

<sup>155</sup> Christine Madonald to the Mother Superior, CAH Ditchingham, December 15, 1889. East and West, Whitsuntide, 1890. See also Diocese of New Westminster Monthly Record, July 1890.



*Carol*, the children received three visitors: the inspector, whose examinations make the children cry, Father Christmas, who sends the inspector away, and the good Spirits, who comfort the children. Through the pageant, the sisters demonstrated their attempts to create a syncretic culture at All Hallows' school by the incorporation of Native elements into this Christian holiday. Significantly, Father Christmas' portrayal by a white pupil and those of the comforting spirits by Native girls suggests how the sisters attempted to negotiate cultural difference at the school.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the mixed-race recreation complicates official discourses of the divided nature of "Brookside" prior to its division in 1891.

The petty dramas of the pageant paled in comparison to the reality of Christine's life: just a few weeks earlier, her mother Annie, who had relocated to Yale to be closer to her daughter, the doctor, and the sisters, had died. Christine's detailed account in *East & West* highlights the profound influence of the sisters:

Sister Alice taught [my mother] about God and the Church and helped her for Communion. She had Communion before she died. One morning Mali [a fellow pupil] brought a little table and a white cloth down to our shanty and made an altar there, and my mother and I had our Communion together. She died on November 5. My mother was properly buried like a Christian by Mr. Small. I have come back to stay with the Sisters always.<sup>157</sup>

Undoubtedly, Christine recognised the importance of Christian rituals and found comfort in her close relationship with the sisters. The sisters appear to

have provided both her and her mother with spiritual succour and

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, By the end of 1889, the Superior was able to return to the school, but her health remained poor. Christine explained how, despite her illness, Sister Amy continued to participate in school activities, such as the Christmas play: "Sister Superior has been sick for a long time, so we don't see very much of her as we used to, but she wrote out all what we are to act, and is helping to make the dresses. When she is well enough she brings her chair out into the hall to show us what we are to do and how to say our parts."

<sup>157</sup> *East and West*, Whitsuntide, 1890. *DNWMR*, July 1890.

protection, in addition to providing a new home for Christine and serving as a surrogate family.<sup>158</sup> Although Christine seemed to be content to remain with the sisters, she was also in demand elsewhere, possibly as a domestic. The sisters were thus forced to negotiate between their own beliefs and those of the Native community in order to protect what they believed were Christine's best interests. As the fourteen-year old explained, "I will go for my holidays to my friends; there is one who said he would adopt me and give me all I wanted. I will stay with him and his wife for a little while, because Sister said they would not be so careful of me as my poor mother was."<sup>159</sup> If Christine were made to feel that she no longer belonged with her own people, a sense of belonging to the Sisterhood was deeply ingrained in this Native pupil. She ended her letter to the Superior by stating, "We know you love your Indian children, even though you have never seen us." She signed her letter in the manner of the sisters: "I remain, dear Mother, Your grateful and affectionate child, Christine." In light of her mother's death, it can only be imagined how Christine interpreted her appropriation of this maternal language.

The relationship fostered between the sisters and this original pupil was thus characterised by protection and dependency within a surrogate family. Certainly by publishing Christine's letter in the Community magazine, the Sisterhood wished to demonstrate the effective nature of its work in the Canadian West, not only in creating loyal, Christian Native girls, but also in extending their influence to these pupils' families: Christine had not been made to feel that her mother exerted a negative influence, rather, the reverse seems to be true. The letter also suggests, however, the

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<sup>158</sup> The records provide no indication of Christine's white father's whereabouts.

<sup>159</sup> East and West, Whitsuntide, 1890. DNWMR, July 1890.

trepidation which the sisters felt once their pupils left the school and were no longer subject to their maternal care. Christine's account stresses how Native pupils identified the sisters within the discourses of Christian motherhood: as Rev. Allan Pitman and Archdeacon Woods before him had testified, the sisters had created a home in the wilderness where Native girls were made to feel safe. A decade on, the Community was happy to report that Christine was teaching the children of a family in nearby Lytton. Richard Small exclaimed that "You may well feel encouraged at finding your seed sown in the past, thus bearing fruit. It is really a fulfilment of the plan so near to our late Bishop's heart, that those taught in the School might in time develop [sic] into teachers of others."<sup>160</sup>

Christine's friend Mali Quelqueltalko similarly was prevailed upon to write for the *Diocese of New Westminster Monthly Record* at Christmas 1889. Her letter demonstrates how the sisters utilised Native girls directly to solicit funds for their school prior to the completion of the Indian School in 1891. As a means of introducing the sixteen-year old correspondent to readers, Sister Amy explained that "I find it very difficult in the routine of our quiet lives out here in the American wilds to find subjects to write of sufficiently interesting for publication....[Mali] is evidently hampered by no such considerations. Please use of or destroy her letter, as you judge best."<sup>161</sup> Accordingly, Mali recorded the delights of the season, including the beautiful Indian School Christmas tree and the sleigh rides she enjoyed with the sisters. Yet, she also explained that "The Sisters did not know what to do for the Indians this Christmas; they had no woollen scarves or pretty handkerchiefs, because not any had been sent out to them as usual by the good English

<sup>160</sup> Richard Small's report, *AHW*, Ascentiontide 1900.

<sup>161</sup> Mali Quelqueltalko to Mr. Mogg, December 18, 1889. *Diocese of New Westminster Monthly Record* (DNWMR) vol 1, no 4 (Dec 1889).

people."<sup>162</sup> The conclusion to her letter exposed its primary function. Her appeal was charming yet direct:

We want a new school-house very badly. It is very pretty where we now live, nearly a mile from the Church, and we have more rooms than in the old house, but it is not large enough for us all. Sister is always telling people that we have no room for more children. The Sisters went out begging last spring, and got \$1500 to build, but it is not enough, and we have to wait until someone will send us more money. I hope I have not written a too long letter.<sup>163</sup>

In her appeal, Mali effectively depicted the sisters' initiative and also how the absence of funds was preventing the expansion of the work. The sisters also used the girls' letters to demonstrate the potential of Native education and an appreciation for what the sisters and "the good English people" have done on their behalf. Through these letters the industrious, dedicated and resourceful character of both pupils and sisters could be promoted to solicit support.

Although Mali's letter provides few clues as to how the All Hallows' School affected her own identity, her continued relationship with the sisters and the school as an adult does suggest that she viewed her experiences in a positive manner. She remained at the school as a teacher after graduation, providing instruction to Native girls and serving as an interpreter. Her sister Annie also attended the school. In 1898, Mali joined her parents for midnight Christmas services at the sisters' chapel. Parts of the service were conducted in the Yale dialect, and she particularly enjoyed the singing. Mali had become a 'model' pupil, not only did she serve as "a bright example to those still under training" but she had converted her entire family to Christianity. As a

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<sup>162</sup> Mali Quelqueltalko to Mr. Mogg, December 18, 1889. DNWMRvol 1, no 4 (Dec 1889). Mali's letter continued: "Then Sister Superior said on Sunday, "We will light the tree with Chinese lanterns, and hang on it buns and jam tarts and tin mugs, and brew a can of hot coffee, and stand it underneath the tree."

