**More English than the English, more Roman than Rome? Historical signifiers and cultural memory at Westminster Cathedral**

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**Abstract**

Westminster Cathedral, the Metropolitan church of English Roman Catholicism since 1903, occupies an ambivalent space in the heart of the modern metropolis. It was intended as a repository and symbol of a national, very English, Catholic heritage in central London, replicating and re-using medieval signs and rituals to lay claim to a history that stretched back to the original conversion of England in the late sixth century. Drawing on studies of cultural memory, the authors examine how successive Cardinals of Westminster from the late nineteenth century onwards designed, constructed, and used the Cathedral to define Catholic identity in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this they steered a difficult and often contested course between twin loyalties to the nation and to Rome. The limits of institutional power to reshape cultural memory are also explored through a case study of the Cathedral’s resident martyr-saint, John Southworth, acquired in 1930 and similarly revealing the uneasiness of English Catholicism regarding its ‘otherness’ within a national culture.

**Keywords**

English Catholicism; Cathedrals; Saints; National Identity; Heritage

In Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945, 262), Julia Flyte, torn between her Roman Catholic faith and her adulterous love for Charles Ryder, exclaimed: ‘sometimes, I feel the past and the future pressing so hard on either side that there’s no room for the present at all’. In contrast to her pious but largely ineffectual and distant younger sister Cordelia, Julia is acutely aware of her, and her family’s, dual identity. As Catholics they look across the Alps to Italy where, in a bluntly allegorical invocation of popular conceptions of papist decadence, their dissolute father resides with his mistress. Yet they also strive, somewhat in vain, for ‘Englishness’ and acceptance within Establishment society, sending their sons to Oxford and marrying their daughter to a Member of Parliament (Grimley 2007, 884-906). *Brideshead* is a novel about identity constructed, as Julia so acutely feels, through a cultural/collective ‘memory’ of the past, rooted and ritually revisited in the eponymous familial home (Rothstein 1993, 318-31). While the particular concerns of the family, and of Waugh himself as a Catholic convert, are atypically aristocratic for an understanding of mostly working class English Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century, the questions they provoke – on the importance of memory and place in the construction of an English Roman Catholic identity – have a far wider applicability. As this article contends, in an analogous manner the community of Catholics who commissioned and constructed Westminster Cathedral at the turn of the twentieth century simultaneously self-identified as both indigenous and cisalpine, the flowerings of a ‘second spring’ while also products of a medieval tradition undamaged by the ruptures of the Reformation.

By the 1930s, when most of *Brideshead* takes place, the formal structures of English Roman Catholicism were less than a century old. Recusant Catholics, many densely congregated in particular localities and to a greater or lesser extent self-organising, had borne witness to the on-going presence of their devotions, despite persecution, since the Reformation. Post-medieval English Roman Catholicism was, despite occasional efforts on the part of the Roman mission, more like a patchwork of regional Catholicisms (Norman 1984, 3-4; Doyle 2005, 12-35; Morris and Gooch 2000, 9-13; Hilton 1994). In 1850, with the re-foundation of Roman Catholic dioceses in England known tellingly as the ‘Restoration of the Hierarchy’, the establishment Church was effectively overlain on these existing networks of faith. At a parish level this was perhaps less problematic, as these episcopal structures largely formed around existing recusant and newer-arrived migrant gatherings, and a number of the sees created in the nineteenth century were direct continuations of the Apostolic Vicariates of the penal period. Perhaps ironically, the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which forbade the use of Anglican diocesan names for any new Roman Catholic dioceses, made it easier for the Church to situate their cathedrals not in small historic towns but in the booming industrial centres of Victorian England. Thus in response to Anglican Exeter, and covering much the same area, the Roman Catholic diocese was located in the major port of Plymouth; and in the West Midlands rather than the tiny backwater of Anglican Lichfield the new Roman Catholic diocese was based in Birmingham. Perhaps most importantly, given the historic strength and concentration of Roman Catholic feeling in the region, in north-west England the Roman Catholic diocese was centred in Liverpool, not Chester (although the Anglican diocese of Liverpool was to be created in 1880) (Doyle 2005, 53-73). While in one sense the Archbishop of Westminster was counterpart to the Anglican Bishop of London, the holder of this office was, in actuality, a *de facto* Primate of England and Wales corresponding to the Archbishop of Canterbury. His Cathedral, when eventually built, at the heart of the metropolis rather than rural Kent was a potent symbol of Catholic claims to presence and prominence in the first city of the Empire.

Building upon this pre-history of institutional re-foundation in the mid-nineteenth century, and rapid growth of its denominational constituency through migration and a high birth rate well into the early twentieth-century, this article explores the little-analysed history surrounding the commissioning and construction of Westminster Cathedral. As a bold and unusual architectural intervention within London’s built landscape, there was a sense in which this space was pulled between a distant past and an adaptive present in invoking a ‘native’ as well as cosmopolitan Catholicism. Eschewing the neo-Gothic in its association with the Church of England (or Anglo-Catholicism in particular), Archbishop Vaughan and then Archbishop Bourne sought, not always successfully, to create a flagship Church which could carry the claims of this increasingly confident religious minority. These aspirations in some senses required the replication and appropriation of modes of religious expression associated with Anglicanism after the Reformation, but could also be differentiated from the Church of England through tacit appeal to an originating foundation with Augustine’s conversion of England and a transnational Catholicism reasserted most vociferously by Pius IX and the First Vatican Council (1869-70). Past and future pressed hard on a complex and multi-faceted Catholic identity shaped to the needs of the present.

**Living in an Old Country: Catholic Memory and Devotional Identities**

As Mary Heimann (1995, 1-37) has noted, the Restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850 has been seen as the catalyst for a ‘second spring’ of ‘Roman’ devotions, led by converts and Rome-educated clergy and bolstered by large-scale Irish immigration, which squeezed out the indigenous and more subdued and ‘timid’ ‘English’ practices within the Church (Norman 1984, 201-2; J. D. Holmes 1978). Certainly the ecclesiastics of the re-founded Catholicism were keen to trumpet the success of the Romanization of England, and much subsequent historiography has taken that assertion at face value (Anon 1939). Indeed, the national picture of nineteenth and twentieth century English Catholicism has been dominated by ‘institutional’ history, often produced from within the Church, with numerous biographies of major figures within the ecclesiastical Hierarchy, studies of the relationship between Church and state, and surveys of the development of the Church largely drawn from ‘official’ sources (e.g. Aspden, 2002; Beck 1950; O’Neil 1995; Vickers 2013). Notable exceptions have been found, however, within a strand of historiography interweaving religion and gender, often focused on women religious (e.g. B. Walsh 2002; Mangion 2008; O’Brien 2017; Nye 2011; Jones 2017). In the main however, much of the scholarship has been inflected with a providential teleology, hagiographical portraits and apologetic tenor, often sacrificing nuance for clarity of narrative. In this model, certainly until the Second World War which is the period surveyed in this article, the tenor of English Catholicism is cast as ‘More Roman than Rome’ expressed through, among other things, frequent attendance at Mass and confession, conservative theology, and public rituals such as the Stations of the Cross and Marian pilgrimage (especially to a revived and contested Walsingham shrine) (Yates 2010; Coleman 2010).

