



## Mary Ward

### Mary Ward was the founder of Loreto schools worldwide

Hundreds of years after her death, Mary Ward continues to be a very important role model in the lives of our current students. Through her story, our students are able to recognise the triumph in persistence and the determination to work hard for what you believe in.

### Mary Ward: Her Story

#### Early Years

#### Mary Ward at Loreto College

Mary Ward was born into an England that few people in Western societies can really understand today. Politically it was a monarchy in which the reigning head of state had a great deal of power although this was mitigated by the Parliament, a group of gentry and nobles who had been elected by their peers to represent their interests in London. These elected Parliamentarians did not really represent the interests of the ordinary person in England. They were generally wealthy landowners. Women, merchants, workers and the indigent were not represented. Therefore power rested in the monarch, his/her advisors and the landed gentry and nobility.

During the reign of Henry the VIII, the religious adherence of the country had changed from Catholic to Protestant. In simple terms, Henry had asked the Pope to allow him to divorce his wife and marry again. While the Pope frequently agreed to this for other monarchs, he refused as Henry's wife was the aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V who had recently invaded Italy and whose troops still remained in Rome. It was in the Pope's interest to keep him happy. While Henry's decision to divorce Katherine without papal approval and leave the Catholic fold was the trigger for the religious change, a growing tide of Protestant sympathies amongst many people enabled the change to occur rapidly and irrevocably. Mary I, Henry's daughter, tried to turn the country back to Catholicism with persecution of Protestants and the famous burning of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, but most people had accepted the new Church of England or even more radical Protestant movements like Puritanism and by Mary's death, Protestantism was fairly firmly entrenched. A small number of people remained Catholics and suffered persecution for their faith. Religious tolerance was completely unknown at this time and the monarch tried to enforce his/her religious persuasion on the rest of the population. Few Westerners today can understand the fervour with which people followed their religion and their absolute persuasion that their side was right and the other side wrong. Each side sincerely believed that they would go to heaven and the others go to hell and were convinced of their duty to convert their opponents before they suffered eternal torment. However if they failed to convert them, many were very happy to send their opponents to hell through public execution.

Mary Ward, born in 1585, in the reign of Elizabeth I, (Henry's daughter), was born into a Protestant England, where the monarch was committed to the Church of England and punished those who did not attend its services. While Elizabeth appeared to be relatively

merciful with Catholics early in her reign, the rising antagonism against them in the country and the Pope's vitriol against her (Littlehales, 1998, p19) led to increased persecution of Catholics. Catholic priests and services were banned on pain of death and faithful Catholics hid priests in priest holes and had Mass said in their private rooms. St Edmund Campion was a famous Jesuit priest of this time who was put to death for his activities in spearheading a Jesuit mission to re-convert England and the famous St Margaret Clitheroe died a martyr's death in 1586. Over two hundred Catholics died in the next hundred years.

Mary's family were landowners, (gentry), who were related to some of the most powerful and wealthy families of Yorkshire. However they were Catholics and the heavy fines imposed by the government on those who did not attend Church of England services meant that their wealth was gradually being whittled away. They had priests and Catholic services in their house, and Mary at the age of five, was sent away to live with relatives, apparently to protect her from her parents' illegal activities. Many of her relatives, including her grandmother, spent time in prison for their faith. (Cameron, 2000, p8) Mary grew up surrounded by very strong, committed women, who suffered numerous privations because of their faith. They ran their estates when their husbands were in prison, or suffered imprisonment themselves, learnt to live on reduced means and lived in constant fear of discovery and even death. Littlehales quotes Fr Richard Holtby, a Jesuit priest who worked in Durham at the time, on the behaviour of officials (pursuivants) hunting for priests:

"The searchers wrought diligently, knocking and sounding every wall and floor under their feet. They broke and beat down without scruple, walls, ceilings, floors, hearth or chimnies....Yea they untiled the house, and, breaking down all within the chambers, they tossed and trod under their feet our clothes and bedding...." (Littlehales, 1998, p16)

Throughout her childhood, Mary spent little time in her parents' home, living for five years with her mother's mother, Ursula Wright at Ploughland Hall. This was the grandmother who had spent 14 years in prison and she was a woman of great piety and strength of character who continued throughout her life to give support to her fellow Catholics in prison. The prisons that most Yorkshire Catholics were sent to were called the Blockhouses. They were situated at Kingston-upon-Hull and were flooded in spring by the high tides, poorly ventilated and dark. Many died here of various diseases. So they endured very real suffering for their faith.

