

# **MONTFORT COLLEGE**

A Short History

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**Montfort College, Romsey, Hants**

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Montfort College, the Junior Seminary of the English Province of the Montfort Fathers, was the first residence of the Congregation in the British Isles. It was opened in 1910 just outside the little market-town of Romsey in Hampshire; but the events which led up to its opening began much earlier and a long way away from Romsey. Its story really begins in fact in Haiti in 1871. In that year the Company of Mary began sending missionaries to Haiti from France, and in the same year the Bishops of Haiti decided that a Seminary was needed in France to educate clergy destined for Haiti. They therefore approached the Superior General of the Company of Mary, who agreed to take on the direction of the new Seminary. It was to be established at Pontchâteau, where the Fathers of the Company of Mary had recently opened a residence. In 1709, St. Louis-Marie de Montfort had tried, unsuccessfully, to erect there a permanent and striking memorial to the Passion of Christ in the form of a huge Calvary. The new Haitian Seminary was duly opened, and for four years this is how affairs stood at Pontchâteau. During that time, however, it became clear that the Seminary was in danger of extinction if some means of supplying it with recruits were not found. The Archbishop of Port-au-Prince in Haiti saw as the solution a Junior Seminary for younger boys, and with this in mind he paid a visit to France to try to persuade Fr. Denis, the Superior General of the Company of Mary, to help him in the foundation of such a seminary. After much discussion it was decided that the plan would go ahead, with the new Junior Seminary alongside the existing Senior one at Pontchâteau, and with the Fathers of the Company of Mary once again in charge of its direction. In addition, the new seminary was to serve as an apostolic school for aspirants to the Company of Mary, as well as supplying recruits for the Haitian Seminary. Building began in 1875, and in 1876, the Seminary opened its doors to the first recruits. It was not to have an undisturbed history, however, and the events of the following years were the direct cause of the establishment of Montfort College in Romsey.

It was not long before the first stirrings of trouble to come were felt at Pontchâteau. In 1880, the anti-Religious government of the Third French Republic began a campaign to destroy the power of the Religious Orders in France by expelling their members. As a result of this campaign, the first recruits for the Noviciate of the Company of Mary from the Junior Seminary at Pontchâteau were sent to Schimmert in Holland to make their noviciate. This was in 1881, and these first novices from Schimmert stayed on there to do their philosophy and theology in the scholasticate. In 1893, these scholastics were forced by the laws relating to military service to go to Canada, though they were able to return to Holland a few years later. Meanwhile, in 1880 and 1881, at Pontchâteau itself, the staff and students were living in constant fear of eviction for two or three days; they even went so far as to barricade themselves in attics for their classes. For the moment, however, the storm passed, and for a while things returned to normal. But the persecution of the Church was not ended, and during the next twenty years things became increasingly more difficult for religious in France. The laws relating to military service became harsher, but there was one loophole: a clause in one of the laws provided that those who could justify living abroad before the age of 19 would be exempt. The superiors of the Congregation decided to take advantage of this law, and began to send boys from the top forms at the Apostolic School of Pontchâteau to Canada to complete their study of humanities. About 1887, the Bishops of Haiti had abandoned their former method of training their secular clergy in France (at Pontchâteau), so that by this time (1890), all the boys at the Apostolic School were aspirants to the Company of Mary. In 1901, this Apostolic School at Pontchâteau celebrated its Silver Jubilee; but only a few months later things had become so difficult that the seminary was forced to go into exile. The final blow came when the government decreed that religious communities were no longer to be

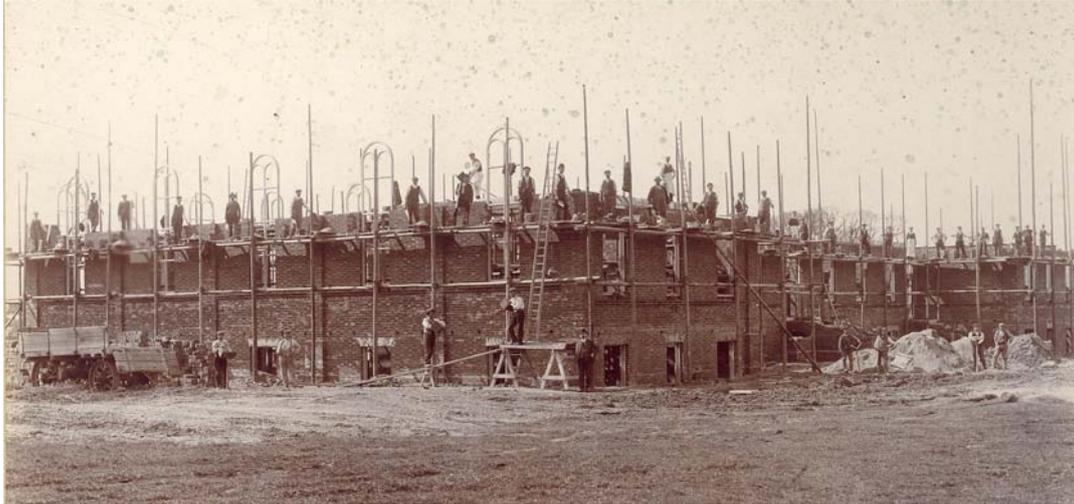
recognised by the law, and in particular that they were not to be allowed to continue teaching the young. In the face of this decree, the Superiors of the Company of Mary decided that, rather than close down their Apostolic School, they would move it to another country. A home was found for it at Santbergen in Belgium, and on September 25th, its full complement of more than 70 persons arrived there to begin their exile.