Devotional studies such as Heimann’s (1995, 3-10; see also McClelland and Hodgetts 1999) problematize this idea. It certainly cannot be denied that this transition of the church beyond the privations of penal times had a profound effect on Roman Catholicism in England, but as she rightly points out this is often interpreted through a rigid categorization of sub-groups implicit in the picture given above – ‘English’ vs ‘Roman’; ‘old Catholics’ vs ‘converts’ and ‘Irish’. These groups are then characterized to explain the developments of the nineteenth century. The irregular and ‘inadequate’ English Catholicism thus lost out to a more dynamic and emotionally fulfilling Roman style driven largely by the fervour of Irish immigrants. As a number of regional studies show, this is far too simplistic – not least in that it exaggerates both the ultramontanism and the Mass attendance of the Irish, and underestimates the continued relevance of pre-Restoration native forms to English Catholicism (Connolly 1984; Supple 1985). As Heimann concludes, ‘[the] Catholic world within England was not an outpost of Rome but remained both an English and a Catholic community’ (1995, 173). This fits into a broader theme of religious revivals which often recycle traditional rhetorics and symbols, innovating while also conserving, renewing and replicating (Garnett and Matthew 1993).

A striking omission from many histories of English Catholicism, both institutional and devotional, is the role of the past in creating present identities. Concepts such as heritage or tradition are used generally by early modern historians writing about the ‘recusant imagination’ to refer to the relationship between English Catholics of the post-Restoration period and their persecuted forebears, acknowledging this as a key part of their identity but with little further analysis (a notable exception is Glickman [2009]). Recent studies of Catholicism in the penal period have stressed the important role of a collectively remembered history in the creation and curation of identity (Kelly and Royal 2017; Raguin 2006). In studies of modern Catholicism, too, particularly the period surrounding the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), it has been shown that various groups used history and ‘tradition’ to construct and anchor identities within a changing world (Harris 2017). Yet for the period between the Restoration in 1850 and the remodelling of the post-Second World War period, there is no sustained work on the making of English Catholic cultural memory (Beck 1950). This is particularly surprising in light of the arguments, summarized above, about the success of the Romanization of English Catholicism. If there was a new synthesis of ‘imported’ Roman devotion with ‘native’ English practice, as Heimann shows, how did this re-shape Catholic identity, and with it understandings and memories of their shared past?

That any changes would have to be presented through a re-formation of the communal past is clear, as in the case of traditional, establishment religions an appeal to continuity and tradition is central to the community of believers. For Daniele Hervieu-Léger (2000, 125) states, ‘in the case of religious memory, the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group’s defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a *lineage* of belief ... belief in the continuity of the lineage of believers ... It is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future’. We may go further than this, and, following Aleida and Jan Assmann (2006; 2011, 5-141), assert a refinement of ‘cultural memory’ as a type of collective memory. This encompasses not only everything which is handed down and ‘remembered’ from generation to generation (‘communicative memory’), but the whole stock of culturally-relevant ‘archives’ which have historically been a part or production of communal identity. It is the role of elites to select and curate parts of this shared heritage to resolve tensions within the community, providing a dynamic which is absent from the changeless concept of ‘tradition’. To combat this inherent ‘precondition of the possibility of change and renewal’ in historically constituted ‘memory’, through a use of ritual, repetition, replication, and reproduction the memory becomes institutionalised and binds the community. In the case of the newly-reformed Catholic institutions of nineteenth-century England, the application of this understanding of the making of cultural memory is particularly apposite for the relationship between the Hierarchy and the laity, and has clear utility for an understanding of the reconciliation of ‘Roman’ and ‘English’ identities which Mary Heimann shows.

Furthermore, Pierre Nora has shown the importance of the role of *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) when *milieux de memoire* (environments of memory) have ceased to exist, particularly ‘where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists’ (Nora 1989, 7-8). English Catholics inhabited a country where the religious sites of their past – the ruined abbeys, the now-Anglican cathedrals – were a vivid and constant reminder of a persecuted past and Coleman and Bowman (2018) also explore, reconciliation of the paradoxes of national identity was far from straightforward. As the future Pope Paul VI commented on his visit to nine Anglican cathedrals in 1934, they were ‘where glorious and sorrowful memories of the past are brought into living contact with the present’ (*Heritage and Renewal* 1994, 200). Catholics could look with regret at what they had lost, but by building new cathedrals they were able to create replacement *lieux de memoire*, forming repositories of devotional and symbolic culture, hosting regular specialized ritual on a grand scale, and acting as the focal point for a regional, or in the case of the metropolitan cathedral at Westminster, national community.

The name was chosen, of course, for its resonance – Westminster being synonymous with the seat of government at the Houses of Parliament and with the conjunction of Church and state at Westminster Abbey, the scene of royal coronations and the resting-place of the king-saint Edward the Confessor (Moran, 2007, 7-9). The bounds of the see were largely on the lines of the medieval diocese of London, but from its creation there was a tension between the clear attempts at reclaiming a historical past and the artificiality of its existence. ‘Westminster’ was viewed by many at the time, Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike, not as a response to the need to organise existing networks of belief, as with a number of the other new dioceses such as Salford or Liverpool, but as a naked power-grab for the religious heritage of the country (Connolly 1984). The *Times* thundered: ‘The selection of the city of Westminster, the very seat of the Court and the Parliament of England, and the appropriation by a foreign priest or potentate of the time-honoured name which is most identified with the glories of our history, and even with the tombs of our statesmen, our soldiers, and our kings, is a most ostentatious interference with those rights and associations to which we, as a nation, are most unanimously and devotedly attached’ (*Times*, October 14, 1850).It is this assertion of ‘belonging’ and tacit acknowledgment of ‘otherness’ which makes Westminster Cathedral as an institution particularly fascinating, as it was conceived as a national symbol of the past, present, and future of the (Roman) Church in England. Westminster Cathedral, in its design, furnishing and functions, was intended to provide that ‘return to the authenticity of the past’, yet was built on fragile and contested foundations. This article does not attempt a full history of the Cathedral, but an analysis of some of the uses, and usefulness, of history from its creation and into the first half of the twentieth century. This is, chronologically, a periodization framed by long episcopacies of two Archbishops of Westminster, Cardinal Vaughan and Cardinal Bourne. The Cathedral was, inevitably, an ‘elite’ building – the epitome of largely ecclesiastical attempts to negotiate the public status and standing of English Catholicism in late Victorian, Edwardian and interwar Britain. Yet, to quote Thomas Tweed’s critique of such top-down, architectural and institutional histories, this is not ‘just about bishops’ (2011, 5). Alongside the episcopal intentions and institutional imperatives for this flagship site, this article seeks to chart the responses of English Roman Catholics to recreations of their communal heritage. As the title of this piece suggests, the Cathedral was designed to resolve the tensions within a constructed cultural memory that was both quintessentially English and orthodoxly Roman, through a process of replication and recreation of easily accessible and readily identifiable historical signifiers.

**‘The model for the new Cathedral’ – Saints and Sites**

In one of the few articles to discuss Westminster Cathedral in any depth, Annabel Wharton claimed that the building was intended to perform two chief functions: ‘to reclaim the authority of the two most spiritually potent sites in England’ – the spiritual authority of Westminster Abbey and the ecclesiastical authority of Canterbury Cathedral – and to be, in the words of Cardinal Manning, ‘proportionate to the chief city of the British Empire’. In Wharton’s assessment, Westminster categorically ‘[failed] to sustain that load of signification’ (1996, 529). Focusing mainly on the failure of the pseudo-Byzantine design to present itself as ‘imperial’, she claims that the Cathedral quickly faded into relative insignificance under the burden of its ‘associations with the East, the feminine, weak, exotic Other’ (Ibid, 546). Putting aside the question of Westminster’s relative ‘invisibility’ within a sea of domestic housing, recurrent problems of confusion with the Abbey or even misidentification as a mosque, have long plagued the Cathedral (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, March 1931, 58; *Guardian*, November 27, 2014). Wharton’s study focused narrowly on the ‘otherness’ of the initial design without considering the ways in which the Cathedral was subsequently furnished, adapted, and made significant in pursuit of its various roles and functions within the Church, the capital, and the English Roman Catholic mind set. While in recent decades it has been crowded in by high-rise developments, for much of the twentieth century the Cathedral, with its tower a full fifty feet taller than nearby Westminster Abbey, was the most prominent Roman Catholic landmark in the capital. It was and remains the seat of the Cardinal-Archbishops of Westminster, *primus inter pares* of the English Hierarchy, and increasingly throughout the twentieth century an important if often problematic member of the English establishment (M. Walsh 2008). As such, it functioned both as a highly visible repository of Roman Catholic memory and as a statement of the often highly personalised vision of its two foundational episcopal-builders of the relationship of the Church in England to the nation, itself embodied in neighbouring Westminster institutions.