In 1594, Mary returned to her parents in Mulwith and got to know her three sisters and brother. Here, at the tender age of ten, her relative proposed a match with a young man of good family named Mr Redshaw. This match came to nothing, but was the first of a number of proposals she was to receive. In 1594, Mulwith was burnt to the ground and the family moved to another property at Newby. Her mother's family, the Mallorys of Studley Royal, were within easy walking distance here and almost within the park were the ruins of the monastery of Fountains Abbey recently destroyed by Henry VIII's men. During the dissolution of the monasteries, Henry's agents destroyed the beautiful buildings, ransacked the contents and forced the monks out onto the streets. Another group of relatives within easy walking distance from Newby were the Inglebys of Ripley Castle. Francis Ingleby had been martyred some ten years earlier.

In 1598, increasing turbulence in Yorkshire sent Marmaduke Ward, Mary's father, to live with his relatives in Alnwick, Northumberland. Mary was sent to her cousin, Katherine Ardington at Harewell House. Like many of Mary's relatives, Katherine had been imprisoned and was frequently visited and probably harassed by pursuivants. At thirteen years of age, Mary made her First Communion at Harewell and this was to be a moment of real grace for her. She had refused a proposal of marriage while here, and became ill with the stress of standing against the wishes of her family. Her father came and took her home but she was soon sent to Osgodby to her Babthorpe relatives. Both her relatives, Sir Ralph and Lady Grace Babthorpe

had been imprisoned but fearlessly continued to house priests, who said Mass every Sunday. It was while staying with the Babthorpes that Mary decided that she wanted to enter religious life.

In 1603, James VI of Scotland was crowned king of England. His mother had been Mary Queen of Scots, a passionate Catholic, and Catholics were hopeful that he would perhaps convert to the “old” faith, but this was not to be the case. In 1605 a number of Catholics, many of whom were related to Mary, tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament in the famous Gunpowder Plot. These were agonising times for Mary, with many of her relatives dead or awaiting death and Marmaduke Ward arrested. On Marmaduke’s release, he told Mary that it was her duty to marry the heir to the Earl of Westmoreland, Edmund Neville, to maintain Catholic power in the North. He took her to London to Fr Holtby, a Jesuit priest, so that the priest could convince her of this. They met in Baldwin’s Gardens, near Holborn. Mary believed it was through God’s direct intervention that both Marmaduke and Fr Holtby changed their minds and allowed her to follow her vocation.

### **Her Attempt at an Enclosed Life**

To pursue this vocation, she had to leave England as, of course, no convents existed there. So she left London in the company of one of St Thomas More’s descendants and stayed in Canterbury with Lucy Browne, daughter-in-law of Thomas More’s daughter Margaret Roper.

She took ship from Dover for Saint Omer, Flanders, to join a convent of the Poor Clares, an order founded by St Clare in the tradition of St Francis of Assisi which was noted for its austerity. She was set to work as one of the unenclosed sisters who served the enclosed nuns. As her French was rudimentary, she could not communicate very easily with those around her. She found the work of the unenclosed sisters too demanding and it was affecting her health, so it was suggested to her that she become one of the enclosed nuns. Mary’s health was a life-long scourge which she faced with enormous courage. It is believed that she suffered from gallstones, which in those times could not be treated effectively. The acute infection of the gall bladder also led to nephritis. In 1607, Mary decided it was her vocation to start an English order of Poor Clares. She chose the town of Gravelines and she and her sister, Frances, moved there under the guidance of superior, Sr Mary Stephen Goudge. Her relationship with Sr Goudge appears to have been troubled (Peters, 1994, pps 98-102). She used most of her dowry money to set up the convent. However, after only a short time, she discerned that she was to do some other work, and in 1609 she left, with Frances, for England, thinking that she would become a Carmelite (Frances in fact went on to join this order). This is the only time that Mary Ward is reported to have wept as an adult, that is, when she came to understand that she was not to continue in the Poor Clares.