The old chateau at Santbergen to which the seminary (renamed 'L'Ecole de la Sainte Famille') had been moved, had been virtually a ruin when it was first decided to move there. Only one wing was at all habitable; and in spite of the tremendous efforts of Brother Élie, both before and after the move, it remained a most unsuitable residence for the seminary: the roofs leaked, there were draughts everywhere, and in general life there was uncomfortable, to say the least. It had never been intended as a permanent home for the seminary, but it was probably hoped that before long a return to France would be possible. As time went on, however, it became evident that this hope was not to be realised in the near future, and so the Superiors of the Congregation began to look around for a more suitable home for the seminary. At the same time there began to appear indications that the Belgian government might be contemplating actions similar to those of the French government: the Superior General and his advisors were influenced by this to look still further afield. Since the start of the religious persecutions in France, many religious congregations, particularly of Sisters, had found refuge in the South of England, where they were allowed to live in peace and to found and run schools and hospitals. It seemed that England offered a more stable milieu for a seminary in exile; and accordingly Fr. Lhoumeau, the Superior General, cast his eyes in that direction.

Fr. Lhoumeau already had some acquaintance with England: ten years before, in 1891, he and Brother Ambroise had accompanied five sisters of the Congregation of La Sagesse to Alton in Hampshire, where the Sisters took charge of a small hospital. Difficulties arose, however, and only a few months after their arrival in England, the Sisters, with Fr. Lhoumeau, moved to take up residence in Romsey, at Abbey House. Shortly after this Fr. Lhoumeau was recalled to France, to be replaced by Fr. Pondurand, a former professor at the Seminary. When it seemed that the Apostolic School must move again and that the best place for it would be in England, Fr. Lhoumeau's thoughts returned to Romsey, and he asked Fr. Pondurand to look about for a suitable site for the building of a more permanent home for the School. Fr. Pondurand found what he was looking for on the hill at Whitenap just outside Romsey - a site of about 30 acres which was up for sale. With the aid of a certain Mr. Harrington, one of the leading Catholics of Romsey, the purchase of the land was completed in 1908, and with the minimum of delay plans were drawn up and the building commenced, under the watchful eye of Fr. Pondurand.

Fr. Lhoumeau seems to have intended the building to be of a very solid and enduring construction, judging by the original specifications, which are still kept in the archives of the Province. The bricks to be used were to be of the best; the nails used were to be of the finest quality; and so on. In the event, however, money ran short, and the building was not, in its completed form, all that had been intended. The building as a whole, for example, was smaller than planned, due to the cutting short of the two outer wings at the rear. Money had to be saved also on smaller details: the wood for the floor-boards, for instance, was not the hard-wearing wood originally intended. Tradition has it that at least one firm involved in the building of the college was forced into bankruptcy. Be that as it may, the work went on, and at one time more than a hundred workers were employed in the task. By the beginning of 1910 it was almost complete, an imposing building, but for the moment standing stark and

unadorned on Whitenap Hill. A few yards away a small convent for a community of Sisters of La Sagesse had also been built. It is interesting to note, in these days of inflated building costs, that the whole complex had been built for around £10,000!



1 Montfort College under construction c. 1909

By February 1910, the college was at least partly habitable, and it was then that the first occupants began to cross over from Belgium. On March 7th, the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, a boat left Antwerp loaded with all the furniture and fittings from Santbergen. Everything was brought: tables and chairs, beds and linen, school materials - even the legendary kitchen sink! Fr. Discord, presumably carefully consulting his French-English dictionary, had neatly addressed it all to "Sir Pondurand, Romsey, Angleterre"! Fr. Chupin accompanied the luggage to Southampton, together with several Fathers and Sixth-Formers; and when everything had been transported to Romsey, they set about the fitting-out of the building. One of the first places to be prepared was the chapel, and on April 28th, the feast of St. Louis Marie, the first Solemn High Mass was celebrated in it by Fr. Chupin. A few days later, he and Fr. Desirée Leroux, who had recently been appointed the first superior of the new residence, visited the Bishop of the Diocese (of Portsmouth) to pay their respects. On May 4th, the Bishop came to bless the new college and to welcome the community to the diocese. By May 10th, the building was sufficiently prepared to receive the first large group of students, 65 of whom arrived that day from Belgium, together with several more priests and four Sisters of La Sagesse who had come to take care of the domestic arrangements. On July 14th 1910, the Superior General officiated at the reception of the habit by 14 of the senior students, the first to go on from Montfort College to the Noviciate of the Company of Mary. Montfort College was well on its way!

The property was far from ship-shape yet however: it would take another two years to complete the work, and it was only in July 1912 that it could really be said that it was finished. When the students first arrived, there were quagmires in front of the house and at the side of the Sisters' convent, and much builders' waste to be carted away. Fr. Leroux, with the help of the staff and students, worked hard to put things in order. He was replaced as superior in the summer of 1911, because of illness, but his successor, Fr. Raimbault, continued the good work. During the following year, the whole college was painted, the boys' cloakroom and the stables were built, the forecourt planned, levelled and turfed. When the new Bishop of Portsmouth, Mgr. Cotter, came in November 1911 to ordain Fr. Fernand Fradet in the college chapel, everything was more or less presentable. In the months that followed, the painting and decorating of the larger rooms was little by little completed on half-days, and with the

financial help of the Provincial, Fr. Deval, many trees were bought and planted - the orchard, the lime avenues bordering the school yard, and the trees which today adorn the frontage. All this was completed by July 1912, and the finishing touch was added in 1913, when the statue of Our Lady was erected at the front of the college.



2 The College shortly after its opening (Note the lack of trees)

Though the College looked pleasant enough by this time, it had already been found that there were certain drawbacks in the general lay-out. The corridors were long and echoing; the classrooms were very small; there was insufficient room in the dining-room; and when the students first arrived, there was no cloak-room for them. The inhabitants made the best possible use of space, but living space must have been rather cramped in view of the numbers of students: at the beginning of the new term in September 1910 there were 87 boys; in July 1912 there were 140! One wonders how these large numbers were accommodated in the study-hall and dining-room; somehow, they were, though both comfort and discipline suffered to a certain extent. After the first few years, however, the numbers at the college were reduced, as we shall see, and with this reduction came improvements in comfort, discipline and academic standards.