As noted above, the Cathedral was built in an unusual pseudo-Byzantine style, in a marked departure from the Gothic revival that characterised most new-build Anglican (and especially Anglo-Catholic) and Roman Catholic churches of the 19th century (Martin and Ramsay 2009, 61-165; Whyte 2017). Indeed, the initial plans for Westminster were drawn up under Cardinal Manning by the German architect Heinrich Ferstel, envisaging an elaborate Gothic plan based on the Votivkirche in Vienna, yet the vast requirements of time and money, and the death of the architect, put the project into abeyance (Wibiral and Pevsner 1977). Manning’s successor Cardinal Vaughan, from a large and devout ‘old English’ with impeccable recusant pedigree, (O’Neil 1995, 11-35) declared a new direction in 1894:

A style of architecture perfectly unique so far as London churches are concerned has been chosen – the ancient Basilican or primitive form of Christian architecture. The original cathedral of Canterbury appears to have been of this form ... The model for the new Cathedral is to be Constantine’s Church of St Peter in Rome (*Catholic Times* August 31, 1894 in Wharton 1995, 530).

The original Canterbury Cathedral, itself based on St Peter’s, was the first church in England to be founded at its conversion by the papal mission of St Augustine in 597. The new Cathedral at Westminster was thus to symbolise the Roman Catholic claim to a patristic and then conjoined English and Roman tradition and the first mission to the island, thereby replicating this process. It ‘captured the magic of England’s past ... the spirit of the present ... and pointed towards the future greatness of the country’s Roman Catholics’ (Kollar 1985, 66). In further links to pre-Reformation Canterbury and Westminster Abbey, Vaughan desired to have the liturgy at his Cathedral performed by a resident community of Benedictine monks, which he had repeatedly affirmed was ‘the one body which had come down in unbroken succession from the days of St Augustine’(105).

A further step in Vaughan’s historicising ideal was to invest his new church with relics befitting the image of a truly medieval English cathedral. From at least the fifteenth century, the basilica of St Sernin in Toulouse had laid claim to the body of ‘beati Aymundi confessoris Regis Anglie’, which by the sixteenth century had become identified with St Edmund, the ninth-century English king and martyr, supposedly carried there from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds by French soldiers in 1217 (Scarfe 1986, 56). No English account of this *furta sacra* existed, and as far as Bury knew it had held the body of the martyr-king until the Reformation. Yet when Cardinal Vaughan heard of the presence of these supposedly Anglo-Saxon relics in the south of France, he desired them for his new Cathedral. St Edmund was an ideal saint for his vision, who would provide a natural foil to Westminster Abbey’s ownership of St Edward the Confessor. As the Benedictine J. B. MacKinlay dutifully made clear in a series of articles in *The Tablet* (a publication under the control of Cardinal Vaughan [M. Walsh 1990, 14-20]), lauding him as a patriot and national hero: ‘for six centuries Englishmen held him in peculiar veneration. He rivalled the gentle Edward the Confessor in their affection’ (*Tablet*, 3 August 1901, 164). Furthermore, he also provided a perfect English counterpart to a number of Roman saints, as ‘his love for his country and his people, his faith and charity and purity caused him to be venerated like the warrior Saints Sebastian and Mauritius; and to be invoked like St Aloysius, the model of purity’ (*Tablet*, 27 July 1901, 121). Installed at the heart of the cathedral, as a royal and martyred exemplar from an unassailably English Christian heritage, St Edmund could provide that continuity from the medieval to the reanimated/recreated Roman Church in England.

The use of appropriate saints to establish a sense of belonging and purpose was common to a number of new English cathedrals of the Victorian era, both Roman Catholic and Anglican (Atkins, 2016). The Anglo-Saxon saints were considered particularly well-suited as they reflected an English Catholicism that was not necessarily, or at least not overtly, Roman or continental. Images and other references to the seventh- and eighth-century saints of the northern Celtic church – Cuthbert, Bede, Aidan, Hilda and others – were used to tie the new Anglican diocese of Newcastle to the historic see of Lindisfarne. At the consecration of Roman Catholic St Chad’s, Birmingham, in 1841 (raised to Cathedral status in 1852) at the centrepiece of the new church above the high altar were enshrined the relics of St Chad (d. 672), the first bishop of Lichfield, in which diocese Birmingham lay. These had been venerated at medieval Lichfield Cathedral until the sixteenth century, when they were saved from destruction by a local recusant family (Greenslade 2006, 125). By translating the relics of St Chad to a reliquary in the new Birmingham Cathedral, the Roman Catholic diocese was able to lay claim to a heritage stretching back to the seventh century. It was not, therefore, a ‘new’ church, but a transformed rendering of the old established church. Notably, in the fifty years that followed, the refurbishment of Anglican Lichfield Cathedral itself made much of St Chad, including at least twelve depictions of the saint and a restoration of the medieval chapel where his head reliquary had stood (Tavinor 2016, 75-7). The use of saints, particularly mutually recognised Anglo-Saxon bishops and kings such as Chad and Edmund, was thus a live issue in the attempts by Victorian cathedrals of both denominations to locate themselves firmly within Britain’s historical landscape (MacFarlane 2016). By doing so, Cathedrals sought to become the repositories of a regional communal memory and, surprisingly, non-doctrinal, devotional ‘ecumenism’. Truro is perhaps the most obvious Anglican example. Carved out of Exeter diocese in 1876 as the westernmost see in England, its stained glass laid out the history of devotion in Cornwall, including many of the myriad local saints who gave their names to churches and settlements throughout the diocese and linking them through Wesley and the Methodists to the foundation of the Cathedral itself, rooting it firmly within a historically-oriented locality (MacFarlane 2012).

It was in pursuit of similar historical-hagiographical resonance that in 1901 Vaughan managed to have the relics of ‘St Edmund’ secreted out of Toulouse, via Rome, to Arundel Castle, the seat of the Roman Catholic Duke of Norfolk, to await the creation of a shrine in the Cathedral. Yet controversy had already attached itself to the relics. A series of letters to *The Times* (August 2, 1901; September 3, 1901; September 10, 1901), notably by the medievalists M.R. James and Sir Ernest Clark, argued strongly against the identification of the Toulouse relics with the Saxon king. Vaughan, dismayed by the reaction but apparently feeling helpless in the face of such overwhelming historical authority, relinquished his claims for their authenticity (Snead-Cox 1910, vol. 1, 287-94; O’Neil 1995, 368-70). The relics were returned, and never entered London in that ‘great procession which shall rival that which in the year 1010 met St Ailwin ... with the coffin and its sacred treasure’ to which so many involved in the project had looked for with hope (*Tablet*, 3 August, 1901, 164).