<sup>163</sup> Mali Quelqueltalko to Mr. Mogg, December 18, 1889. DNWMRvol 1, no 4 (Dec 1889).

New Westminster paper explained: "She is a most trusted maid in the schools, teaches the pure Indian children on Sunday, and helps with the Mission work among the old indians."<sup>164</sup> The following year, she took up employment as a nursemaid in Vancouver, but remained connected to Native society in a significant fashion.<sup>165</sup> In 1900, this accomplished and articulate twenty-seven year old wrote to *All Hallows in the West*, the official publication of the Sisterhood at Yale, describing a recent visit to "my people" during which the festivities of potlatch took place:<sup>166</sup>

I think if some of our friends, I mean our real white friends like the Sisters and Miss Moody would come, they would see for themselves; you cannot understand unless you see, and the Indians would be so glad, and there would be a chance to teach them to be good Indians and Christians too, and not what they often feel, that to be Christians they must leave off being Indians and try to be like white people giving up even what is harmless in their old customs.<sup>167</sup>

Whatever else had been imparted to Mali at the All Hallows' School, her understanding of the benefits and the relevance of her own culture had not been destroyed. Moreover, the publication of her letter in the Community magazine suggests that the Sisterhood endorsed her sentiments. Her identification of the sisters as "our real white friends" speaks to the ways in which she differentiated between the sisters and other missionaries, and also of her appreciation of the threatening nature of mission work upon Native culture. Yet in her attempts to reconcile her Native and Christian identities, Mali perceptively highlighted the limitations of such an endeavour: only

<sup>164</sup> Work for the Far West, Quarterly Magazine for the Diocese of New Westminster, October 1898.

<sup>165</sup> The records do not indicate if Mali received remuneration for her efforts. AHW, vol 1, 3 (1900).

<sup>166</sup> Mali to the MS, CAH, All Hallows in the West, vol 2, no 2 (1900)

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., Myra Rutherford notes that missionary women in the Canadian North usually downplayed the extent to which Natives who converted to Christianity retained their own customs. Women and the White Man's God, 123. Barman notes that "no evidence exists that any of the sisters or Miss Moody ever took up Mali's invitation." "Separate and Unequal," 119. The present study, however, demonstrates that the sisters did visit the Interior Salish at their homes quite frequently.

through experience could ignorance be tempered with understanding. Although the sisters originally viewed their mission in terms of imparting a model of British society and culture to the Native community, their experiences with Native peoples over a fifteen year period had not sharpened but rather complicated the politics of their work. At Yale, the sisters did not attempt to eradicate Native culture, but attempted to incorporate it into their programme of civilisation and conversion. Like Mali, they wished to bridge the cultural gap between white and Native societies, demonstrating that the "boundary markers of Empire" could be extremely porous in the imperial setting at Yale.

Other former pupils appeared to endorsed the sisters' work in their own fashion, not infrequently by sending their own daughters to be educated at the Mission School. When Susanna, one of the sisters' earliest pupils, sent her daughter Leesa to the sisters in 1899, she wrote "If my little daughter want anything, please write to Mr. [Richard] Small, I am sure he will give it to you, and my husband will pay him if we come back. I am very sorry indeed not to see Leesa, I like to see her, but I couldn't now. I hope I might see her sometime, after I would come home."<sup>168</sup> After two years at All Hallows, Leesa was a model student by the age of six and a particular source of pride to the sisters:

[She] is a strikingly prosperous looking little mortal, very fat and stumpy, with strong white teeth, and strong black hair, every strand of which stands uncompromisingly upright. She knows the Lord's Prayer, and can answer the first Church Catechism, she has laboured through the Second Primer and can write a tidy largehand copy. She is only six yeas old, but she can knit and she can hem neatly. Can any ordinary little

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<sup>168</sup> AHW, Michaelmas 1899.

English girl of that age do more?"<sup>169</sup>

In her analysis of missionary work in the Canadian North, historian Myra Rutherdale notes how "[i]dealised portraits of Aboriginal Christians were deemed a positive sign of progress and potential."<sup>170</sup> As their description of Leesa's accomplishment makes clear, the sisters were indeed proud of this particular pupil. Their comparison of Leesa to "any ordinary little English girl," however, suggests the radical nature by which they viewed the potential of such children: this characterisation crossed boundaries of race and nationality. The sisters' description of Leesa would have presented readers back home a striking juxtaposition of "Indian" physical characteristics with "English" educational and domestic accomplishments. The presence of second-generation pupils such as Leesa, whom the sisters referred to as "our grandchildren," testifies not only to the ways in which the sisters positioned their mission within the discourses of maternalism, but also how "old girls" did as well. Taken together, the cases of Christine, Mali, Susanna, and Leesa suggest the ambiguous impact of the sisters' work with Native girls at Yale, and provide some clues as to the nature of the relationships they formed with the sisters. These relationships were characterised by dependency, sensitivity, and quite possibly fondness. However, for Christine, who lost her mother, Susanna and Leesa, who lost each other, and Mali, who feared the loss of her culture, these complex relationships often occurred within a context of crisis and uncertainty.

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<sup>169</sup> AHW, vol 3, 1 (1901). In 1901 former pupil Anna Malchesant sent her daughter to the sisters because she was dying of consumption, as she explained in her telegram to the sisters: "I sent my little girl to you because I am dying. Dake care of her, make her to pe goot." The sisters explained that "Anna had learned to sew and cook, to read, write and speak English but, like many Indian children, could not distinguish among b and v, d and t." After 4 years at the school, she left to marry and had not been heard from again until her daughter arrived.

<sup>170</sup> Rutherdale, Women and the White Man's God, 120.

The sisters' influence at Yale was not confined only to the Native girls at the school. Rather, it extended to the Interior Salish throughout the Fraser Valley. The nature of this influence, as seen in Chapter Six, can be gauged effectively through a consideration of the sisters' travels beyond Yale. In sharp contrast to the regulated, domestic, and artificial character of the school, these journeys took place within a wild, unpredictable, natural terrain. Removed from the structured environment of the school, the sisters were completely at the mercy of their Native guides and the elements. Although it did not create a reversal of power relations, camping trips complicated the dynamics of racial privilege by placing the sisters at risk and exposing their vulnerability.<sup>171</sup> By the 1890s, when the sisters had developed closer relationships with the Interior Salish, these trips allowed the sisters to consolidate their missionary efforts, and perhaps just as significantly, to see at first-hand the effects of their mission upon Native culture.