### **A New Direction**

In London, Mary resumed her ordinary clothes and visited the houses of Catholic friends and also those in prison. She lived in lodgings in St Clement’s Churchyard in the Strand in London. Mary must have felt confused and upset at this change in her circumstances. She had gone against the wishes of her family to join the Poor Clares, had spent her dowry on the establishment of the new convent in Gravelines, but had been unable to continue in the life she had chosen. She was now (and for the rest of her life) dependent on the generosity of others for her living. It was in London, in this state of confusion that she received her “glory vision”. From this moment, she became more convinced of her purpose and began to gather a company of women to help her in achieving it. These women were: Susan Rookwood, Catherine Smith, Jane Browne, Mary Poyntz and Winefrid Wigmore. An obviously popular guest, she visited Coldham Hall in Suffolk, the home of the Rookwoods, the Brownes in Berkshire, the Poyntz family in Tockington Park, Gloucester, and the Wigmores in Herefordshire.

Convinced that God had special work for her and her companions, in 1609, Mary took ship for St Omer with her companions and they set up a small establishment in the Grosse Rue. Here she and her companions, now joined by Barbara Ward and Barbara Babthorpe, lived a communal life as an association of pious women vowed to chastity and good works. As part of their good work, they visited the English Catholic families of the district, praying with them and supporting them and they ran a school for girls. The companions lived a very austere, regulated life as part of their vocation but also they were poor as the group had no official status and although some forty women were thought to have joined, (Littlehales, 1998, p63) the parents of the women were reluctant to settle dowries on an unacknowledged association of religious women.

### **Back to the Continent**

The system of education for women that developed in the St Omer school was unique in its time. The girls were taught reading, writing, needlework, religion (all commonly taught to wealthy young ladies) and at Mary Ward's insistence, Latin, modern languages, calligraphy, music and dancing. It was these last subjects which singled out her education from what others offered. As well as this, no distinction was to be made in the classroom between the children of the wealthy and those who paid nothing (the fees of the wealthy helped to fund the education of the poor). Mary Ward believed that in the challenging times ahead, women of education and discernment would be needed to do God's work, both in married life and religious life. In particular, she longed for the re-conversion of her home country, England.

During these years, Mary Ward was uncertain as to how to move forward. How should this pious association develop? If she opted for a full religious order, she would be required to accept enclosure, but without this official status, she was in limbo. In 1612, convalescing from measles, Mary heard the words: "Take the same of the Society. Father General will never permit it. Go to him" (Littlehales, 1998, p64). While Mary felt a great sense of purpose and spiritual peace at these words, it was this intention to model her Institute on the rule of the Society of Jesus which was to bring her to her expulsion from the church she loved. Fr Roger Lee, her confessor, was initially opposed to it as were many English Catholics, many Jesuits and many eminent members of the Church. Religious women should be under strict supervision; enclosed, not wandering around where they would be at risk of losing their virtue and bringing scandal on the Church.

In the next two years, Mary took several journeys to England where she established a community. Susannah Rookwood, appointed Superior in England, was at one time imprisoned in an English gaol where she suffered many privations. In England, the women wore ordinary clothes so as to move about in society converting people and doing good works.

According to the Schola Beatae Mariae (Littlehales, 1998, p71) the lifestyle of the companions was strictly ordered. They rose at 4.00am for prayer followed by Mass and private oration of the Divine Office. There were twice daily examinations of conscience; silence prevailed at meals while Scripture was read and at many other times during the day. They wore modest, black clothing, but unlike their enclosed counterparts, went about in society. This led to their title by those who did not like them of "galloping girls" and "chattering hussies" (Littlehales, 1998, p111). It was in St Omer in 1615, that Mary Ward experienced her vision of the Just Soul in which she envisages the beauty of a soul which existed in freedom from dependence on earthly things, completely ready to take on any good works (Peters 1994, 171). Mary worked hard to form a way of life for her companions which would allow them to live the life of the just soul.