Despite this failure, within the Cathedral the iconographical and dedicatory schema pointed to Vaughan’s desire to lay claim to national traditions of Church and State that were rooted in a Roman Catholic past. At its consecration in 1910 by Vaughan’s successor, the London-born Cardinal Bourne who parentage melded an English recusant past with Irish Catholic strain, the rite used was self-consciously ‘identical’ with that used at Westminster Abbey in 1065, and during the Mass of Dedication the ‘Edward’ bell in the campanile, dedicated to St Edward the Confessor, rang for the first time. As also explored in the context of late-Victorian Ireland (Nicghabhaan 2018), these complex consecration ceremonies asserting permanent occupation of public space are ciphers for the political as well as spiritual concerns of the period. Replication in this respect entailed direct appropriation of past ritual and was, as we shall see a recurrent feature of the early history of the Cathedral. The dedication of the chapels, unusually even for the English Roman Catholic cathedrals, included no Continental saints and little room for the newly-beatified English Martyrs, but instead, besides those to the Holy Family, Our Lady, Holy Souls, St Michael and Sts Peter and Paul, the dedications reflected a Cathedral for Britain – Sts Gregory and Augustine; St George and the English Martyrs; St Andrew and the Saints of Scotland; St Patrick and the Saints of Ireland; and Archbishops of Canterbury St Thomas Becket and St Edmund of Abingdon.[[1]](#footnote-1) The relics encased in the High Altar were also of St Thomas Becket and St Edmund of Abingdon, along with St William, archbishop of York, and the seventh-century British missionary St Boniface, combining the two ancient archdioceses of England with the conversion/restoration narrative (de l’ Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 317-22; A. Holmes 2016; Vincent 2016; Underwood 2016).

The relics were not just of saints, but of the medieval great churches that Westminster sought to replicate and, indeed to integrate within itself. In 1902 Vaughan wrote to his secretary Mgr Dunn stating that he had ‘a basket full of stones from old Cathedrals and Abbey Churches’ although he had yet to acquire stones from Canterbury, Hereford, and Westminster Abbey. He gave instructions to write and ask for samples of the stonework from each, and with them Dunn was to ‘take a hammer and divide each stone into 3 pieces – one to go into the cement or grouting of the High Altar, one for the Blessed Sacrament Altar, and a third from the Lady Altar.’ Larger stones ‘finials etc.’ should be kept whole and arranged near the Lady Altar ‘as to be visible to any one looking at it for that purpose’ (Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster (AAW) V.1/21/100). Thus the fabric of the medieval great churches of England was to be physically incorporated into the main altars of the new metropolitan cathedral, as if enshrining the built heritage of England’s past as altar relics. Perhaps more than that, the *lieux de memoire* of medieval England were brought all together in this new repository of cultural memory, combining their powers of significance, and mixed within the cement of the altars becoming part of the binding materials of the centrepiece of a renewed English Catholic identity. Furthermore, Medieval England had been known as ‘Mary’s Dowry’ due to its particular devotions to the Virgin, and Pope Leo XIII had referred to the title in 1893, so by mounting the larger pieces visibly around the Lady Altar Vaughan could engage in a process of re-enveloping Mary in the churches formerly contracted to her (Pasquale 2008, vol. 2, 11). Whether this latter actually happened is unclear, as the stones are not there now. They may have been cleared out when the chapel was marble-clad in 1908 (Browne and Dean 1995, 121). The theme of Mary’s Dowry was more lastingly reasserted fifty years later when Cardinal Griffin purchased a fifteenth-century alabaster statue of the Virgin to stand in the Cathedral as ‘Our Lady of Westminster’, in direct replication of the image venerated in late-medieval Westminster Abbey as ‘Our Lady of Pewe’. The replication of historic practice engendered by this image was noted in the *Westminster Cathedral Chronicle* at the time: now English Catholics ‘may be with our forefathers in spirit in their devotion to Our Blessed Lady’ (January 1958, 5).

Westminster’s extensive relic collections, mainly accumulated in the first half of the twentieth century, showed in very tangible terms its success in establishing itself as a national church for the Catholic community and even some beyond those bounds. In 1910, around the time of the consecration of the Cathedral, the convert Charles Cooksey sent to Westminster his relic of the Anglo-Saxon coffin of St Cuthbert, presumably acquired at the excavation of that saint’s grave in Durham Cathedral in 1899. Westminster, he wrote, would have ‘the proper keeping’ of it (AAW Bo 1/104). Clearly at least some of the laity had accepted the role of the Cathedral as a custodian of a Catholic history of Britain, with roots traversing the rupture of the Reformation.

The loss of his Saxon royal relics was not the only setback Cardinal Vaughan had received in his plans for a Cathedral visually embodying and performatively preserving an English Catholic inheritance of the Middle Ages. The architect hired to realise his basilican vision, John Francis Bentley, visited Italy looking for models but was so disappointed with the architecture he saw there – dismissing both Vaughan’s proposed model of St Peter’s in Rome and the Duomo in Florence as ‘the worst large building[s] I have ever seen’ – that he instead chose as his inspiration the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. (de l’ Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 29) Nonetheless, the Cardinal was persuaded to accept Bentley’s design as, while it abandoned the missionizing and English flavour of the Roman basilican style, it would be spacious, economical, and quick to build – the latter two particularly important considerations as the Cardinal was by then in his sixties and anxious about his own ill-health. The choice of Hagia Sophia as a model was explained, with no apparent success in the popular imagination, as representing the globalizing nature of the British Empire. Or as Bentley put it: ‘it would seem fitting that the cathedral of the world-metropolis should be of a type rather *international* than limited by any national and perhaps insular characteristic’ (Wharton 1995, 531-40). In subsequent narratives of the Cathedral foundation, Bentley’s frustration of Cardinal Vaughan’s plans largely gave way to the narrative that Vaughan had always wanted a Byzantine style from the first. In a testament to the less triumphalist and more irenic ecumenical approach to Anglican-Catholic relations that characterized the post-conciliar period, Gordon Wheeler, former Cathedral Administrator (head of the cathedral chapter and equivalent to an Anglican Dean) in his 1990 memoir posited that Vaughan had chosen this peculiar style from a desire not to ‘compete’ with St Paul’s Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. (Wheeler 1990, 67)

Cost-effectiveness was a notable feature of the early years of the Cathedral, not just in the cost of construction but also the re-use of meaningful historic stonework and the utilisation of relics rather than the commission of expensive new artworks. The comparatively modest funds required for the building were raised through subscription, mainly by Vaughan writing to individual potential donors and appealing to elites’ ‘nostalgia for a lost age of faith’ rather than through a national appeal to ‘ordinary’ Catholics (Doyle 1995, 40). The names of the more substantial donors were published in the *Westminster Cathedral Record*, in lists headed up by the great old Catholic families but dominated by middle-class southern English recusants and converts (*Ibid,* 43-4). Vaughan’s Cathedral, in which he sought to link England’s Catholic past to its re-established present and aspirational re-conversion future, was aimed at and funded by this latter group, themselves trying to reconcile their national and religious identities through an appeal to the past. Thus Vaughan’s letters to subscribers emphasised the function of the Cathedral as the provider of divine service ‘as in the olden time within the walls of Canterbury, during a thousand years...’ (de l’ Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 260). By comparison with the similarly Byzantine American Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, begun in 1920, which as Thomas Tweed has shown laid claim to a national Catholic memory through its broader devotional appeal as a Marian shrine, and hence enlistment of donors across the demography of believers, Westminster’s attraction was always more limited (2011). The great communities of Irish and northern working-class Catholics were only belatedly asked to contribute to the relief of the debt on the Cathedral, and their meagre parish contributions indicate a general lack of enthusiasm for, or engagement with, the project (Doyle 1995, 43). The English Cathedral performed a more restricted national-ecclesiastical role than the American national-devotional Shrine (Tweed 2011, 14). In terms of the curation of a national identity, it was the English Catholic middle class and the clergy who were the predominant presences in the first five decades of the Cathedral, and as we shall see it was the middle classes who were particularly critical of failures in the re-formation of its historical links, notably in the matter of the ‘Byzantine’ architectural style (Snead-Cox 1912, vol. 2, 328-9).