Summer vacations were often spent on camping trips and the sisters were usually accompanied by those Native pupils who did not return home during the school closing. That the sisters enjoyed such holidays is evidenced by the fact that in 1892 Mr. Moody gave his daughter Althea, who was a teacher at the Indian School and a novice at All Hallows, a camping vacation as a gift, equipping the party with a tent, furniture and various supplies in order to make this outing more "practicable and easy than trips in the past"<sup>172</sup> An analysis of this trip throughout the province's interior speaks to the ways in which the cultural dynamic between the sisters and the Interior Salish was

<sup>171</sup> Myra Rutherdale also exposes the vulnerability of female missionaries in the Canadian North and their dependence on Aboriginal guides. See Women and the White Man's God, esp. chapter 4. On female vulnerability in the colonial west more generally, see Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire.

<sup>172</sup> East and West, All Saints 1892. Although not officially a sister until 1898, Moody's identity, unlike that of any other teacher or school employee, was that of a sister in training, and it is in this manner that she would have been presented to the pupils.



becoming increasingly more complex. Although the sisters had become more experienced campers by this date, they were still not able to dispense with the trappings of 'civility' which served to provide a boundary between themselves and Native culture. As the party made its way to the Native camp at Spuzzum, Mali Quelqueltalko, one of the original Native pupils, and a group of other girls were dispatched ahead to prepare the camp for Sister Amy and Althea Moody's arrival. The girls made a comfortable bed of spruce boughs, which together with "a piece of matting on the ground, and camp stools to sit upon, gave an air of luxury to our surroundings" reported Moody in her letter to Sister Alice.<sup>173</sup> At the Spuzzum camp, Sister Amy attended to cleaning and repairing the church, and mending the altar frontal, while Moody taught the Lord's prayer to the elderly in the Thompson language along with the first four of the ten commandments. Although many Anglican clergy in British Columbia were ignorant of Native languages, Moody's commitment to communicating with Native peoples in their own language can be seen as representing a fissure in the armour of imperial hegemony.<sup>174</sup> Thus, while some markers of cultural difference, such as camp stools, remained significant, others were being bridged.

The interplay between the sisters and Native culture emerges from the their detailed account of this missionary expedition in *East and West*.<sup>175</sup> Sister Amy was obviously impressed with the level of dedication among

<sup>173</sup> East and West, All Saints, 1892.

<sup>174</sup> Significantly, in 1894 Althea Moody prepared a translation of the Communion Service into the Sh' At dialect and privately printed "for the use of the Lower Fraser Indians in the All Hallows' Mission Chapel, Yale B.C." Sh'Atjinkujin, Part of the Communion Service of the Church of England (London: Darling and Son, Ltd., 1894). PABC. See also DNWMR, May/June 1894. Miller makes a similar argument in his conclusion to Shingwauk's Vision, 415.

<sup>175</sup> These trips also afforded the sisters to act as mediaries in local disputes, such as the occasion when the sisters travelled to Six Mile Creek: "Though ostensibly a picnic, our party was intended to effect peace between the settler - an eccentric old man- and the railway officials." East and West, All Saints, 1892.

Native peoples at Spuzzum: "We went down to the Indian Camp just now for Matins: although it is Saturday, and the sky is threatening showers, and the hay is only partially cut, about twenty men and boys mustered for the service, besides women and children."<sup>176</sup> Her comments suggest not only the religious dedication of Natives at Spuzzum, but also an awareness by the sisters of the ways in which Christian rituals interfered with and must be choreographed with the cycles of Native life. An address to the Native peoples by the Richard Small, recently arrived back from Korea, lends further insights into how the sisters perceived of their mission. Small commented on the positive effect the children from the sisters' school had on their families: "The Sisters came, not to take away their responsibility in regard to the training of their own children, but to set them an example of how children should be brought up in the fear of God." Upon hearing these words, Sister Amy recorded that she felt a sense of accomplishment: "I had never thought of setting our Indians an example in this respect, and I felt so thankful to hear Mr Small speak of it as a duty that had been faithfully done."<sup>177</sup> In Small's rhetoric, the sisters' function was to impart Victorian ideals of Christian self-help, morality, and domesticity: their identity as women religious recrafted as moral mothers.<sup>178</sup> Sister Amy's response provides a rare glimpse into how she interpreted her mission in BC and her identity as an Anglican sister. Her mission was an extension of an identity which derived from a sense of Christian obligation, devotion, and self-sacrifice.

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> On the construction of maternal discourses, see Eileen Janes Yeo, "The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750-1914" Women's History Review 8:2 (1999) 201-218.

From their arrival in BC in 1884, the All Hallows' sisters had made the Mission church at Yale a particularly strong focus of their work. To as great an extent as the school, the Mission church represented the fruits of the sisters' labours among the Interior Salish, and the demonstrations of devotion exhibited therein were often manifest in creative and surprising ways. Each year, the sisters held a Christmas party for the local Native people to give thanks for their mission work. In 1900, the party concluded with speeches from members of the local Native community. The year had been one of trial as the sisters learned of friends killed in the South African war, and, closer to home, the mission was struck by influenza.<sup>179</sup> Blind "Tom," a Native who had served as an interpreter for the sisters since their arrival in Canada, described the mutual admiration which had developed between "his people" and "our Sisters": "My Friends, this is a great night for us and our Sisters. They are ours, they came from a great distance many years ago...to live amongst us, to teach us, to help us bring up our children, and to make good music for us in our hearts...our Sisters never looked back, they came to us, and with us they stayed."<sup>180</sup>

Althea Moody was particularly dedicated to the Native mission. In addition to the Thompson language, Moody had learned the dialect of the Native community at Yale - Sh'At - and had printed a series of prayer books so that the Native congregation could participate in the services in their own language.<sup>181</sup> Each Christmas, she led the Native choral service at the Mission

<sup>179</sup> The two themes were brought together in the Community magazine's account of the sisters' response to the flu: "it was evident that the fight with this formidable enemy was to be a hard one, but as usual the Sisters rose nobly to the occasion, and speedily and systematically made their plans for the campaign." *AHW*, Ascensiontide, 1900. The schools were operating at maximum capacity with 30 Native girls and 31 white pupils, many of whom were daughters of the clergy.

<sup>180</sup> *All Hallows in the West*, Vol 3, no. 1 (1901); *Work for the Far West*, Summer 1901.