Despite their simple lives of service, the companions and most especially their leader, Mary Ward, gained some very bitter enemies. While Bishop Blaes of St Omer was a strong supporter, many were scandalized by the idea of women going about openly without apparent male protection and living under female rule. After all, women were considered the lesser sex who might easily fall into error! When a Jesuit said that the commitment and good lives of the women would wane because: "...when all is done, they are but women!" (Littlehales, 1998, p79) Mary Ward remarked that in the matter of religious fervour: "...there is no such difference between men and women" (Littlehales, 1998, p79). The Jesuits were seen by many English Catholics as actually putting back the cause of the re-conversion of England by what was seen as a militant stance. Women associated with the Jesuits were a much easier target than the Society itself, and independent women like these, apparently pious though they were, were objects of great suspicion. Even so, many women were attracted to the life Mary's Institute offered and she soon had over 60 women working in England and St Omer.

### **Mary Ward Expansion**

Mary buoyed by the visions she had had and the increasing number of members, embarked on a programme of expansion. Her first new venture was in Liege, a town governed by the Prince-Bishop Ferdinand, who appears to have established friendly relations with the companions, saying Mass in their local church. The Mayor and Guilds also held great power and were not altogether well disposed towards the numerous religious houses which graced their town as the religious depended heavily on donations and taxes given by the town burgers.

In 1618 the thirty years war between Catholics and Protestants broke out across central Europe. This caused a number of problems for Mary Ward and her companions. Conflict between Catholics and Protestants in many European countries intensified and persecution of Catholics in England and other Protestant countries was rife. Travel across Europe became more complicated. Despite this, Mary visited England at this time and apparently the Archbishop of Canterbury himself was made aware of her activities in converting souls to Catholicism. She was visiting Hungerford House with her brother when news of an imminent search by pursuivants led to the party's hasty decampment for Knightsbridge. She also visited religious prisoners at Wisbeach Castle in East Anglia. Her courage and dignified, compassionate manner won her much admiration and a number of converts. Crossing back to the Netherlands, her ship was forced to return to England by a storm, and on landing she was captured by the authorities. At her trial, undaunted, she reprimanded one of the justices for blaspheming the Holy Mother. Mary was imprisoned and reputedly sentenced to death, but was released, probably on payment of a hefty fine by a well-wisher, and she left England for Liege.

The community in Liege was in difficulties with a young sister (Praxedis) who was claiming to have visions telling her that Mary Ward's ideas for the Institute were wrong. These accusations appear to have emanated from a Sr Mary Alcock who used Praxedis as a mouth piece and later provided material for a slanderous pamphlet (Peters, 1994, p259) against Mary. As well as this difficulty, the people of Liege were raising difficulties about the housing of all these indigent English women. Luckily the Liege community was saved by the gift of a property to live in by Thomas Sackville but the Vice-Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr Blount, was no friend to Mary Ward and continued to act against her wherever possible.

### **Journey to Rome**

During this time, Mary had been working on her plan for the Institute which she intended to take to the Pope so that it might be formalised. She obtained letters of introduction from influential people to the Pope and a number of cardinals as well as the Jesuit General, Fr

Mutius Vitelleschi. One of her patrons was Isabella, Infanta of Spain, married and living in Brussels, who wrote on her behalf to the Pope. Unfortunately Mary's letter describing her idea for the new institute to be founded along Ignatian lines never left Brussels, so that from the beginning there was confusion over what she actually proposed. At the age of thirty-six, she, four of her companions, two servants and Fr Henry Lee set off from Brussels to walk 2,000 miles to Rome. Incredibly, despite her ill health, she covered some 30 miles a day. While walking, they recited the litanies of Our Lady and prayed to the angels, particularly the Archangel Michael. After the hard walking of the Alps, it would have seemed sensible to take the shortest route to Rome, but Mary out of devotion to the Blessed Mother, walked a further 250 miles in pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loreto. The party arrived in Rome in December, 1621 where they were welcomed by the Infanta's delegate Bishop Vives. They visited the important churches, including the Gesu, the Jesuit church which contains the tomb of St Ignatius.