[Figure 1 near here]

**Replication and Reception – the (Re)creation of Cultural Memory**

The Cathedral, founded in 1894 and completed by 1903, attracted a mixture of criticism and praise. It quickly gained the popular sobriquets ‘Cardinal Vaughan’s Railway Station’ and ‘The Roman Candle’ in reference to the tall campanile (de l’Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 308). *Tatler* claimed to speak for the local *ton* in expressing distaste for its ‘extraordinary ugliness [combining] the architectural features of a modern music hall with the peculiar graces of an exaggerated factory chimney...one worse than Keble Chapel’ (11 December, 1901, 475). Bentley’s fellow-architects were more effusive. Norman Shaw called it ‘beyond all doubt the finest church that has been built for centuries’, and it was nominated for a King’s Gold Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects (de l’Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 308-9). Perhaps more importantly, however, it left a number of English Roman Catholics, particularly those in the middle classes who had contributed much of the funding, concerned that it would ‘make them appear as un-English and alien as their detractors claimed’ (Doyle 1995, 30). The, admittedly unorthodox, convert Frederick Rolfe referred to it as an ‘ugly veneered pretentious monstrosity’, and ‘a pea-soup-and-streaky-bacon-coloured caricature of an electric-light station’ (1904, 37). There was certainly plenty of criticism of the architectural style from within the flock, much of it coming to the ears of Cardinal Vaughan (O’Neil 1995, 370). Although it is difficult to gauge the extent to which he spoke for a general feeling among the Roman Catholic middle classes, the Conservative MP Edwin de Lisle wrote to *The Tablet* bemoaning the un-English design and warning that with:

a thousand years of English Catholicism to guide us, and three hundred years of English Protestantism to warn us, if we reject [the English Gothic] assuredly we are unworthy of those ancestors whose faith we claim to honour (23 June, 1894, 978-9).

In a letter replete with historical models for the contemporary Church, and praising the Cardinal’s plan to introduce Benedictine monks, ‘the successors of the Abbot and monks of Westminster’, to the Cathedral so that modern London would know the rites and songs ‘for which many shrines of medieval London were of old famous,’ de Lisle looked forward to the Cardinal:

... having reingrafted Pope Pius IX’s modern creation of the Church of Westminster into the ancient, still living, monastic stock of Westminster, and the stately tradition of good King Edward of Saxon times, and of his Norman successors, Richard II and Henry VI. In these politico-controversial days it is well to remember and insist upon the only line of unbroken continuity in the hierarchical order which we can claim with the pre-Reformation ... Church of England, viz. the Benedictine mission ...

Yet despite the value of its deep historical resonances, the Benedictine plan, as the basilican model, also ultimately failed in not having taken account of more prosaic contemporary concerns. The Cathedral clergy, as secular priests, objected to the presence of an autonomous body with control over the liturgy, and the English Benedictine community were similarly concerned about restrictions on their ability to do missionary work within the parish (Kollar 1985, 36-47). Vaughan, disastrously, turned to the Benedictines of Solesmes in France, a move which brought condemnation from almost all English parties. It was therefore decided, despite ‘the old associations which cluster round the site of Westminster’, where the Benedictines had for centuries until the Dissolution sung their daily offices in the medieval Abbey, that it was ‘more in accordance with the fitness of things’ to have secular clergy performing the liturgy (*Tablet* 15 June, 1901, 922; Kollar 1985, 49-120). It is perhaps testament to the very English character of Catholic cultural memory even in this most ‘Roman’ of periods that the prospect of French monks singing at Westminster was too much for it to bear.

Not all Vaughan’s attempts at historical mimesis were failures, and as his close friend and biographer Snead-Cox noted, he had a highly attuned ‘historical sense’ (1910 vol. 2, 346). Following his consecration, he requested that rather than going to Rome to receive his pallium from the Pope, as his predecessors had done, it was to be sent to London to form the centre-piece of ‘an ecclesiastical pageant which should serve as an object lesson reminding the English people of certain vital truths in the story of their own past’ (vol. 2, 15). In the post-Conquest medieval period, the Archbishops of Canterbury had received their pallium, the symbol of their archiepiscopal authority, from the papal representative in Canterbury Cathedral, rather than travelling to Rome. Thus, as with the medieval English Church, Vaughan could emphasize that he received his authority from Rome, but exercised it as the head of an indigenous and locally autonomous English church. The pallium was a link between Rome and the Archbishops that had last been bestowed upon Cardinal Pole in 1557, and a part of English cultural memory that had fallen into abeyance through a lack of ritualised re-presentation. While Anglican Canterbury retained the pallium as part of the arms of the archdiocese, this was an empty symbolism: ‘to the people at large it had become a symbol without a meaning’ (vol. 2, 15-16). Without the act of a ceremonial public transfer of power from pope to archbishop, which Vaughan appropriated and polemically replicated, the pallium meant nothing. With it, although he stopped short of putting it so overtly, he lay his claim to the inheritance of the medieval, the ‘real’, archbishops of Canterbury for use in the present.

Abbot (later Cardinal) Gasquet, a noted medieval historian, gave the sermon for Vaughan’s investiture in 1892 at Brompton Oratory (which prior to the building of the Cathedral was the largest Roman Catholic church in London [Martin and Ramsay 2009, 127-30]). Within it, he outlined the importance of the pallium in the history of English Christianity, and invited the congregation to cast their minds back to 601 when Pope Gregory I invested Augustine as first Archbishop of Canterbury – thus beginning a line of succession interrupted after Reginald Pole in the sixteenth century, but now renewed. Pole’s particular resonance was as the last English archbishop to receive the pallium from Rome, and a staunch advocate of it being the symbol solely through which the archbishop is able to exercise his authority (Snead-Cox 1910, vol. 2, 17). He also represented a previous restoration of the English Catholic Church, having been archbishop during Queen Mary’s brief re-establishment of Roman Catholicism following the Henrician Reformation. Pole’s registers contain a full account of his own self-consciously ‘historical’ ceremony, which discarded the ‘modern’ Henrician changes and returned to the ‘purity’ of the medieval ritual (Ayris 2017). Vaughan’s ceremony was consciously based on these records, with Snead-Cox (1910, vol. 2, 18-21) providing a footnoted source for ‘the old Canterbury ceremony of the kissing of the Pallium (“*osculantur Pallium cum reverentia*”)’. In a further historical touch, on his creation as Cardinal, Vaughan requested as his titular a name that ‘England knows’, the Church of St Gregory and St Andrew, from which St Augustine had set out on his mission to England (O’Neil 1995, 357). Vaughan was often blithe about his motives, writing to Lady Herbert that his appropriation of the medieval archiepiscopal ritual was ‘too good a trump-card against the Anglican (*sic*) to throw away’ (Leslie 1942, 405). Snead-Cox confirmed that ‘his purpose was frankly controversial ... that was what he was for’ (1910, vol. 2, 15). His historical sense and confrontational nature, coming from a recusant family full of missionizing zeal, combined again in his donation in 1897 of a heraldic board to hang in Canterbury Cathedral over the tomb of Cardinal Pole. The Canterbury Cathedral Chapter accepted the donation, although the brass plate recording it was only authorised on the condition that his title ‘Archbishop of Westminster’ was not included (Collinson, Ramsay, and Sparkes, 1995, 513; Ingram Hill, 1976, 50). The chapter were aware of Vaughan’s claims to an archiepiscopate based on his ritual acceptance of Rome’s authority through the pallium, and rejected it.