The arrival of so many 'foreigners' in their midst, so different in language, dress and customs, gave rise to a certain amount of curiosity and perhaps a little resentment among the townspeople of Romsey at first. To begin with, the newcomers were Catholics, and that in itself was a matter for concern in a region where prejudice against the Catholic Church was quite common. The community soon found that the wearing of their cassocks and Rosaries in public was not viewed with favour. Some of the traditions brought with them from Pontchâteau and Santbergen had to be adapted: for example, it was decided that, to avoid the danger of provocation, the Second Rosary on half-days, which it had been the custom to say during the course of the walk, should be said at a different time. Mostly however the traditional way of life at the Junior Seminary was preserved, though many things must have aroused the wonder of the inhabitants of the town: the Fathers' habit of rising at 4.30 in the morning, for example. But gradually the townspeople became used to the strange ways of the newcomers. The cassock came to be accepted as a kind of academic gown. Esteem and respect for the community grew, helped by the fact that it brought welcome custom to the local trades-people, who found the Fathers honourable clients. Real friendship was shown to them from the first by the Bishop and clergy of the diocese, many of whom became life-long friends of the community.

It is interesting for us to look back at the kind of life lived in those early years at the college. It was an ordered and well-regulated existence - perhaps too well regulated for our tastes today: virtually every moment of the day and every form of activity was the subject of

written regulations.\* The order of the day was laid down as follows (with perhaps minor modifications):

4.55: Boys get up.

5.10: Morning Prayer and Meditation in the Study-Hall.

5.30: Mass, during which the boys said their First Rosary (i.e. the Joyful Mysteries) privately. Mass was followed by a period of Thanksgiving.

6.20: A period of study.

7.15: Breakfast, after which the boys went back to the dormitory to make their beds, and then had a period of recreation.

8.00: Class.

10.00: Recreation.

10.30: Visit to the Blessed Sacrament together, followed by a study period.

11.55: Examination of Conscience in the Chapel.

12.00: Dinner, followed by recreation.

1.30: Second Rosary (the Sorrowful Mysteries, often said outside), followed by a study period.

2.30: Class.

4.30: Tea, followed by recreation.

5.00: Visit to the Blessed Sacrament together (unless there was Benediction that night), followed by a study period.

6.30: Third Rosary (the Glorious Mysteries) and Spiritual Reading in the study hall.

7.00: Supper, followed in Summer by recreation.

7.45: Night Prayers.

8.00: Bed.

On Sundays and feast-days this order of the day was modified slightly (there was no class other than a Catechism class in the morning), with special arrangements for major feasts. There was no class on Thursday, its place in the morning being taken by the writing of a composition in the study-hall. There was a walk every Thursday and Monday afternoon, lasting at least three hours. From All Saints Day till Easter, except on walk-days, the upper forms were allowed to stay up to study until 8.30, this period being known as '*veillée*'.

All these various activities were governed by written regulations and customs. These, for example, reminded the boys of the deportment required at prayers or in Chapel, and laid down the procedures to be followed on entering and leaving the chapel: "On entering they make the sign of the Cross piously with Holy Water. They go sedately and modestly to their places, where they wait standing and in respectful silence to make together a fitting greeting

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\* The details (and quotations) given in the next few pages may not apply in all their details to the regime at Montfort College: they are taken in point of fact from regulations referring to Montfortian Apostolic Schools in general and from the Book of Customs of the revived Seminary of Pontchâteau (which dates from after 1928 - the other documents are of uncertain date) on the assumption that they were followed at Romsey.

to the Blessed Sacrament. At a first signal from the Father in charge, they genuflect and stand up again; at a second signal they kneel down.” To receive Communion: “they approach the Holy Table in two rows in the order indicated beforehand, their hands joined and in profound recollection.” On rising it was laid down that “after having put on their trousers and shoes (which they must not have done before the rising bell) each pupil washes his hands, wrists, neck, face, ears, teeth and nails; combs his hair carefully; finishes dressing; uncovers his bed; attends to his other needs; takes care not to forget anything, neither his Rosary beads, nor his knife, nor his handkerchief, etc...; then he takes his place in the ranks to await the signal to go down to the place of prayer.” “The pupils clean their shoes on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, at the beginning of the mid-day recreation.” At the beginning of the study periods, “when the prayer is finished, they are given two minutes to take from their desks their books, exercise books and all that will be needed for the given exercise, for they will not be able to open their desks again during the study period without permission. During this operation they will avoid hiding their heads behind their desks.” “All exits from the study hall, even with the permission of the Prefect, will be noted down on an *ad hoc* note-slip which the pupil gives to the Father he wishes to see. The latter, on dismissing the pupil, notes down the time at which he leaves his room. The note-slip is given back to the Prefect on re-entering the study hall.” “The cleanliness of the study hall demands that there be no spitting on the floor...” With regard to class periods, it is noted that “the duties of the pupil during class are principally silence and attention, docility and politeness.” “When a pupil is questioned by his teacher, he always stands with his arms folded; and he never replies with the monosyllables ‘yes, no,’ without adding ‘Father’.” “When an occasion for laughter arises in class, the well-brought-up child does not shout or contort his body, and knows when to stop in time, at the first sign from the teacher.” In the refectory, where there was usually reading during the meals, “they keep perfect silence during the whole of the meal time, making their requests in a low voice to the servants and by signs to their neighbours.” Rules of good table manners are given in detail; for example: “The spoon is always held in the right hand; the fork may be held in the right or left.” “They must not blow on their soup to cool it.” In speaking of the head of each table, the Rules note that “it is their task to cut the meat and to serve to each one a reasonable quantity from each dish, without taking account of the tastes or desires of each pupil: it cannot be tolerated that the pupils of an Apostolic school should systematically abstain from what is served up for them.”