### **Opposition Mounts**

Meanwhile, Pope Paul V had died and a new Pope, Gregory XV was now in power. Bishop Vives escorted the party to an audience with Pope Gregory who received Mary Ward and her companions graciously. The Pope was most impressed by Mary's piety (Littlehales, 1998, p107) but gave her no real promises about the Institute. Mary appears to have thought that permission to found the order would be granted speedily, but of course Church politics were much more convoluted than that. She met the Father General of the Jesuits who was impressed by her virtue, but would not accept the attachment of the Institute to the Society as St Ignatius had forbidden the setting up of a second order such as the Poor Clares were to the Franciscans. Mary Ward argued that she did not envisage a second order, but a group of women who would do the same work as the Jesuits, but among women. The Pope handed over Mary's application to Cardinal Bandini who began discussions with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Very quickly Mary's enemies gathered their forces and began a campaign to make sure that the Institute would not be approved. Most of these were English secular priests headed by a man called John Bennet who was followed by Thomas Rant, an even more implacable enemy. Littlehales states that some of the arguments against them were that:

(1) An Institute without enclosure is forbidden by the Church, yet the English Ladies call themselves "religious"; (2) They preach in Church where women are ordered by St Paul to keep silence; (3) The danger of heresy is not to be discounted; (4) They insinuate themselves into the houses of noble Catholic families and go about in various costumes, which is dangerous and the occasion of many scandals. They wander hither and thither at will, sometimes alone among men of bad repute; (5) They are a scandal and disgrace to the Catholic religion. (Littlehales, 1998, p111)

Along with this, was the insecurity of their financial situation. The cardinals deliberated and offered Mary Ward approval only if she would accept enclosure. Mary refused this offer and countered by asking for approval to set up a school in Rome so that the Institute could go about their work as they did elsewhere so that their blameless lives could give testimony to the need for a group like theirs. Approval for the school was granted and due to the generous financial support of Cardinal Ludovisi, it opened in 1622. This was a school for poor girls as wealthy people sent their girls to convent schools for education. By February of 1623, there were 120 girls enrolled in the school and more of the Institute had come to teach from Liege (Littlehales, 1998, p119). It was here in the house on the Via Monserrato that Mary's sister, Barbara, died at the age of 29. This death may in part have been caused by the extreme poverty in which the women were living.

Later in 1623, Mary travelled to Naples, at that time under the rule of the King of Spain, to investigate the possibility of setting up another school. She was keen to close the foundation

in Liege which continued to be troubled and move the sisters to another site, perhaps Naples. Mary was able to gain the support of the Jesuits, Archbishop Carafa, the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Pamphili and the Duke of Alba, the Spanish governor of Naples. She set up a school here with both boarders and day scholars. Meanwhile, Bishop Comitoli of Perugia requested that she set up a foundation there. While the Bishop was of course, supportive, the Jesuits in Perugia were not and she had very little money and this further foundation only made things worse.

### **A New and Even More Conservative Pope**

Pope Gregory XV died and a new pope, Urban VIII was elected. In 1624, Mary met the new pope in Mondragone, Frascati. She took letters of introduction from the Prince Bishop Ferdinand and the papal nuncio in Cologne. The pope heard her petition with gracious kindness; unfortunately Urban was no more inclined to grant her wishes than Gregory had been and was noted during his papacy for his reactionary stance to any new ideas (he was the pope who hauled Galileo before the Inquisition). On the 11th of April, 1625, Pope Urban VIII ordered the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to suppress all of the Englishwomen's houses in Italy due to their observance of a religious life without enclosure. Mary Ward did not believe that the order came from the Pope who had received her so kindly and waited for events to unfold. In May she went to San Casciano dei Bagni to take the waters for her gallstones, still not really believing that the Institute was to be suppressed. On the 12th of November, 1625, the schools in the Papal states were closed.