Following the death of Bentley in 1902, Vaughan was able to reinforce his earlier idea of Westminster as an heir to medieval Canterbury through the installation of ten medallions between the columns on the frontage either side of the main west door, although somewhat at the expense of style as the result is rather cramped (see Fig. 3). The medallions must have been executed at some speed, as they were ‘put in hand’ as an ‘independent action’ by Vaughan at some point after March 1902 and were in place by the enthronement of Cardinal Bourne in December 1903 (de l’Hôpital 1910, vol. 1, 103-4). It suggests, at least, that Vaughan had been considering the design while Bentley was still alive, but had been prevented from executing it by the architect. Each medallion bears one or two basso-relievo busts of twelve of the sainted and beatified archbishops of Canterbury, from the missionizing St Augustine to the thirteenth-century St Edmund of Abingdon and Bl. Boniface of Savoy. It is not clear whether Vaughan borrowed the idea directly from Canterbury, as there a number of medieval archbishops’ tombs had clustered close together in the choir aisles, on the routes to the shrine of St Thomas Becket, in order to lend weight to their archiepiscopal authority and primacy (see Jenkins 2018). The medallions are, however, particularly reminiscent of an early thirteenth-century reliquary chasse from Canterbury (Fig. 2) bearing on its sides busts of the relics contained within, with identifying inscriptions: the sainted archbishops Augustine, Alphege, Dunstan, Anselm, the kings St Edmund and St Edward the Confessor, the British martyrs St Ursula and St Cordula, Sts Peter, Paul, and Mary, and St Blaise, whose relics the Cathedral claimed (The Met, Cloisters Collection, 1980, 417). The chasse was in the collection of noted dealer Samuel Whawell of North London until 1927, so it is quite possible that it had come to Cardinal Vaughan’s attention and served, at least partially, as a both model for the style of the medallions and a historical template for the accretion of episcopal and national authority.

[Figure 2 near here]

The medallions could serve in much the same way as those on the reliquary, replicating externally in recognisable pictorial form the networks of faith and heritage represented by the potentially tangible but usually inaccessible relics within (Hahn 2017). Recently, when the Esztergom relics of St Thomas Becket came to Westminster in 2016, one of the Cathedral volunteers, a member of the Guild of St John Southworth, asked a fieldworker on the ‘Pilgrimage and England’s Cathedrals’ project to take picture taken specifically underneath Becket’s portrait (Fig. 3; pers. comm. Tiina Sepp, February 8 2018). In this performative act, the image on the facade had elided with the tiny fragment of bone on display within the Cathedral, absorbing for a time some of the significance of the corporeal remains.

[Figure 3 near here]

*The Tablet* (26 December 1903, 1002) highlighted the Westminster medallions in their report on the enthronement of Vaughan’s successor as Archbishop, Francis Bourne, shortly after the completion of the Cathedral in 1903. It detailed how ‘the Archbishop and his successors for all future time ... will have above and around them the great medallions from which will look down on them the portraits of their predecessors, the sainted Archbishops of Canterbury ... each and all of whom in their day wore the same sacred Pallium which they received from the same See of Peter’. Here we see clearly how the English-Roman cultural memory was formed through a lineage or chain (to which the series of roundels bear some resemblance) of apostolic succession, each archbishop linked to St Peter (and hence to Christ) and to their successors. The chain was broken, and English Catholicism fragmented, but Westminster Cathedral, as the seat of the archbishop, acted as a *lieu de memoire* where the chain was ritually and publically re-forged (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 96).

The ceremony at the Cathedral was arranged for the Feast of the Martyrdom of St Thomas of Canterbury (29th Dec), ‘carried out according to the ancient ceremonial which was prescribed for his predecessors the Catholic Archbishops of Canterbury before the Reformation,’ and designed, according to *The Tablet* (26 December, 1903, 1001-2), to ‘awaken a host of historic memories.’ The article listed the names of twelve historic archbishops of Canterbury and two modern archbishops of Westminster, bringing them together, ‘in harmony with the past,’ in a chain of memory showing that: ‘Catholics never forget their proud heritage of a thousand years of English history ... The function will renew in our midst scenes and sounds which have so often entered into the life of the Church in this country in Pre-Reformation times... Under the domes of the new Cathedral the past and the present will meet and mingle in the Church’s enduring unity.’ Handbooks were provided containing the order of service and an accompanying text of the medieval Canterbury service, so all could ‘see for himself its faithful correspondence with the historic original’. Furthermore, it was not just Bourne’s own enthronement that replicated a medieval English-Catholic past, but each of the cathedral canons were also instituted using historically reconstituted ceremonials, seeking to replicate those of the pre-Reformation English cathedrals (Vickers 2013, 547).

**‘Our Boast and our Glory’ – Liturgy and Music as Mnemonic**

In an early twentieth-century understanding of the significance of the Cathedral, the furnishing and decoration of Westminster with national saints and easily-assimilated references to a tradition of national Catholicism going back to the conversion of the Isles to (Roman) Christianity by St Augustine also underpinned the Cathedral’s planned function as the centre-point of a hoped-for Roman Catholic re-conversion and reunification with the Anglican Church. As the twentieth century progressed, these grand missionizing desires were increasingly tempered as Catholics themselves moved more into the mainstream of British society, but the historical resonance remained significant in the continued formation of communal identity (Lothian 2009). Furthermore, such historical reflections need to be continually activated to be effective, what Hervieu-Léger called: ‘The practice of *anamnesis*, of the recalling to memory of the past, is most often observed as a rite ... the regular repetition of a ritually set pattern of word and gesture exists in order to mark the passage of time ... with the recall of the foundational events that enabled the chain [of collective memory] to form and/or affirm its power to persist...’ (2000, 125).

It was thus not enough merely to attach historical signifiers to the Cathedral, but these must be continually remade to sustain its significance partly to the local congregation of believers comprised of chiefly working-class Irish but mainly to the nationwide community of particularly English middle class converts and old recusant families at which the Cathedral had been aimed, and by whom it had been largely funded. Westminster, and cathedrals more widely, performed this successfully through a combination of a continuous daily round of liturgy and grand set-piece ceremonial, much of which could *only* take place at a venue of such size and, more importantly, prominence. The 1908 Eucharistic Congress, held in London with the Cathedral as its base, was the first major public expression of this type, culminating in a highly controversial eucharistic procession (Horwood 2000; Machin 1983; Devlin 1994). Cardinal Bourne had intended to carry the Blessed Sacrament in procession through the streets of London, to ‘serve as a reminder to the nation at large of that long period when such a belief united all Englishmen with the whole of Christendom’ (Vickers 2013, 198). Unsurprisingly, some Anglican authorities (with the support of Members of Parliament) protested vigorously, and Bourne agreed that the sacrament would not form part of the procession. On the completion of the Congress, however, the Papal Legate exhibited the sacrament from the balcony of the Cathedral to the crowds below contained within a monstrance which had been given by Henry VIII to the Belgian shrine of Our Lady of Halle, and loaned to the Cathedral for the Congress for the purpose of once again emphasising Westminster’s, and Roman Catholicism’s, historical national roots (Vickers 2013, 197-208).