Even the periods of recreation and the walks are governed by written rules. “During recreation, games are obligatory.” “When a general game is announced, all private games must cease immediately; and no-one must try to organise one in opposition to the general game.” “During a game, they must avoid forming groups or little meetings to chat or discuss. to philosophise or talk politics.” “When private games are allowed, they must avoid playing in twos; in their games and during the rest of the recreation there must always be at least three.” “Leap-frog, hide-and-seek, and in general all new games are forbidden in our Apostolic schools.” For walks: “The pupils form ranks in the order which will have been announced for them; they keep to these ranks as long as the Father in charge does not allow them to be broken... the Father in charge can make any changes in the ranks and groups that he considers opportune.” “They never stop in the woods. They may stop for a time in a free and open place, provided the pupils remain under the eye of the Father in charge.”

The students did not go home for Christmas or Easter holidays, at least in these early days. During these periods there was a special time-table, and they were governed by special rules and customs. Even for the Summer holidays, when the students returned home, there were many written rules governing the way they were to spend their time, the kinds of

entertainment they were allowed, their prayers and frequentation of the Sacraments, etc. They were always given some work to do during these holidays. On returning they had to bring with them a sealed certificate of good conduct from their parish-priest.

Mention has already been made of the cramped conditions at the College in the first four years of its existence. With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, this at least was alleviated somewhat, as several of the students and professors were called up to serve in the forces. Even before the boys returned from their summer holidays, one of these students had been killed in action in Belgium, the first of several during the course of the War. The hostilities must have caused doubts as to the possibility of re-opening the College that year, as the Archives mention that the students eventually returned only at the beginning of November. One reason for this may have been the possibility of using the building as a military hospital, as in October, an English officer called to see if it would be suitable for such a purpose. However, at the time, some of the community were laid up with typhoid fever, and it was decided not to use the building as a hospital. Another reason was the danger of crossing the Channel in time of war, and of course the natural reluctance of parents to let their children go abroad at such a time. However, the College did eventually re-open, under a new Superior, Fr. Cousseau.

The boys who returned in 1914 were to stay at the College, without a visit home, until July 1916, owing to the ever-present difficulty of crossing the Channel. That in itself was a cause of a certain amount of discouragement; and there were others arising from the state of war. There were regular departures of students called up to serve in the forces; and every so often news would arrive of students and former professors killed in action: the College lost 8 of its students killed during the war, as well as a number who never returned to take up their studies again. There were also the little annoyances to which everyone was subject: the black-out (the community was 'menaced with a fine' for its infringement), the restrictions on entering certain zones. Added to these for the inhabitants of the College were the visits of the Police checking on aliens and the necessity of carrying an identity card. The shortage of staff also caused some difficulties: the two top forms had to follow the same courses. The reduction of the numbers in the sixth form due to the call-up meant that very few went on each year to the Novitiate: only three in 1915, three in 1916, two in 1917 and four in 1918: yet another cause for discouragement. It was not all black however: the dark days were occasionally brightened by an amusing incident, like that of Fr. Dixneuf, who was taken for a spy while taking a short-cut across the railway lines at Stockbridge, or that of the British soldier who, having drunk too much, woke the whole community up one night with his hammering at the door, looking for his camp!

As the war dragged on past its first year, parents became more and more unwilling to send their sons across the Channel to England to the College. Approaches were therefore made to the Bishop of Nantes. For some time the Junior Seminary of that diocese had occupied the old buildings at Pontchâteau. It was now arranged that the boys for the lower three forms of the Apostolic school should be admitted to this seminary, thus causing a further reduction in the numbers at Romsey, with a consequent improvement in discipline, and, it would seem, in academic standards. After the return of the boys in 1916, then, there were only senior boys at the College: only 46 of them, where before the choir alone had numbered 50.

This return to the College in September 1916 was delayed by the fear of a German U-boat outside the harbour at St. Malo, but eventually the journey was made uneventfully. The Romsey students were unable to return again to France, however, for the remainder of the

War. Life went on much the same as before, with the occasional news of another death. Fr. Cousseau was re-named as Superior for another three-year term of office, and various members of staff came and went. Then the tide of war began to turn, and the closing months were marked by increasing excitement. After the signing of the Armistice in 1918, a special Mass of thanksgiving was said and was attended by all the boys in Romsey town. Things could now get back to normal again, with the exception that the lower three forms continued to attend the Nantes Diocesan Seminary at Pontchâteau.

There is little information available about the years immediately following the Great War of 1914-1918. In 1920, Fr. Lagrée replaced Fr. Cousseau as Superior, though the latter was to return to the College for a further term as Superior in 1926; Fr. Lagrée was renamed as Superior in 1923. One important change in these years was the introduction of the Baccalaureate examinations shortly before 1926, and with them a restructuring of the academic courses at the College.

Almost from the opening of the college, some English boys had been admitted, the first being Horace White, who arrived on March 31st, 1911. He eventually became a Benedictine priest. He was followed by others, at first from the region around Southampton, but after the War from farther afield: by then the Sisters of La Sagesse had established themselves in Lancashire, and they began sending boys to the College in increasing numbers from that part of the country. By 1926 there were some English boys in all the classes, while two had already gone on to the Noviciate in France, one of them having afterwards gone to Rome to study. In 1925, seven of the new students had been English, all of them from Lancashire. Three of them were later to be ordained Montfort Fathers. These English boys had, of course, quite a lot of difficulties to overcome, as, not only was French the only language in which they were taught, but all the customs and practices of this French seminary were very different from those of other English schools and colleges. Nevertheless, they seem to have fitted in well. With them came a few young men, mostly Irish at first, who wished to become lay-brothers in the congregation. The first of these to be professed was Brother Wilfrid (Daniel Colman), who made his first vows in 1919. Later that year he went to Canada, where, tragically, he was drowned in 1921.