<sup>181</sup> "Sh'Atjinkujin - Parts of the Communion Service of the Church of England." These high-quality prayer books contained the texts of the liturgy, holy communion, and various offices. They also offered pronunciation tips for the Sh'At dialect to assist non-Native speakers.

church. However, in 1900 illness prevented her from attending the Christmas celebrations.<sup>182</sup> According to Tom, the Native congregation feared that in Moody's absence the Christmas service would just not be the same. It was to be not disappointed, as Tom explained:

[W]e found out that out of the White School which the Sisters have here, near this School for our children, was one girl who could play and sing the words of our Service, and so our Christmas service was just as good as ever, and we were surprised and glad. We know it was God the Holy Spirit Who helped this young girl, Who taught her the music and the words, and Who put it into her heart to do this. The Sisters are working for the white people because their children want help as much as our children, they are growing up together here in these great homes, the children of the white people on one side, and the children of our people on the other, and we must be thankful to God for all He is doing for us.<sup>183</sup>

Tom's speech was reprinted in both the Community magazine, *All Hallows in the West*, as well as in the official organ of the diocese of New Westminster, *Work for the Far West*. To the sisters and the Church of England it represented a triumph in the work of Christian civilisation: Tom's loyalty, gratitude, and religious fervour symbolised the potential of the imperial mission in its purest form. Beyond its symbolic function, Tom's address also reveals the cultural interplay that took place at the school: the unidentified white pupil had clearly crossed cultural borders in her linguistic accomplishments. Not only did the sisters encourage this white pupil to learn the Sh'At language, but they enthusiastically publicised her achievements. Her active engagement in Native services at the mission church complicates the discursive representation of the segregated culture at Yale - a discourse, which paradoxically, resounded within Tom's own speech, even as his message undermined it. His address speaks to the ambiguities of

<sup>182</sup> She had left Yale several months earlier and was convalescing in Toronto, or France.

<sup>183</sup> *All Hallows in the West*, Vol 3, no. 1, 1901; *Work for the Far West*, Summer 1901.

the sisters' mission work at Yale: through their own devoted efforts, they had created a loyal, devoted Native following who appeared to value the sisters and their school; that these women had done so, however, through a syncretic approach that made Native peoples recognise the significance of their own culture as well as Christianity provides insights into how the sisters were themselves influenced by the relationships they forged in BC.<sup>184</sup>

The sisters performed their identities at Yale outwardly as teachers, mothers, and missionaries, yet their sense of self was determined primarily by their identities as women religious. The extent to which their relationships with Native peoples were formed through their functional identities emerges strongly from their accounts of successful church services and star pupils. As the texts of former pupils, Rev. Richard Small, and the interpreter Tom, demonstrate, the sisters were considered variously as mothers, friends, teachers, and protectors. Yet, to what extent the sisters performed their identities explicitly as women religious is less discernible. One account, however, suggests how this aspect of their identity was revealed. Early in 1900, Sister Alice Louisa travelled to Spuzzum for the funeral of an old man named 'Sam' whose daughter was a pupil at the school. Surrounded by the Interior Salish in the snowy woods, she gave a short talk on "Life within the Veil" and its application to their lives.<sup>185</sup> In so doing, she disclosed insights into the sisters' own culture and how it shaped their mission in BC. In the

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<sup>184</sup> All Hallows in the West, Vol 3, no. 1, 1901; Work for the Far West, Summer 1901. The sentiments delivered by "Sam," the old, blind chief at Yale, were particularly poignant: "Listen my friends, to what I am going to speak to you to our Sisters. Many years ago as you know, when the Yale chief died, they helped me to be made chief, which was my right....To our sisters we all want to do right, as they do by me....We are glad to all be down here tonight, keeping Christmas with our friends from Spuzzum and other places, to see the children of our people in this School. This is something to make us happy, to be here, to have the Sisters here, to have them look after us and our children, to make one family of us all in this place which they have built to the praise of the Great God."

<sup>185</sup> AHW, vol 3, no. 1.

absence of the text of her speech, the ways in which Sister Alice Louisa conceived of "life within the veil" must remain shrouded. However, her decision to share insights into the sisters' spirituality with the Native congregation at Sam's funeral might indicate that the relationships these women forged with the Interior Salish were not only institutional, but also deeply personal.

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**"Such honoured little maidens:" Race, Representation and the Royal Visit, 1901**

After the turn of the century, the sisters found it increasingly difficult to negotiate their vision of Native education with the demands of white society, the Church and the state. Two significant developments of 1901 intensified this change. That year witnessed the departure of Sister Amy, the Sister Superior. She was replaced as Head of the school by Sister Constance, who had come to Yale in 1889. Sister Constance had been raised in the Community orphanage in England, and, as she had arrived after the introduction of white pupils as boarders, was less in tune with the school's original emphasis to educate Native girls. As well, she would have been all too well aware of how Native education depended to a significant extent on the fees for the white school, which by that date, accounted for over two-thirds of the schools' annual income.<sup>186</sup> Just prior to her departure, Sister Amy attempted to defend the programme of Native education at Yale against arguments from both Church and state that such education be shortened. In

<sup>186</sup> For example, in 1901 Native pupils were still only receiving \$60 per annum. This amount was radically insufficient to clothe and house these girls for a year. In 1901 the school received \$6418 in "Canadian" school fees, representing over two-thirds of its total income. By comparison, Native pupils received a government grant of \$1368, and SPCK scholarship funding of \$240. The sisters relied on donations and subscriptions to the school to augment this income: in 1901 this amounted to just over \$200. That year there were 30 Native girls at the school and 40 white pupils. See *AHW*, 3,3 (1901)

her annual report to the DIA for 1901, she thus explained the school's ethos :

The All Hallows' boarding school is called upon to deal with what is practically the first generation of Christian, civilized Indians in this part of the country. Failure and success in dealing with Indian girls have alike shown the special need there is for an unusually long period of the most careful moral and religious training, in order that their characters be sufficiently strengthened to withstand the many adverse influences to which they are exposed on leaving school.<sup>187</sup>

Such a programme, she surely believed, had led to the school's reputation and had been borne out by the "success stories" of pupils like Mali. Yet such a programme required substantial funding, as evidenced by the another significant event of 1901 - the official opening of the new "Canadian wing." Not only did the Bishop arrive in Yale to consecrate the new wing, but the Mother Superior from England was also an honoured guest. Leading the procession of "Canadian" pupils dressed in white with white veils, Muriel Underhill, daughter of the sisters' chaplain, carried the cross to the school chapel. The poignant scene was recorded through the eyes of Native pupil, Emma Chutatlem:

The Canadian girls went first, we followed the tail. The four sisters were the next...It was a fine morning, the sun shone over the new wing, and the trees swang backwards and forwards which made the sun go behind the trees, and made little gold streaks all along the house. We sang hymns and psalms of praise to our God on high. We hope to have a new wing some day....we marched down these nice tidy paths and stood still singing, and then divided in two, the Canadians one path and we on the other we went up into two lines and the Canadians led in Chapel and we after, and we sang hymns and said prayers.<sup>188</sup>

Emma's hope for an Indian School "new wing" never materialised. In light of DIA funding, which remained grossly inadequate at \$60 per pupil, and its

<sup>187</sup> DIA Annual Report, 1901, 415. Report from Sister Amy, included in the moral and religious training section of the report, not the academic section.

<sup>188</sup> AHW, vol 3, no 3 Christmastide, 1901.

policy of training Native children primarily in industrial and domestic pursuits, the Indian School could not compete with its wealthy, white counterpart. Although the sisters received widespread support for the school from friends in Canada and England, they could not raise the thousands necessary for a new Indian School building.<sup>189</sup> The character of the sisters' educational programme was ultimately the reason that Emma hopes were dashed: it was too expensive, and in the opinion of the DIA, unsubstantiated. Emma's account of the two groups of children, in two separate paths, going in their own directions, was indeed prophetic of the school's future.