### **Expansion into the Holy Roman Empire**

It seems a little odd that in 1626, in the middle of winter, Mary should leave Rome when things there appeared to be in crisis, to set up a school in Munich. Perhaps she still did not really believe that the Pope would allow the suppression of the order and its work because she believed with complete conviction that her work was God's work. This journey was once again accomplished on foot and at a much slower rate than her journey of five years before due to Mary's ill health. On Mary's arrival in Munich she received the sponsorship of Elector Maximilian and his wife, Elizabeth. He provided them with the Paradeiser House where she set up a school with sisters from the houses in St Omer and Liege. While travelling and living in Italy, Mary kept in close contact with her companions in the other houses, nominating the principals of the schools and the superiors of the houses and these letters contain much of the historical evidence used by authors in piecing together her life. The Jesuits in Munich were not supportive of Mary Ward or her work.

After six months in Munich, Mary left for Vienna to set up another house there. Although she had few funds and was stretching the resources of her order even further, it seems that Mary felt that she could gain approbation from Elizabeth's brother, the Emperor, who might be instrumental in gaining approval for her order from the Pope. The house in Liege was almost bankrupt and St Omer, Trier and Cologne were in trouble, so she may have thought that the Empire held much more promise. The Emperor received her kindly and gave her a house Stoss am Himmel, near Maria am Gestade, to use. Unfortunately, in seeking secular rather than religious authority for her establishment, Mary made a grave mistake and an enemy in the local Bishop, Klesl. The Bishop sent in visitators to look into the Institute and its work. Mary told them that she and her companions were not an order, but an "ecclesiasticae feminae" (Littlehales, 1998, p164). The visitators appear to have been satisfied. In 1628, Mary decided to expand into Pressburg (Bratislava) with the support of Cardinal Pazmany. Pazmany had previously been a Jesuit and was a great believer in the need to educate women so that they might educate the next generation. This meant he was an ideal patron for Mary Ward. Cardinal Pazmany gave the sisters a house near St Martin's church and a school began. The curriculum gave pride of place to religious knowledge and the

sacramental programme, and included reading, writing, arithmetic, housekeeping skills, but unusually, Latin. This was a very broad curriculum for those times (Littlehales, 1998, p166).

### **Mary Ward moves to Suppress the Institute**

Mary's expansion into Vienna and Pressburg were reported to the Vatican by Bishop Klesl, a member of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and led to further moves against her and the Institute which were to end in her excommunication. Mary was obviously unaware that the Congregation were about to suppress her institute entirely as, buoyed by the successes of her Munich, Vienna and Pressburg establishments, she decided to set up a house in Prague in 1628. In Prague, however, she met opposition from important leaders of the Church, particularly the Cardinal, von Harrach. Unfortunately, she was unable to establish a house in Prague. Meanwhile, in Rome, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was eager to suppress Mary's Institute and was only held back by their reluctance to offend her powerful ally, the Emperor. In 1628 the Congregation wrote the Decree of Suppression of the Jesuitesses for the town of Naples and the community there was closed down. Luckily the Jesuits helped the sisters to find accommodation until they could be re-established by Mary. The substance of the Congregation's decree was formed around the following points:

- Freedom from enclosure is not allowed by canon law for women's congregations.
- It constitutes a constant danger for the moral life of its members.
- The independence of the Institute from Episcopal authority is likewise unacceptable, both as regards its community life and teaching activity.
- The consumption of their dowries has placed those members who have left in moral danger.
- The Jesuitesses take a vow binding them to the instruction of girls and uneducated women. Without permission from the local bishop, however, no teaching may be undertaken. (Peters, 1994, p473)
- Mary Ward's problem was that she refused to accept enclosure and that she wanted her Institute to be free to move around under the direction of the Pope, but not necessarily the local Bishop. Unlike other associations of religious women, she had directly petitioned the Pope and therefore brought notice to the fact that she intended to live a religious life without enclosure. While there were pious associations living in communities in Northern Europe, like the Beguines, they had managed to escape attention and were generally accepted by the Northern Bishops and ignored by the Vatican. Mary felt that God had chosen to direct her away from enclosure which would restrict the ability of her Institute to meet the needs of the times. The trouble was that many of the male hierarchy of the Church were simply unable to accept that women should have any autonomy to make their own choices about what was needed. Their reactions ranged from rational disagreement with Mary Ward's ideas to complete vitriol and even inventing lies to discredit her. After the suppression in Naples, the Bishops of the Northern countries were ordered to follow suit.