In 1926, amidst great rejoicing, the community celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Apostolic school, opened at Pontchâteau in 1876. For three days, beginning on April 26th and ending on the feast of St. Louis Marie on April 28th, the College was in festive mood. The Superior General attended the celebrations, and on the last day the Bishop came to join in the rejoicing. There was a Solemn Mass each day, as well as talks on the history of the College and various forms of entertainment provided by the students. On the first day, the occasion was taken to install and bless a new statue of the Sacred Heart, and to dedicate the College to the Sacred Heart.

In September 1926, Fr. Lagrée was replaced as Superior by Fr. Cousseau. During the following year, things having improved in France with regard to the position of Religious, the decision was taken to return the whole Apostolic school to Pontchâteau. It was the intention of the Superiors of the Congregation to close down Montfort College and sell the property, since it was not thought to be financially possible to continue running it for the relatively small number of English students who would remain after the French boys had gone. However, they were eventually persuaded to allow it to continue as a Junior Seminary for the English students, and when the new school year began in September 1927, there were no French boys at the College. So began the era which was known in those days as the 'English College'. The teaching staff consisted of Fr. Moors, a Belgian; Fr. Boulouard, a Frenchman;

Fathers Dubois and Latour, Canadians; and Fr. Carter, the first English Montfort Father. In that first year, there were 26 students; this number gradually increased: to 54 at the beginning of 1929, and to 74 in 1931, thus fully justifying the decision to continue. The first superior of the 'English College' was Fr. Moors, appointed in September 1927, Fr. Cousseau having returned to France with the French students. The French Baccalaureate Examinations were now replaced by the London University Matriculation Examination.

For the following years there is little information given in the Archives of the College, apart from lists of the Staff and Brothers. From these we see the name of the first English Montfort Father, Fr. Carter, in the community list for 1928. Fr. Carter later left the Congregation and worked until his death in the Diocese of Shrewsbury. In the succeeding years more and more English names appear in the lists, including those of some scholastics who began to spend a year each here before ordination. The first of these was Peter Ryan, who later became the first English Provincial superior; the next year there was Lawrence Hardman, later to become the Bishop of Zomba in Nyasaland; while the following year saw John Molloy and Christopher Bennett on the staff. There also appear the names of more English (or Irish) lay-brothers, together with those French brothers who had stayed on. In 1931 Fr. Moors was replaced as Superior by Fr. Fernand Fradet, the first Montfort Father to be ordained in the College chapel (this was in 1911); he himself had to be replaced however in 1932 owing to his deteriorating health. He was succeeded by Fr. Hubert Six.

In 1929, the students first began to go home for a short holiday at Christmas, though this did not begin until Boxing Day, December 26th. It was in this year too that the first burial, that of one of the Romsey Sisters, took place in the College cemetery which had been laid out shortly before. The first of the Fathers to be buried there was Fr. Boulouard, who died at the College in 1935. In the following year, Bro. René died and was buried in the cemetery. Bro. René had for many years been the cobbler at the College, and after his death one of the tall stories told year by year at the College was that, on the eve of his Anniversary, he would walk the dormitory at night and mend any shoes that needed repairing!

In 1933, the lighting in the Building was changed from gas to electricity. This is the first mention in the Archives of the many modernisations carried out over the years. Many more will be seen as the story unfolds.

In 1935, Fr. Lagrée became Superior in succession to Fr. Six. The following Christmas the boys were allowed to go home for Christmas itself for the first time. They still did not have a holiday at home at Easter however.

As the second world War approached, the general unease was expressed at the College by the issuing of gas-masks to all the inhabitants, in 1938. At the outbreak of the War, there were only two French Fathers left on the staff, Fr. Lagrée having had to return to France because of ill-health. Fr. Troadec replaced him as Superior, being appointed in October 1939. The other French Father was Fr. Guimard. There were still two or three French Brothers however. Another of the Brothers, Bro. Benoit, a Prussian by birth, who had first come to the College in 1938, was sent by the civil authorities to Australia for the duration of the hostilities with Germany, returning in 1945. The air-raids which were a part of life during the War affected the College no less than other places. The black-out regulations were strict, and several times the boys spent at least part of the night in the bottom corridor which was prepared as a makeshift air-raid shelter. The sixth-formers were recruited as stretcher-bearers to work at the Gardens, the former Workhouse, in Romsey, a duty which often resulted in their being called out at night.

Perhaps the biggest upheaval caused by the War as far as the College was concerned was the flight of the English students from France as the German forces advanced. They caught the last boat sailing for England from St. Malo, and arrived at the College on June 17th 1940, many of them dressed in their cassocks and clerical hats. After staying for a few days at Romsey, they dispersed to their homes until a suitable house for an English scholasticate could be found. With their return to England and the cutting of communications with France forced by the War, together with the continuing increase in the numbers of English members of the Congregation, it was felt that the time had come to establish an English Province. With the acquisition of a suitable house for a Novitiate at Totton, seven miles from Romsey, in 1942, all the canonical conditions for the erection of the Province were met, and it was duly established (as a Vice-Province because of the smallness of numbers) in that year. Montfort College can rightly be said to have given birth to the new Province. For many years the history of the Montfort Fathers in England had centred around it: now its former pupils were to begin extending the growth of the Congregation in England. The first Provincial, Fr. Peter Ryan, was one of those who had been a student here at the start of the 'English College' in 1927.

With the establishment of the English Province in 1942, Fr. Christopher Bennett took over as Superior of the College from Fr. Troadec, and he and Fr. Guimard, the last two French Fathers on the staff departed from the community in the same year, thus leaving an all-English teaching staff for the first time since the opening of the school. There were then 11 Fathers on the staff, and four Brothers, two of them still French.

During the War, the College played host to the orphan boys from Abbey House in Romsey, run by the Sisters of La Sagesse; while for a short time the College Convent was used as a temporary home for the Poor Clare nuns from Southampton, who had been bombed out of their Convent. At the end of the fighting, life returned to normal. In 1945, Fr. Michael Worsley was appointed Superior in succession to Fr. Bennett, and in that year too the Legion of Mary was established at the College.