In 1901, however, the school still had reason to rejoice: that autumn it was honoured by a visit from the Duke and Duchess of York. The royal visit dramatically demonstrates the segregated, imperial character of the school by that date. In the summer of 1901, loyal subjects throughout the British empire rejoiced in welcoming the Duke and Duchess of York, future King and Queen, whose royal tour was designed to cement the empire in the wake of Queen Victoria's death. In Canada, the royals' agenda included such diverse highlights as the Parliament buildings, Niagara Falls, an "Indian pow-wow," and not one, but two stopovers at the spectacular Banff Springs Hotel.<sup>190</sup> Perhaps no community, however, regarded its place on the itinerary with such esteem as did the All Hallows' School. The school's appearance on the Duke and Duchess' itinerary effectively demonstrates the prestige with which this institution was afforded in the empire, and, by extension, the legitimacy of the work of sisterhoods in the colonial context at the start of the twentieth century.

<sup>189</sup> See AHW and WFFW for details of income during this period.

<sup>190</sup> See Joseph Pope, The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York through the Dominion of Canada in the Year 1901 (Ottawa: S.E Dawson, 1903). Unfortunately, Pope does not mention the royal's stop at All Hallows. See also Harold Nicolson, King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign (London: Constable and Co., Ltd, 1952).



The visit of the Duke and Duchess provided a spectacular opportunity to showcase the potential of the civilising mission of imperialism within the Canadian context. It allowed the sisters to fashion an identity for their mission which reinforced its British heritage while emphasising its Canadian spirit. In anticipation of the royal couple, the students and staff of the school had been preparing for weeks. The welcoming ceremony was pivotal: an elaborately-orchestrated ritual of deference and patriotism, brimming with symbolic significance. From the banners hung in honour of the esteemed guests to the selection of gifts, and the carefully-worded speeches all was at its finest. All of the decorations were handmade and reflected the school's wholesome Canadian complexion. Maple leaves were twined over the balconies of the buildings and woven into a pavilion which had been erected on the lawn. The children were taught how to "line up" march, curtsy, and form a guard of honour.<sup>191</sup> Preferring not to go with such standard fare as "O Canada" or "The Maple Leaf Forever," the sisters and students had composed a special "Song of Welcome" of which they were particularly proud. The Bishop of New Westminster noted that "the arrangements made by the Sisters for the reception of the royal party were simply perfect."<sup>192</sup>

The big day finally arrived on October 3rd, and when the train bearing the royal standard pulled up at "Brookside" at 2 o'clock, all was in place. Lizzie and Flossie, two Native girls, recorded the scene:

We all had our best red pinnies on and nice red ribbon in our hair, and the belceny was drest with red maple and so was the porch, and all the girls, and we went to the gate and stood accordent to our ages. As soon as the Duke and Duchess came

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<sup>191</sup> AHW, Christmastide, 1901.

<sup>192</sup> Work for the Far West, January 1902.

we gave a deep pow. We had only just learnt how to pow.<sup>193</sup>

The Sisters were then all presented to the royal couple at the "maple throne," an arbor created by the children "decorated with evergreens, maple, ferns and flowers, under which the Duke and Duchess stood, while the children... sang their song of welcome."<sup>194</sup> The "Sailor Prince," so taken with the song, requested that a copy be forwarded to the royal yacht in Halifax.

As the couple toured the school grounds, the students were neatly arrayed in two lines: the Native pupils dressed in red stood on the left holding white daisies - the Indian School flower - with the white girls dressed in white with mauve shawls to the right. From each school, a representative girl had been selected with the honour of presenting a gift to the Duke: Milly O'Shamaist for the Indian School, and Muriel Underhill, daughter of the sisters' chaplain, for the Canadian school. The school magazine provided its readers a colourful description of these fortunate girls:

Each child was a perfect wholesome, healthy, pleasing type of her race--Anglo-Saxon Muriel with her pink complexion, fair hair, blue eyes and well set up little figure, Indian Milly with her silky black hair, soft dark eyes, and cheeks like a rich ripe russet. Such honoured little maidens they knew themselves to be when they received "Princess May's" smile and gracious words of thanks.<sup>195</sup>

Muriel's gift to the Duke was a book of scripture, fastened with a violet ribbon while Milly presented "an Indian basket made of cedar fibre, and filled with the best yellow plums and deep purple prunes that we could find in the garden."<sup>196</sup> As the Duke happily munched on the plums, and the girls stood,

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<sup>193</sup> AHW, *Christmastide*, 1901. I have maintained the original spelling as printed in the magazine. The girls explained that "Though there are a great many Schools in Canada, our School was the only one their royal highnesses visited, that was a great honour which we will never forget."

<sup>194</sup> *The Inland Sentinel*, October 8, 1901.

<sup>195</sup> *All Hallows in the West*, vol 3, number 3. *Christmastide* 1901.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, Sister Amy's report.

bursting with pride in his presence, the Sisters could not but have been thrilled at the fruits of their labour and the honour paid to them by the royal couple.

The discourse of the royal visit presents an official representation of the All Hallows' School in 1901: the harmonious blending of English boarding school propriety and Native culture, woven together by the maple leaf and neatly tied up with the banner of patriotism. It appeared that the Sisters had accomplished on the banks of the Fraser what many could not: a form of imperialism which not only incorporated native culture, but actually celebrated it. The politics of place were central to this imperial vision. Native and white girls shared the same physical space on the grounds but were differentiated not only through their placement on the lawn and their attire but also by the type of gift they presented to the Duke. While Muriel's gift resonated with Christian learning, Milly's offering was of the earth, presented in a handwoven basket - a symbol of domestic labour among native women. Through such a representation, the school, and by extension, the sisters, appeared to conform to imperial assumptions of racial difference: the Native girls they had trained were well behaved, well dressed, and suitably deferential to their superiors; most significantly, they knew their place as distinct from their fellow white pupils.