In 1628, the Papal Nuncio for Vienna, Palotto, a friend to Mary Ward, convinced her to journey to Rome if she was to save the situation and her good name. Very ill, she set out, this time in a litter, but still insisted on making the detour to Loreto. In March 1629, she sent a Petition to the Pope. It seems that she did have an audience with the Pope at Castelgandolfo and she left feeling that further moves against the Institute would be deferred, but this was not the case.

The house in St Omer was closed by the Bishop of St Omer in 1630, due both to the movement against Mary Ward and continuing financial problems. Mary, who had returned to Munich, soon learned that Liege, Cologne and Trier were also under threat and despite the

protests of locals; they were all closed in 1630. Mary Ward decided to send a visitor to the house of Liege, where a number of the members were still living in community, to investigate the problems in the community and the suppression of the house, which Mary Ward believed to have been unlawful and not sanctioned by the Pope. She sent her life-long friend, Winefrid Wigmore, as visitor. Winefrid, finding the community were not abiding by Mary Ward's regime, deposed the superior and replaced her and then entered into a battle of words with the Papal Nuncio, (Littlehales, 1998, p197) who had previously been well disposed towards the Institute. The Papal Nuncio became convinced that the English Ladies were a group of recalcitrants and reported on Winefrid's complete loyalty to Mary Ward and lack of obedience to the Church. This event led to disastrous consequences for Mary Ward and Winefrid Wigmore. In 1630, the case was handed over to the Inquisition and in early 1631, Winefrid was imprisoned in Liege.

### **Disaster Strikes**

Mary sent a letter to the Pope petitioning him to review the suppression. She believed that God had called her to found the Institute and that God would save it. The letter was to no avail and in January 1631, the Papal Bull *Pastoralis Romani Pontificis* was issued, one of the harshest bulls ever written, declaring Mary Ward a heretic and schismatic. (Littlehales, 1998, p205) The bull was read to her as she lay in bed ill and she was led away to imprisonment at the Anger convent of the Poor Clares in Munich. The sisters from the Paradeiser House brought in food and clean clothes for her and the wrapping paper for these items was used to send messages in lemon juice between Mary Poyntz, the superior, and Mary. Mary was imprisoned for nine weeks. During her imprisonment, three of the Jesuits who had acted against her fell ill, and Mary, compassionate towards her enemies as always, prayed for them. After the nine weeks, Pope Urban changed his mind and she was released and she returned to the Paradeiser House. At the end of 1631, Mary decided to try to see the Pope once again to see if anything could be done to save the situation.

The Pope met her and declared that he did not believe her a heretic and in fact considered her and her English Ladies to be virtuous. He ordered that Winefrid should be freed and allowed the English Ladies to live in community in Rome on the Esquiline Hill. Many of the companions living in Munich remained at the Paradeiser House although this was not officially sanctioned. The Pressburg house also continued under the sponsorship of Cardinal Pazmany.

### **Going Home**

In 1634, Mary was so ill that it was considered necessary that she travel to San Casciano again to take the waters. The Pope had said that she was not to leave Rome, but revoked this order and she once again journeyed there. On her return to Rome she again visited the Pope to ask him to withdraw the Inquisition's spies who had dogged her footsteps, the Pope assented and even sent his own doctor to her when she fell ill once again. Later his own brother, Cardinal Sant'Onofrio brought her the Pope's blessing. It is hard to understand this Pope and his strange behaviour towards Mary Ward. Always kind to her when they met, in her absence he succumbed to the pressure from her enemies and destroyed her reputation and her life's work. Undoubtedly he did not believe that her wish to form an order was sound. He obviously did not think that women could serve God in a similar way to men. He wanted them to be safely enclosed within the walls of the convent and firmly under the control of a Bishop; but he had allowed the Inquisition to go much further than merely banning the Order, he had allowed her to be called a heretic and schismatic and for some time to be denied the comfort of the sacraments of the Church.