In 1946 Bro. Élie died. He had come to the College with the first group from Belgium in 1910 and had been here ever since. For many years he had been the Archivist, and it is said that when he died (of cancer) it was thought best that the Archives which he had written should be burnt. Certainly the existing Archives for the first 39 years of the College's existence are not in his hand: they are written in English, probably by Fr. James Frith, who followed him as Archivist.

In 1947, the College celebrated with great rejoicing the Canonisation of St. Louis Marie de Montfort. Fourteen of the students went to Rome with Fr. Handley for the Canonisation ceremony in St. Peter's, while at the College itself, the day was marked by a Pontifical High Mass in the open air. Later in the year, during a solemn triduum held in honour of the new Saint, the College chapel saw the ordination of the third priest to be ordained here, that of Fr. William Connolly (the second was Fr. James Downey in 1941). It was in the same year, it would seem, (*post hoc sed non propter hoc?*) that the first pantomime was produced at the College: 'Robinson Crusoe', produced by Fr. Cyril Madden.

From 1948 onwards, much more information is given in the Archives about the details of happenings at the College. Many of these details do not concern a short history of this type, though they help to build up some sort of a picture of what life at the College was like in the following years. They are punctuated from time to time by events of major importance, the first of which is recorded for this very year of 1948. It was then that the boundary of the

College grounds began to change for the first time since 1910. The Local Council served a Compulsory Purchase Order on the Community, for the purchase of a large tract of the College land adjoining the town cemetery. The land was apparently needed for re-housing in the aftermath of the War. An appeal against the purchase was made, but to no avail, and later in the year building began. Today, Chambers Avenue stands on this land.



3 The cast of the pantomime "Rumplestiltskin" in 1953

In September 1948, Fr. Cyril Madden took over as Superior from Fr. Worsley, who had recently been appointed Provincial Bursar. Later in the year, the modernisation of the College was advanced a further step by the installation of an AGA solid-fuel cooker in the kitchen to replace the old gas stove which had stood in the middle of the floor. The following year saw more changes, first of all in the personnel: Bro. Timothé, the last of the French Brothers, returned to France, leaving behind him only one non-British member of the community, Bro. Benoit. In the same year, the Brothers' dormitory, for many years in one of the rooms in the basement, was changed to the first floor. Changes were made too in the time-table: the number of classes was changed from four to five, and the hour of rising for the boys put from 5.50 (a time which had applied for many years) to 6.45. There seemed in some ways to be a new wind of change blowing, heralded perhaps by the visit in 1949 of one of H.M. Inspectors (*en passant*, we may note one or two points from his report: The curriculum comprised Religious Knowledge; Latin, French, English, Greek Testament, Mathematics, History, Geography and Music; the age range was from 12½ to 29 (!), and the average age of those in the matriculation form was 21; it is mentioned that there were no baths available for the boys but that they could take a cold douche: this is not true - although there was no hot running water in the dormitories there had been showers for many years in the basement with hot and cold water). Whether the Inspector heralded change or not, the following years certainly saw plenty of changes: hardly a year passes in the Archives without some change of greater or lesser importance being recorded. In 1951, the 5th and 6th forms were allowed for the first time to go out for walks in groups of three or four (previously, all the boys had

walked in crocodile under the supervision of a Father, a system which still continued for those of the lower forms). They were also provided with a common-room. In the same year, the G.C.E. exams were introduced to replace eventually the London Matriculation. In 1952, the main corridor and study hall were completely re-floored: perhaps it was as well, for in that year the study received more wear than in any previous year, as the First Form had to use it as a classroom because of their large numbers: 34. In 1953, the numbers at the College topped 80 for the first time since the 'English College' began, and this necessitated the use of a second room as a Junior refectory for a time. In September of that year the first Prefect of Discipline was appointed, Fr. Matthews being the first to fill the role; previously, each member of staff had taken a turn at duty. The material improvements to the College continued with the building of the extension to the boot-room, enclosing the lavatories.



4 The College in the 1950s

In September 1954, Fr. Madden was replaced as Superior by Fr. Bennett, back for a second term. He was to remain until 1960. A few months after his appointment, wash basins were installed in the boot-room, and the following Summer the school-yard, which until then had been dry earth, with the tennis-courts laid out in brick, was tarmacadamed. In 1955, it was feared that the College was to lose some more land, when newspaper reports revealed that some of it was zoned for housing development. Later, however, after some discussion, this zoning decision was rescinded. The situation was sufficiently precarious however to cause some concern as to the future of the College: at that time a great deal of the College's food was supplied by our own farm. When the opportunity arose, therefore, Lodge Farm was bought, comprising about 40 acres of land adjoining the College property on the opposite side of Halterworth Lane, together with a farmhouse, a cottage, and farm-buildings. This farm was taken over in May 1957, and not long afterwards the Brothers took possession of the farm-house, where they lived until 1968. They had their own chapel there for morning Mass, though they came up to the college for their meals. Dairy-farming operations began at Lodge Farm in September 1957, and for the next few years a herd of 20 or so cattle was maintained, together with pigs and hens.



**Montfort College Football Team, circa 1955**

Tim Noonan	John Miley	John Jude Johnston	Pat McCann (?)	Sam Erskine
Tony Porter	Derek Blunt	Bob Ellwood	Martin Loftus	Jim Murray
				Ralph Ashton

Meanwhile, modifications and improvements at the college itself continued. In 1956, a new terrazzo floor was laid in the kitchen, and in 1957 new wire netting fences were erected around the school-yard and flood-lights installed: the students at the time commented on the possibility of watchtowers at each corner of the yard as the next move! But the fence and the lights were soon seen to be an addition to the amenities of the school-yard: no more running miles for tennis-ball's; and it was now possible to continue the ever-popular football games on the yard even after dark. In 1958, the work of cleaning the house was made easier by the purchase of an electric floor-polisher, and suddenly the old dry boards of the dormitory and corridors were shining. The bursar's task was also made easier in 1958 when a van was bought: the days of riding in the face of icy winds on a motor-cycle were over.