Members of the Native community who arrived at the school to attend the royal party also had a clearly-defined place within the ceremonies. Although most were away fishing at the time, those in attendance wore their Sunday best. As Sister Amy explained, the Native peoples of Yale were deeply impressed by their guests:

Their old chief evidently expected to be permitted to shake hands with the White Chief's Son, and was full of importance,

and, I have no doubt, a prepared wordy oration, but the circumstances did not permit of our giving the Indians any particular prominence in the proceedings, so we had to console Sam for his disappointment by pointing out what a privilege he and his people enjoyed by being permitted to come within the school grounds on such an occasion, while all the white inhabitants of the village stood outside.<sup>197</sup>

Although not allowed to address the Duke - whom the chief, Sam, appeared to have viewed as his equal - it is nonetheless significant that the Native spectators were afforded greater access to the royal couple than was Yale's white society. Like the pupils, they too were being showcased by the sisters as evidence of successful missionary work at Yale: by positioning the Interior Salish - neat and reverential - within the school grounds, the sisters could also display their own position within Canadian society, demonstrating their bridging role between the two cultures. Thus, the rituals surrounding the royal visit suggest how difference, order, and symbolism were central not only to the institutional dynamic of the All Hallows' School, but also to the smooth operation of imperialism in the colonial context. However, the sisters' concerted attempt to distinguish between the two groups of pupils, and their permitting of some Native guests, but not the white residents of Yale, inside the school grounds, hints at a more-ambiguous dynamic. The royal visit speaks to the paradoxical manner by which the sisters officially negotiated the cultural and educational ideologies of empire.<sup>198</sup> The unified community they presented to their royal guests was structured dramatically by racial difference: within such a discursive representation, the sisters emphasised the culturally-specific context of their mission to civilise and educate in the Canadian West.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, By this date the number of Native residents at Yale had dwindled to about 25.

<sup>198</sup> On the ambiguities inherent in female missionary enterprise, see the introduction in Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, eds. Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), esp. 18 -21.

The neat categorisations of racial difference presented to the royal couple that autumn afternoon served as an "official" representation of the All Hallows' School in 1901.<sup>199</sup> A different and ultimately far more complex dimension of the sisters' missionary work and their racial politics emerges, however, from an event which occurred at about the same time at the Mission Church at Yale. Here, the politics of place become messy, revealing the ambiguities of the sisters' identities as imperial agents and the ways in which the sisters interacted with and challenged Victorian imperial ideologies. The wedding of Native woman Annie Schwartz to a rancher from the nearby town of Nicola attracted far less fanfare than the royal visit.<sup>200</sup> The guests who attended, however, were similarly diverse. Annie had been a pupil at the sisters' school during the early days of the mission. Upon the completion of her education, she had worked at the school as a domestic and a cook for seven years.<sup>201</sup> Now, returning to Yale for her wedding celebrations, she was joined by both white and Native former school mates, teachers, Mrs. Underhill - the chaplain's wife, and of course, the sisters. The bride was radiant in her garland of maidenhair fern and orange blossom, complete with a bouquet of trilliums and starry fruit blossom. Her fancy wedding cake was brought in from Vancouver. Pupils at the white school presented her with a silver-plated cake basket, while the Native students' gift was handmade fine embroidery and needlework.<sup>202</sup>

For the sisters, Annie Schwartz' wedding in the Mission church, to a respectable rancher, represented the pinnacle of their reform efforts.<sup>203</sup> It

<sup>199</sup> See Work for the Far West, January 1902 for a description of the school's history to this date.

<sup>200</sup> Such weddings were not uncommon at Yale and many received similar coverage in local publications.

<sup>201</sup> Work for the Far West, October 1898.

<sup>202</sup> Report of Sister Agatha, All Hallows in the West, vol 3, number 3. Christmastide 1901. For a similar account of a wedding in 1900 see AHW, Ascensiontide 1900.

<sup>203</sup> The evidence does not specify the rancher's ethnicity.

showcased a less-obvious, but just as significant aspect of their mission to Native girls in British Columbia. While the coverage of the wedding in the same issue of the school magazine was brief compared to that given to the royal visit, the details provided - particularly the individualised guest list - suggest that the sisters were keen to portray an alternate, less institutional representation of their community at Yale. No direct account of the wedding from Annie Schwartz' perspective survives. Perhaps she had no choice but to marry in the Yale mission church. Perhaps her relationships with her guests were not close. Perhaps she had no use for a silver-plated cake basket. Perhaps, however, her marriage, surrounded by white and Native pupils, the sisters, and members of Yale society, to a Nicola rancher depicts the ambiguities within the All Hallows' community more so than the discourse presented to the Duke and Duchess of York.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, the wedding reveals the centrality of Christianity and the significance of the Mission church to the sisters' enterprise. It demonstrates how, in order to understand fully the sisters' mission at Yale, it is imperative to widen the frame beyond that of the school. "Brookside," regulated explicitly by Church and state, implicitly by white society, does not fully represent the operations of imperialism as set down by the All Hallows' sisters: these operations were complex, fluid, and fraught with ambiguities. The sisters' imperial vision was coloured by their monastic culture, and specifically by the programme of rescue work at the House of Mercy in England. Within this context, Annie Schwartz' progress from pupil to domestic service to her eventual wedding in the Mission church, like that of the most "successful" penitents in England, represents the sisters' mission to "save" their female charges from a culture deemed full of peril. In the Fraser Valley, the sisters' mission was shaped as much by

<sup>204</sup> For a similar account, see Marilyn Whiteley, CSCH Papers, 1988, 87 -96.

missionary work as it was by education and the teacher/pupil dynamic was but one aspect of the wider relationship that existed between sisters and Native peoples in the imperial context.

The sisters' general acceptance by both Native and white societies - as English educators and as women religious - had a profound influence on the fate of their mission and on the ways in which their women's identities were experienced. In the British context, Anglican sisters were eventually accepted on the basis of their useful function within society. Their spirituality, their lifestyle, and even on some occasions their nationality and their identity as "Victorian women," were, however, called into question and frequently ridiculed. Ironically, their status as outsiders defined their identity and afforded these women freedom to chart their own course in the face of unsympathetic bishops and hostile detractors. In the imperial context, however, the Anglican sisters at Yale were largely accepted and valued on the basis of their social utility, in addition to their gender, their nationality, and most importantly, their spirituality. Indeed, as in Britain, their religious identity most affected their work in BC but with vastly different results: in the context of increasingly secularised provincial education, the sisters' religious-based school became highly desirable to clerical and high-ranking families throughout the West. As the demands of wealthy white parents intensified, the sisters were forced to compromise their educational programme to the materially-impooverished Interior Salish of the Fraser Valley. The facility in which Native peoples had paid for for their children, and that the sisters had established expressly for Native girls, became subsumed within an institution catering to the daughters of elite white society in British Columbia and throughout the Northwest. The Native girls,

who as pupils, unpaid teachers, agents, and domestic servants had ensured the school's continued success, were left unprovided for, their education rendered obsolete.