If such large-scale events were important to reinforce continually the Cathedral’s role and significance within both the nation and the Roman Catholic community, it was the daily round of liturgy that arguably played a greater part in activating and inculcating the links to both an English and a Roman lineage that was at the heart of Westminster’s identity. While Cardinal Vaughan’s original intention to have the liturgy performed by a resident community of Benedictine monks, as at Westminster Abbey in the Middle Ages, was frustrated by the realities of ecclesiastical politics, he was nonetheless determined that the Cathedral should have Divine Office of an equivalent standard. Thus, unlike other new Roman Catholic cathedrals where the chapter was mainly comprised of active parish priests, Westminster’s chaplains were to be resident and chiefly concerned with the performance of the liturgy. His idea of the function of a cathedral, certainly not universally held either then or since, was as a beacon of liturgical fullness and excellence, which would provide an example to the churches of its dominion and through the continual round of prayer ‘secure the victory in many a battle with sin and error’ (Doyle 1995, 20-2). In 1905, *The Tablet* showed the aspirations of the Cathedral when it asserted that ‘nowhere in the whole Catholic world outside of Rome itself has the splendid liturgy of the Catholic Church been more fully and accurately carried out than within the Metropolitan Cathedral’(29 April 1905,12).

Of particular importance to the full performance of the liturgy at Westminster was the provision of professional singers and a full-time choir school, neither present at any other Roman Catholic English cathedral in the early twentieth century and of course modelled on the Church of England. These gave the Cathedral a uniquely symbolic place in the English Church, as not only providing the fullest liturgy but also the most beautiful, emphasising through the senses its preeminent place in the nation. In many ways the establishment of the choir at Westminster was a replication of a familiar Anglican cathedral choral tradition, wherein the nineteenth century had seen a re-flowering of choral music and the reinvention of the now-familiar Choral Evensong (Rainbow 1970, 243-61; *Heritage and Renewal* 1994, 187). The first Master of Music, Richard Runciman Terry, made use of traditional medieval plainchant and compositions by English polyphonic composers of the sixteenth century such as Taverner, Byrd, Palestrina, and Tallis, much of which he discovered in his own archival research, to create a liturgical choral soundscape that was unique to Westminster and rivalling that anywhere else in the country, encompassing elements of both vernacular and Roman musical traditions (Andrews 1948).

This was in contrast to the prevailing continental Catholic liturgical music of the nineteenth century, which was frequently reliant on chamber orchestras to provide backing to untrained choirs performing music of dubious liturgical value (Doyle 1995, 51-4). At Brompton Oratory, in West London, the unfocused admixture of English and continental musical traditions is apparent in the 1890s by their use of Byrd’s recently-discovered ‘Mass for Four Voices’, then performing Tchaikovsky’s ‘Pathétique’ Symphony on Good Friday (Andrews 1948, 32, 57). Such confusions of style were eschewed at Westminster, and concerts of any kind other than organ recitals were barred from the Cathedral until 1967 (AAW HE1(W1) letter of Mgr Tomlinson to Cardinal Heenan January 30, 1967). The music, as the liturgy and the setting, was carefully curated by Terry and his successors to project an image of the Cathedral and of English Roman Catholicism based upon the reuse and reinterpretation of historical models of longstanding. The performance of the Divine Office at Westminster quickly gained renown, being reviewed in the national press, recorded for listening at home, and broadcast on the radio and, later, the television (Doyle 1995, 54-5). Yet for all its beauty and symbolism, the liturgy at Westminster was pointedly grand and somewhat distant. The choir sung from stalls behind the High Altar, itself raised and sheltered under an imposing baldacchino. The magnificence of the liturgy, a spectacle designed at Westminster to overpower the senses and drawing deeply on traditional Roman Catholic ideas of the power of performance over participation, was more important for the Cathedral’s symbolic role than the more congregationally-focused worship of ‘lesser’ cathedrals and the parishes (which would become an overarching priority for all Catholic liturgical settings following the Second Vatican Council). The numinous beauty, and indeed mysterious ‘otherness’ of a sumptuous liturgy were, for many including an urban working class, the draw (Swift and Gilley 1985). The historicity of the ritual – its distance both in space and time, and its historicity, were emphasised as the highest form of mnemonic ceremonial encompassing the whole community over the more familiar local parish evocations of the liturgy.

Yet while the liturgy may have been distant, the Cathedral prided itself on its openness relative to its Anglican counterparts. A 1932 editorial in the *Westminster Cathedral Chronicle* (November 1932, 214-15) entitled ‘The Purpose and Use of a Cathedral’ claimed that ‘though large crowds visited [Westminster] daily everyone was free to wander at will, and even during the Divine Office there was hardly any restriction except that of the Church itself and the reins of one’s own common sense and good taste ... Little incentives to prayer were all around you ... it pulsates with life every moment from dawn till late at night’. Unlike the prevailing practice in contemporary Anglican churches which was to charge, and sometimes to close entirely, outside of service times, Westminster sought to establish its role as a *lieu de memoire* for English Catholicism through both the ritual clerical presentation of historical mysteries, and the free invitation to personal exploration and engagement with a space filled with curated artefacts of cultural memory (Bruce 2000, 93).

**The Relics of John Southworth and the Limits of Cultural Memory**

To a large extent the role of Westminster in shaping and making the English Catholic cultural memory is as much the responsibility of his successor as Cardinal-Archbishop, Francis Bourne, who held the see for over thirty years until his death in 1936. Bourne’s personal spirituality was more representative of an English clergy trained on the continent and attracted by the ultramontane, with particularly strong devotion to Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom he organised annual pilgrimages (Harris 2016, 264-5). It is notable, however, that he did not introduce any images of Thérèse into the Cathedral despite her popularity, and it was only in 1950 that she was incorporated into the cathedral mosaics (*Oremus* November 2015, 14-15). Clearly that was not what Westminster, early in its life, was *for*. Similarly, we can see in the acquisition, promotion, and fortunes of the body of one of the English Martyrs, John Southworth, the problematic place of the English Martyrs in mid-twentieth century English Catholicism.

One important aspect of Westminster’s history that has curiously received little attention by scholars is the acquisition, in 1930, of the largely incorrupt body of one of the English Martyrs, Bl. John Southworth (canonised 1970). The English saints of the penal period and the continental saints popular with many Rome-educated clergy had hardly figured in the design and furnishing of the Cathedral. Vaughan’s goal was to marry the imported Roman devotions of the restored Hierarchy with a medievally derived English imagination. Yet Lucy Underwood (2016) has argued that this was precisely the function of the English Martyrs in late nineteenth century English Catholicism, particularly in the period surrounding the beatification of fifty four including Thomas More and John Fisher in 1886. Why then were they not included in the Cathedral beyond a jointly dedicated chapel, somewhat late in the design process, with St George? When Vaughan had sought relics for a shrine at his cathedral, they had been the Anglo-Saxon martyr-king St Edmund, a symbol of English-Catholic and church-state commonality. His altar relics had spoken of a medieval English ecclesiasticism, and he was buried in the chapel of St Thomas Becket along with a small altar shrine with relics of that great English controversialist. By contrast, while the chapel of St George had been co-dedicated to the English Martyrs, and in 1915 it was made a war memorial for English Catholics in common with practice in many Catholic Churches, even in January 1930 it was described as ‘in a very backward state’ (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle* January 1930, 17; Browne and Dean 1995, 179). English Catholic devotion to the martyrs prior to the reopening of the case for the canonization in Rome in 1928 seems to have been lukewarm at best (Davies 2007). Preaching at the opening of a Church of the English Martyrs in Birmingham in 1923, Cardinal Bourne expressed concern that since the beatification of the Martyrs in 1886, devotion to them had ‘become less among [Catholics] in the last few years’ (*Tablet*, 30 June, 1923, 868).