Improvements in the academic life of the College were further advanced in 1957 by the appointment of Fr. Cannon as head-master, thus relieving the Superior of some of his duties. A new time-table had already been introduced in 1954, and now additions to the school calendar brought the school into line with comparable schools in the country. Cricket was re-introduced after many years' lapse in 1958, and it was then that the first school sports-day was held. In that year too, a third football pitch was added to the existing two to cope with the greater numbers of students: there were 85 boys in 1958, 84 in 1959, and 93 in 1960. In 1958, following an inspection by one of H.M. Inspectors, the College was placed on the Government register of Independent Schools. The following year, one of the old class-rooms was converted and equipped as a science laboratory. It was in 1958 that the first Prize-Day was held at the College for many years.

In April 1960, the College celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The Superior General, Fr. Heiligers was among the guests entertained by the play "Non Moriar Sed Vivam" which traced the first fifty years of the College's history. Other guests were Archbishop King of Portsmouth, Bishop Hardman of Zomba, the Mayor of Romsey (this was apparently the first visit of a mayor to the College), the French Provincial, and several former French professors, including Fr. Moors, the first superior of the English College. In the following September, Fr. Joseph Wareing became Superior in place of Fr. Bennett.

In August 1961, Fr. Handley was officially installed as Parish-priest of Romsey. Until that year, Romsey had been included in one of the Southampton parishes, though for many years its Catholic population had been cared for by Montfort Fathers, first by Fr. Claessen, a Dutchman, who was followed by Fr. Andrew Somers, another Dutchman, then by Fr. Jeremiah McCarthy, and finally by Fr. Handley. In fact, there had been a Montfort Father continually in residence in Romsey since 1891, providing Mass for the people of the district.

Changes continued to be made at the College in the succeeding years. In 1961, the Fathers' library was moved from its old position in the room next to the 'top sacristy' (which had started life as the Infirmary). The same year, the dormitory was enlarged by the removal of the old Sports-room, and the showers were renewed with tiled walls and floor.. In 1962, the College was connected to the main sewer: before this the sewers had led to a cess-pit in the orchard. That year, too, an electric organ was bought for the chapel with the help of donations by parents and people of the district. At the end of 1961, the laundry was modernised to the extent of having an oil-fired boiler installed to replace the old coke-fired one, though the machines were still run on steam.

The College had been from its opening the home of at least part of the Mother-House library, removed from Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre during the troubles in France. In 1962 these books were inspected by a representative of the Mother House, now moved to Rome, and as some were found to be quite valuable, it was decided to take them to Rome. Later in the year they were all packed up and sent off by sea.

In 1963, Fr. Wareing was succeeded as Superior by Fr. Owen Cannon, for some years already the headmaster. At the beginning of the following year, the Fathers began to take meals separately from the boys, in the room which had previously been their common-room. The former Fathers' Oratory was vacated to make way for a new common-room. Later in the year, a wall was knocked down to enlarge the new dining-room so that the Brothers could take their meals with the Fathers. The Brothers then also began to take their recreation with the Fathers: previously they had always taken meals and recreations separately. Other changes in the same year included the laying of the triangular lawn (with its retaining wall) at the side of the building (a statue of St. Louis Marie was erected there the following year), the tarmacading of the surrounding driveway, and the installation of a television set in the study-hall (the Fathers had acquired a T.V. the previous year) - a sign of the times: previously it had been almost unheard even of even to allow a radio for the boys. 1964 also saw the introduction of the liturgy in English following the Second Vatican Council, and of Mass facing the congregation, for which the sanctuary was altered somewhat.

By the end of 1964, consequent upon a fall in the numbers of Brothers in the Province (Bro. Benoit, the last remaining non-British Brother, had returned to France in 1956 after many years of quiet service at the College; Bro. Columba had died in 1963, others had left the Congregation, while some had gone to work elsewhere in the Province), the farm had to some extent been run down. With this running-down in farming operations, the need for farming land was reduced, and at the end of 1964, a large tract of land between the College buildings and Chambers Avenue was sold for housing development, extending from Botley Road to the Tadburn stream (affectionately known to former students as 'the Brook'). The proceeds of this sale enabled the Province to pay off all its debts, but it also enabled an extensive modernisation programme to be carried out at the College. This programme was begun the following year with the complete renovation of the chapel. Minor alterations had been made to the chapel before, but nothing so radical as this. A side chapel was built on the East side, and the room on the ground floor next to the chapel was incorporated as a second side chapel.

A choir tribune was built at the back, and a false ceiling with concealed lighting introduced, while the sanctuary was reshaped and panelled in wood. A new floor was laid and pews bought, and the whole was redecorated in a simple colour scheme. Much of the structural work and painting was carried out by the Brothers under the guidance of Father Derrick, who had had much experience in Church building in Malawi where he built the Cathedral of Zomba. The work was finished just in time for the fourth ordination to take place in the chapel, that of Fr. Robert Ellwood on March 5th 1966. Work actually went on, putting the finishing touches to the transformation, until 1.30 in the morning of the day of the ordination! Later in the year, Fr. Derrick also transformed the Sisters' chapel at the convent.

A short while after the completion of the chapel, a request was made by Hampshire County Council for 12 acres of land at Lodge Farm, near the top of Halterworth Lane, to be used for the building of a primary school. At first the College appealed against the purchase of this land, but it was eventually decided, on the advice of solicitors, to sell it to the Council. The sale was not completed until 1970, when building operations began. Before this, at about the same time that building began on the Saxon Meadows Estate (as the land sold in 1964 came to be known), building of houses had also commenced on the site of the gravel pit adjoining the College land to the North, and on the opposite side of Botley Road. The College was such a well-known landmark in the district by this time that a road on this latter housing estate was called Montfort Road. So by the end of the sixties, the College was virtually surrounded by housing.