Although the relationships they forged - as religious educators - with white society determined the outcome of their school at Yale, those they established with members of Native society most affected their experiences and their identities as women religious. In the colonial context, these identities were mitigated through racial ideologies: their privileged position was dependent on the power they wielded as 'White women' to transform and civilise Native peoples. From within this imperial discourse they established long-standing relationships with the Interior Salish with whom they lived and worked. Their programme of Christian civilisation was dependent on the goodwill of these people to believe in their God, attend their schools, and protect them in the Canadian wilderness. The sisters' engagement with the civilising project of imperialism was multi-faceted, reinforced by the discourses and practices of Christianity, maternalism, colonialism, racism, and on occasion, feminism. As other historians have revealed, the politics of Western women in colonial settings operated within a "complex dynamic of complicity and resistance."<sup>205</sup> The sisters were both complicit in and resistant to perpetuating the goals of European imperialism. This dynamic created at times a conflict of allegiance for the sisters which dramatically influenced both their experiences and the fashioning of their identities. In both their daily interaction with indigenous society and in the discourses through which they represented themselves and their work, the sisters often occupied ambiguous terrain. Their "superiority" as white

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<sup>205</sup> See Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds. Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 7.



women was coloured by the context of self-sacrifice and humility which structured their lives as women religious. Although their sense of duty and their belief in the validity of their mission never faltered, their monastic identity as cultural outsiders, which had been forged at the convent in Britain, enabled these women, when possible, to destabilise their identity as imperial agents, and to serve, in their minds, as agents to the Native people they so clearly believed in. That the sisters often struggled with their mission, however, even as they perpetuated it, exemplifies their own highly contradictory relationship with the cultural dynamics of the colonial context.

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#### **Epilogue: The Fate of the All Hallows' School**

For a short period, the All Hallows' School continued to prosper into the twentieth century.<sup>206</sup> Eventually, however, the requirements of modern education proved too costly, forcing the school to close in 1918.<sup>207</sup> Although the DIA had raised the school's grant to \$100 per Native pupil in 1911, the costs required for maintenance to the school building, to be borne from donations and subscriptions, proved overwhelming.<sup>208</sup> Moreover, by 1915,

<sup>206</sup> See for example the glowing praise for the school reported in the Victoria Daily Colonist, June 1908: "As the development of the great West goes forward, there would seem to be no limits to the future in store for [the] All Hallows School as one of the leading and most widely influential educational institutions west of the Red River." Cited in All Hallows in the West, All Saints, 1908.

<sup>207</sup> See the New Westminster Diocesan Committee, formerly WFFW, Nov. 1918. The paper explained that the expense of bringing the school up to government standard proved too costly for the sisters.

<sup>208</sup> In 1912 the sisters found themselves in a catch-22 situation. They requested that the school be raised to a Class A institution, due to the fact that "some of the girls from the first families in the Province attend our Canadian School, and as the girls in the Indian school receive the same care and attention." A class A status would raise the DIA grant to \$125 per Native pupil. However, the class A status could only be given if a new building was constructed. Class A = first rate buildings owned by churches or societies, Class C = second rate buildings owned by churches or societies. The AHS was classified as Class C. The DIA explained that "it could hardly be considered politic to make an exception in favour of any particular school." Sister Constance to the DIA Agent, Dec 2, 1912. DIA School files, 1912. Memo from DIA accountant to Mr. Pedley, Dec 13, 1913. DIA School files.

the building constructed in 1891 was in such poor repair that a new building was necessary, but the sisters were unable to secure the funding for such a project. The Diocese of New Westminster expressed its "profound regret" that "the Sisters, who have so long carried on the School, [might] find themselves in the position of being no longer able to continue, and in consequence return to England."<sup>209</sup> The Native girls' school was transferred to Lytton, the home of the Native mission in the Fraser Valley and site of St. George's School for Boys. In his address to the Synod, the sisters' chaplain lamented that the sisters "find themselves compelled to withdraw from their work at Yale" and "express[ed the Synod's] appreciation of the very excellent and self-denying work that the Sisters have accomplished during the last thirty or more years."<sup>210</sup> Of course, the sisters were only "compelled to withdraw" because the agencies of Church and state, which had so eagerly welcomed them to the province, no longer had the capacity or the incentive to fund the sisters' work.<sup>211</sup> "Home" missions were no longer attracting the same social interest as they once had: for example, in 1915 the diocese raised only a few hundred dollars for the Yale school, while the fund for Japanese missions amounted to over \$5700.<sup>212</sup> In the context of world war, and without adequate financial support, the All Hallows' School could not survive.

Delayed by the events of the war, the sisters were unable to return home until 1920.<sup>213</sup> That they had left an indelible mark on the indigenous peoples of the Fraser Valley is undoubted. Perhaps they derived some

<sup>209</sup> New Westminster Synod Journal (NWSJ) 1917. 34th Session of the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster. VST, 59. On the closure see, See WFFW, Nov. 1918.

<sup>210</sup> Underhill's Report to the Synod. NWSJ, 1917. 34th Session, 33.

<sup>211</sup> See the NWSJ for fund allocation. Significantly, much of the money raised during this period was by Canadian women's associations.

<sup>212</sup> NWSJ, 33rd Session. See Miller, Shingwauk's on these changing social attitudes, esp the conclusion.

<sup>213</sup> Althea Moody, who officially joined All Hallows in 1898, eventually founded the Little Sisters of the Poor where her work with Native families, this time in India, continued until her death in 1930.

comfort from the fact that in 1915, the Anglican churches in the small town of Yale had a total of 151 communicants, three more than at Holy Trinity Church in New Westminster, the diocesan headquarters in the lower mainland.<sup>214</sup> Today nothing remains of their educational enterprise, save a small exhibit in the Yale Museum and the sign for the "All Hallows Trailer Park" on the site once occupied by the school.

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<sup>214</sup> NWSJ, 1917. 34th Session, 33.

## CONCLUSION: A Complex Superiority

Throughout the nineteenth century, the relationship between female monasticism in the Church of England and Victorian identity politics was premised on paradox. In their creation of innovative identities, Anglican sisters appropriated the dominant ideologies of femininity in order to subvert them in their daily lives within Anglican convent culture. The identities which these women fashioned drew upon the socially-sanctioned belief in middle-class women's moral and spiritual superiority and their duty as Christians to extend their influence throughout society. Yet, by organising their work within monastic culture, and by creating identities widely perceived to cast aspersions on the primacy of the home and the family, Anglican sisters threatened to destabilise the gender-based ideology which sought to define and regulate Victorian women. To many observers, the religious life was deemed "unnatural" because of its implied superiority over that of "true" womanhood, centred around the home and regulated by patriarchal authority. In the cultural context of Victorian Britain, Anglican sisterhoods served as a discursive arena in which issues not only of women's character and place in society, but also of English national identity, could be debated more widely.

Collectively, Anglican sisters utilised Victorian gender ideology in order to establish religious communities and to fashion unique monastic identities. The monastic ideals of humility and servitude which governed their lives enabled these women to acquire and exert considerable cultural authority. Due to its novelty, the identity of Anglican sister was subject to a process of continual renegotiation in relation to the nature of the work the

sisters engaged in, and the cultural context in which they operated. By fashioning their identities as nurses, moral reformers, and teachers, these women attained a significant degree of moral authority over those in their care. Moreover, as demonstrated by the Community of All Hallows, as these institutions became more established, their members utilised this moral authority as a means of obtaining a greater degree of self-determination, financial control, and institutional autonomy, often facilitated by the labours of working-class women. In the Canadian context, the sisters' identity as "white women" further enhanced their sense of superiority over the Native peoples with whom they lived and worked. Here, the sisters drew upon their multifarious identity as women religious and upon the discourses of imperialism to challenge colonial society's increasing attempts to shape Native education in British Columbia.