One solution to Underwood’s demonstration of the vitality of the cause of the English Martyrs in the 1880s, and its somewhat moribund state in the 1920s, is to point to the regionality of much cult behaviour. As John Davies (2007) found, there was little appetite for John Fisher or Thomas More in Liverpool Diocese, although more local Martyrs just as Edmund Arrowsmith and John Almond were made recourse to and remembered. In York, the cult of St Margaret Clitherow was the subject of pilgrimage in the late nineteenth century (Turnham 2015, 110-11). Another explanation is to posit that the cause of the Martyrs was, and to an extent always has been, a politically sensitive area of Catholic cultural memory. Atherstone (2011) and Assmann (2006, 7) note the susceptibility of collective memory to politicization, particularly when there is a victim-perpetrator dynamic (“Remember what Amalek did to thee”). Yet this aspect of English Catholic identity was latent and for it to be part of a *national* cultural memory, at least, needed to be activated. As Underwood notes, ‘beatifying the martyrs did not so much respond to popular demand as provide the opportunity to create it’ (2016,150-1). Thus in 1930, when a ‘small shrine’ to the Martyrs was finally erected in St George’s chapel at Westminster, it drew ‘large numbers of devout clients’ (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, January 1930, 17).

Bourne saw the Martyrs as fitting exemplars for English Catholics in an increasingly secular world: ‘they can teach us how not to yield to those weaknesses which are characteristic of the English people, and they can teach us also how best to utilize, how best to make still more potent, those sources of strength which belong to our race’ (*Tablet*, 30 June, 1923, 868). Their sacrifice was an example of the self-sacrifices Catholics made for their faith (*Tablet*, 3 March, 1928, 291). Thus in 1926 when French workmen discovered on the site of the former Catholic school of Douai the body of the seventeenth-century martyr Bl. John Southworth, Bourne quickly moved to claim him for Westminster Cathedral (Purdie 1930; Schofield and Skinner 2012). Southworth had been a ministering priest in the Westminster area during the plagues of 1630-50, and arrested many times until finally being hung, drawn, and quartered for continuing to carry out his cure of souls (Schofield and Skinner 2012, 22-47). He thus had the potential local appeal that was the driving force behind a number of the other Martyrs’ cults, and was promoted within the Cathedral from the start as ‘The Parish Priest of Westminster’ (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, May 1930, 95-6). In the same article, the date of his martyrdom, June 28th, was seen as particularly significant, ‘one of God’s Fairy Tales[!],’ as this was the eve of the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, and had been the date of the consecration of the Cathedral (to the Most Precious Blood) in 1910. His feast would coincide with that of the Cathedral, with the patron saints of Rome and medieval London following the next day, tying the cause of the Martyrs to both the re-founded church and to unity with Rome. When his body was transferred to a glass and wood feretory in the Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs on 1st May 1930, the *Cathedral Chronicle* reinforced the historicity of the ceremony, looking back beyond the penal period once again to the medieval: ‘the thought came again and again: “Are we in Protestant England or have we gone back to pre-Reformation days?” And as the procession passed we realised that this solemn pageant was an actual historical event’ (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, June 1930, 104-6).

The translation of Bl. John Southworth sparked a short-lived but comparatively vibrant cult, with ‘a constant stream of pilgrims’ coming to see the body in the first few months, and miracles (technically ‘favours’ as he had not yet been canonized) occurred in great numbers both at and away from the Cathedral, were recorded in the *Cathedral Chronicle* until 1939 (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, July 1931, 136-7; January 1932, 18-19; August 1932, 155-7; October 1933, 196-7; April 1934, 73-4; September 1935, 161-2; June 1936, 118; October 1939, 269). Most of these attested to the mundane needs of working-class Londoners – finding jobs and lodgings/lodgers; solving marital problems; helping with minor physical ailments – and accorded with the low-level problem solving expected of Southworth as a ‘parish priest’. As Underwood (2016) noted of the late-nineteenth century, Southworth’s translation was an opportunity to create interest in the Martyrs, or, as the *Cathedral Chronicle* suggested (June 1930, 116) ‘the providential discovery of the relics has provided a point of focus for the great devotion which exists among English Catholics towards their Martyrs’.

Yet even the presence of a (mostly) incorrupt saint in the heart of the capital, the only such holy body to be on display in the entire country, attracted the devotions of English Catholics only for so long. Even within the decade, the number of miracles swiftly reduced – 120 in the first five years, 24 in the subsequent five years. From 1940 onwards, references to Bl. John in the *Cathedral Chronicle* are confined to the repeated retellings of his life story in the July edition, reproducing the sermon given in the chapel on the eve of his feast. Even his ‘reclothing’ in period dress and the removal of his shrine’s wooden cover in 1954 failed to garner much enthusiasm (Schofield and Skinner 2012, 81). The general devotion of English Catholics to their saints and martyrs is well-attested (Harris 2013, 233-50; Harris, 2015). Yet while as historical models or exempla they appealed to a clerical or monastic sense of self-sacrifice, their sufferings were too much for increasingly modern English Catholics to bear more than sporadically (see Heimann [2017a; 2017b] on the relationship between the saintly, the miraculous, and the visceral in British Catholic history). If we consider Westminster Cathedral as a repository of cultural memory, a site for the articulation of a national English Catholicism, it is notable that Cardinal Vaughan wished to place his relics of St Edmund behind the High Altar in pride of place. St John Southworth is, and has always been, on the fringes, in a side chapel behind a grille. His is a cultural memory that can, almost literally, be wheeled out on special occasions, but is otherwise safely dormant.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Westminster was presented as a national cathedral on historical lines, referencing itself to the ancient English centres of religious and sacramental life at Canterbury and Westminster Abbey. Cardinals Vaughan, and then Bourne intended it to reposition the English Catholic story at the centre of the metropolitan and national narrative through reactivating strands of a medieval and recusant Catholic memory while recreating a vision of a capacious English Christianity that could encompass and subsume centuries of Anglican patrimony. Successive Cardinals and Cathedral Administrators continued to use medieval English devotional imagery and relics to furnish and decorate the Cathedral, continually reasserting their significance through the performance of a consciously traditional liturgy, and incorporating both pre-Reformation Catholic plainchant and post-Reformation English polyphonic musical forms to provide a powerful sensory setting full of historic communal Roman Catholic resonance. Furthermore, major events, mirroring those found and reported at the major English ecclesiastical institutions, sought to place Westminster Cathedral within the Catholic and non-Catholic imagination alike as the centre of a particular form of highly traditional and deeply significant national and indigenous Roman Catholicism, albeit one that spoke more to a southern, middle-class and convert demographic rather than to the Catholic heartlands in the north or resident Irish communities in London. As an attempt to create a lineage of believers and belief that stretched back to the medieval period and looked forward to a re-conversion of England (through the curation within a national church of a communal English Catholic memory), Westminster Cathedral was only a partial success. So it was that in 1961 the Cathedral Administrator could note that because of its national status ‘Westminster Cathedral is often in the news. On one occasion it may be sensationalised because some misguided people have chained themselves to pillars or statues or railings; on another because of the attendance of Catholic heads of state or foreign royalties’ (*Westminster Cathedral Chronicle*, July 1961, 151). Cardinal Vaughan’s historically inflected vision of what the Cathedral was for, and what it should mean, had persisted, and flourished, in the decades since his death but the possibilities and politics of replication would be reconfigured in the period after the Second World War in the movement towards ecumenism and *aggiornamento*.

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1. Welsh Catholics were not separately represented by a saint in the Cathedral until the installation of a mosaic of St David in 2010, *Oremus*, 219 (Nov. 2016), p.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)