Meanwhile, the process of change continued. In 1966, Fr. Frederick Matthews replaced Fr. Cannon as Superior (Fr. Cannon then took over the Parish of Romsey from Fr. Handley). Three new subjects were then added to the time-table: the theory of music, art and current affairs. In January 1967, another innovation was the inclusion in the teaching staff of some Sisters of La Sagesse from Abbey House, who began teaching some subjects to the First Form. Later that year, the time-table was further changed, and the boys' Mass was henceforth said at mid-day. At the end of the year a visit from the HMI informed the staff of the necessity of preparing to undergo an inspection with a view to official 'Recognition as Efficient', without which the Government would eventually close the College. This acted as a spur to the further modernisation programme already envisaged. Meanwhile, in 1967, further minor modifications and improvements were made: the students went home for a holiday at Easter for the first time in the history of the College; the stage in the Hall (or 'theatre') was moved and later the floor asphalted. A change of more moment was the ceasing of all operations at Lodge Farm; the cows were sold to a neighbouring farmer, and the land leased to him in exchange for a daily supply of milk. Some land was retained for growing potatoes, and hens were still kept at the College farm.

At the end of 1967, the second phase in the modernisation programme began with the erection of a new classroom block on the side of the College next to the chapel. This was a prefabricated wooden building linked to the boot-room by a corridor. Work on it was slow, but it was eventually completed in time for the new school year in September 1968, providing six spacious and well-lit classrooms with two small store-rooms. At the same time as the new classrooms were occupied, renovations were under way in the dormitories, providing the boys with new toilets, foot-baths and showers, and new wash-basins with hot and cold running water - the first time there had been hot water in the dormitory. Shortly afterwards the old study-hall was converted to a dining-room for the boys, with the installation of a serving and dish-washing area, with a hot cabinet and a sterilizer. By the end of the year the boys were able to vacate the old dining-room, which was then converted into a new common-room for

the Fathers and Brothers. At the same time, wash-basins were installed in all the rooms of the members of the community, and new showers and toilets installed on the first floor.

In September 1968, history was made at the College by the advent of four Brothers of St. Gabriel to live with the community and to teach in the school. This was perhaps the first time that members of the two congregations had lived and worked together since the nineteenth century, owing to an unfortunate controversy which had divided them.

In 1969, the Provincial Chapter having decided that the year's novitiate should now be done after the study of philosophy, there was no reception of the habit, which was replaced by a graduation ceremony. The following year, 1970, there was a possibility that the College might close or change its form radically: this was because of the general unease felt at that time about the fall in vocations, and also because of a searching re-examination on the occasion of the Provincial Chapter of the whole idea of formation for the priesthood. However, at a special session of the Chapter at Easter 1970 the whole question was thoroughly discussed, and it was decided that the College should continue as before. Shortly afterwards the inspection of the school by a team of Government Inspectors took place with a view to having the College recognised as efficient, and as a result the plans for further improvements, which had been hanging fire during the Chapter discussions, were given the green light. They included a new library and laboratory, and extra classroom space, to be provided by a further extension to the new classroom block. Plans were drawn up, and the building commenced in October 1971. The opportunity was also taken of renovating the boot-room, installing central heating and showers, and in fact rebuilding and re-roofing part of the old boot-room. At the time of writing, this work is still going on: when it is finished, the modernisation programme foreseen for the College will be complete. Meanwhile, in the last two years, 1970 and 1971, a new all-electric laundry has been installed at the convent; the dormitories have been divided by six-foot high partitions; fire screens and a fire-alarm system have been installed throughout the college; an internal intercommunications telephone system (rendered necessary by the increased size of the living quarters consequent on the building of the new classroom blocks) has been introduced; and the basement corridor has been re-floored in terrazzo.

With the election of Fr. Matthews as Provincial in August 1970, Fr. Harold Cowan replaced him as Superior, and Fr. Sean O'Haire took over the duties of headmaster.

An era came to an end at the college on February 24th 1972, when the last two remaining French Sisters left to return to France. They were Sr. Françoise Angélique and Sr. Augustine, both of whom had spent nearly all their religious lives (in the case of Sr. Augustine, 60 years; in the case of Sr. Françoise, almost as long) at Romsey: Sr. Augustine had first been in Abbey House, but had spent 49 years at the College.

It is clear that the last 12 years and more have been a time of great change at Montfort College; not only in the material surroundings, but also, perhaps more, in the way of life of the community and students. To any former student returning today, the College must be almost unrecognisable. Some of the old traditions linger on, at least in the vocabulary: we still speak of the '*cour d'été*', of '*veillée*' and occasionally of the Fathers being in '*conseil*'; the present joinery is still referred to sometimes as the 'bakery', though the ovens for baking bread are long since gone, and bread has not been made at the college since 1941; the Sisters still speak occasionally of the '*séchoir*'; the reception rooms for visitors are still referred to as the 'parlours'. But all the old familiar places - the study hall, the classrooms, the chapel, the dining-room, the corridors, even the dormitories - are changed almost beyond recognition.

The highly regimented style of life has changed: the only chapel exercises which are compulsory for the boys now are the Mass, Rosary in the evening and night-prayers - all the rest is left to their own piety; none of the boys walk out in crocodile any more; all except the First Form keep their own money; compulsory games for all during recreations disappeared long ago, except for the organised football and cricket on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. Nearly all the boys possess transistor radios; they rent a colour television for themselves; they may keep bicycles at the College once they reach the Fourth Form. There is no longer any reading during meals, and, although silence at certain times and in certain places is still prescribed, these rules are very much relaxed compared with what they were. As times have changed, so has life at the College. Whether all these changes are for the better or not must be left to future generations to decide. Yet, despite all change, Montfort College still continues to educate boys in a Christian and humanitarian way, and seems set to continue doing so for many years to come.

*In fact, Montfort College ceased to be in 1978, when the number of students had fallen so low as to make it non-viable. (Note added in 1997)*