Individually, Anglican sisters shaped their identities not only in terms of work, but also through their relationships with God. Their faith enabled them not only to imagine a new lifestyle, but by embracing it, to perform remarkable self-transformations. Unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, the women who created Anglican religious orders at mid century did so without centuries of tradition to draw upon and established monastic identities to emulate. They derived valuable yet highly-controversial legitimation from the Oxford Movement while ever-conscious of their official marginality in the Church of England. Within this context, and subject to public ridicule, these women required considerable spiritual dedication. As women religious, sisters used their personal submission to God to gain greater control over their own lives, thus challenging clerical and social authority. It enabled Mother Ann to confront her diocesan superior,

and provided Emily Scobell at Lewes the courage to defy her father in her desire for the religious life. Nor could the members of the Third Order at All Hallows have persevered without a powerful sense of their faith in God.

Because faith and devotion were channelled so effectively to defy male authority, the religious aspect of sisters' identities created the fiercest controversy among English society. While the social function of religious orders gradually gained acceptance, the symbolic identity of women religious continued to attract widespread public opprobrium. The elements which defined Anglican sisters' relationship to God - their dress, their names and titles, the religious rituals which shaped their lives, and most powerfully, their vows - also differentiated these women from their lay counterparts. In the eyes of most Victorian observers, these markers of difference implied a sense of superiority among women religious over other women which they refused to tolerate, and thus attempted to regulate.

The popular debate surrounding sisterhoods represents the paradoxical relationship between female monasticism and Victorian identity. In many ways, Anglican sisters were both the embodiment and the antithesis of the idealised Victorian woman. Therefore, their identity, and that of the novel communities they created, was extremely difficult for their contemporaries to understand. Moreover, because these women operated beyond the scope of patriarchal authority, their lifestyle and behaviour was subject to public inquiry. As such, the identity of sisters and sisterhoods were discursively manipulated by a host of contemporary commentators who attempted to define and regulate these "rebellious" women. Popular discourses surrounding sisterhoods often focused on the form of the religious life in relation to its function. Critics capitalised on popular representations of

medieval nunneries, in which naive young women wasted their lives under the shadow of a tyrannical priest. In order to counter such a discourse and to demonstrate the social utility of Anglican sisterhoods, their promoters constructed discursive identities which emphasised female liberty while downplaying spirituality. In this context, sisterhood life - the highest expression of female religiosity in the nineteenth century - was repositioned in terms of the work performed by sisters and its social value. Paradoxically, then, female piety and devotion - the lynch pin of "woman's nature," Victorian moral reform, and the motivation behind women's desire to join religious orders - were thus discursively often rendered insignificant by opponents of monasticism as well as by those who supported and sought to revive the religious life.

The Anglican episcopate was faced with a difficult dilemma: on the one hand it welcomed the sisters' dedicated work for the Church, but on the other, it did not wish to appear to sanction any apparent disparagement of women's maternal role. The ambivalent response from the Church toward sisterhoods further exposes the tension between the form and the function of the religious life. While the 1878 Convocation heartily endorsed the work of Anglican sisters, not until 1891, when sisterhoods were actively promoting Christianity across the empire, did the Convocation finally condone the lifestyle which facilitated this work.<sup>1</sup> The first resolution to be passed by the committee on sisterhoods that year illustrates the extent to which the regulation of women's spiritual commitment remained salient to discussions of the religious life:

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<sup>1</sup> Chronicle of Convocation, 1878. The Report on sisterhoods explained that "the value of the work which [sisterhoods] have done can hardly be overstated." 241.

That those who enter a Sisterhood should be permitted after an adequate term of probation, and being not less than thirty years of age, to undertake life-long engagements to the life and work of the community, provided that such engagements be subject, on cause shown, to release by the Bishop of the diocese in which the Sisterhood is established.<sup>2</sup>

With such recognition, however, came a loss of independence. Church acceptance represented the formal regulation of a group of women who had negotiated the perils of monastic life for nearly fifty years largely without episcopal guidance. While monastic vows duly were accepted as an inherent feature of the religious life, the bishops now determined the conditions which regulated these vows. Moreover, in its denial of vows to women under the age of thirty, and the casting of such vows as potentially temporary, the Church's recognition served to undermine rather than underline women's spiritual commitment.

The discourses which surrounded the establishment and evolution of Anglican sisterhoods affected how sisters performed and understood their identities as women religious. They shaped the sisters' sense of self at the Society of St. Margaret in the wake of the Lewes riot, and complicated the sense of moral superiority of the reformers and teachers of the Community of All Hallows. To an even greater extent, however, individual and collective monastic identities were constructed by each Sisterhood's own convent culture. Here, the ambiguities of female monasticism and Victorian identity emerge most powerfully. Monastic culture's emphasis on self-sacrifice and humility before God allowed Mother Superiors to develop substantial power within the Community and also to challenge the men who sought to regulate

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<sup>2</sup> Chronicle of Convocation, 1891, 45. The bishops also secured the right to oversee Statutes, to approve the establishment of branch houses, and to control the location of sisters' work. For the tepid response from the Community of All Hallows toward the Church's recognition, see East and West, Whitsuntide, 1891.



sisterhood life. The sisters too, often performed their identities ambitiously, competitively, and with a financial prowess more typically associated with male entrepreneurs. Yet, as these women accrued collective power and developed new forms of monastic identities, they often did so through the regulation of other women, including the working-class members of the Community. Just as the authority sisters held appeared to defy ideals of obedience, so too were the class dynamics and hierarchical character of sisterhoods sharply at odds with monastic ideals of equality. Such ambiguities extended to the relationship between these institutions and the cultural context in which they operated. Situated on the margins of both Church and society in Britain, sisterhoods became increasingly influential and their members exercised considerable cultural authority. In contrast, in the Canadian context, where their identity as women religious was viewed advantageously, these women had less autonomy in relation to Church, state, and society, and gradually lost control over their imperial mission.

The culture of Anglican sisterhoods provides a window into the lives of English women in the nineteenth century. An analysis of this culture reveals the extent to which a diverse group of women - ambitious Mother Superiors and devout penitents among them - drew upon the ideologies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion in order to imagine and create radical new forms of identities at odds with those socially-prescribed to women. The ways in which they did so, in a variety of contexts, exposes the radical potential of female monasticism not only to destabilise Victorian identity politics, but also to provide provocative forms of female spiritual expression and cultural authority. Yet, as the tensions within convent culture, and those experienced by the sisters externally suggest, the

relationship between sisterhood life and feminism was highly ambiguous. Anglican sisters created empowering identities by manipulating the ideological and social forces which sought to shape their lives. Their sense of superiority, whether moral, racial, or spiritual, however, at times was facilitated by the presumed inferiority of other women. Within the highly-charged context of Victorian gender politics, theirs was a complex superiority.

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