In 1635, Mary's health was still poor and with the Pope's permission, she set out for Spa to take the waters there. It seems that she intended to go home to England afterwards. With her

went Mary Poyntz and Winefrid Wigmore. All along the way she was met by influential Church and noble people who seemed to flock around her at all times in her life despite her troubles. While she attracted vicious enemies, she also attracted loyal and helpful friends. The loyalty of her closest companions was extraordinary and despite their own suffering, they stayed with her for life. The sisters spent five months in Paris due to Mary's ill health and were supported by the Benedictines of St Edmund. She journeyed on to Liege but was forced to stay at the Abbey at Stavelot due to ill health.

Mary had written to the Pope asking for letters of introduction to Queen Henrietta Maria of England (Charles I's Catholic wife). She received a letter from Cardinal Barberini which described her as "...one much esteemed in Rome both for her well known qualities and piety..." (Littlehales, 1998, p228). On the way home, Mary visited her sister Frances who was in the Carmelites in Antwerp.

In 1639, Mary arrived back in London, England. Very soon her house was a centre of Catholic activities and she was thinking of starting a school there but anger was mounting at the autocratic, Catholic leaning Charles and London became dangerous. Mary's house was harassed by pursuivants and it was decided in 1642, that with the Queen seeking refuge in the Netherlands and Charles in York, the companions would retire to Yorkshire. Initially they settled in Hutton Rudby, a very remote spot. From here, Mary's companions made a pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine at Mount Grace to pray for her and she herself went on her return to health. In 1643 she left Hutton Rudby for Heworth, less than a mile from the city of York. When the Parliamentarians descended on York, the companions retired behind the city walls where they prayed for their delivery to St Michael. The city surrendered to the Roundheads and Mary left for Heworth.

### **Her Death**

By this time, Mary was near death, but waited for her dear friend Winefrid to return from a journey to London. She handed over to Barbara Babthorpe the leadership of the Institute and died in the midst of her companions on the 20th of January, 1645. Her funeral was difficult as being a Catholic, she was not eligible for burial in an Anglican churchyard and the community had little money. However they managed to scrape up enough to bribe the vicar of St Thomas Church, Osbaldwick and it is here that her grave lies. Mary Poyntz had these words engraved on her tombstone:

To love the poor  
Persever in the same  
Live dy and rise with  
Them was all the ayme  
Of  
Mary Ward who  
Having lived 60 years  
And 8 days dyed the  
20 of Jan. 1645

(Littlehales, 1998, p243)

### **After Her Death**

Mary's companions continued her work in communities in Munich and Paris. The Emperor Maximilian allowed the Paradeiser House to continue as a school in 1835. (Cameron, 2000, 157). Forbidden to name her as their founder, the companions under the leadership of Barbara Babthorpe and then Mary Poyntz kept alive her memory and her vision for the

education of women. (Kirkus, 2009). In 1686, Frances Bedingfield was given money to buy the Bar Convent in York. The followers of Mary Ward, in order to survive, accepted enclosure, continued to work in education but were not officially accepted by the Church. In 1703, Pope Clement XI allowed women to govern women and the second Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Mary Ward's first Institute was still under suppression) came into being and was made an official Catholic religious order in 1877. (Cameron, 2000, p159). In 1909, the order was permitted to acknowledge Mary Ward as their foundress. Pope Pius XII called Mary Ward: "That incomparable woman who Catholic England gave to the Church." Their Ignatian Constitution was not officially accepted by the Vatican until 1979.

The order expanded into Ireland through the vision of Theresa Ball who having spent time at the Bar Convent, was asked by the Bishop of Dublin to establish the order in Ireland. Perhaps not knowing Mary Ward's own love of Loreto, she is supposed to have remarked as she and her companions settled into their first convent that they were like the holy family in the holy house. The Irish branch became known from then on as Loreto. Four hundred years after her first school was begun in St Omer, Mary Ward's work continues across the world. Her sisters and her schools have educated thousands of women and the Catholic faith has been nurtured in all. The Catholic Church which dealt so harshly with Mary Ward, has much to thank her for and the lives of thousands of women have been changed for the better because of her vision and sacrifice.

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