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### NOVICES IN THE HISTORY OF THE GBR SALESIAN PROVINCE

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In November 2007, it was 120 years since Don Bosco sent the first small group of Salesians to Battersea, in London, England where they arrived on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>. On 9 March 2007 it was 150 years since Dominic Savio<sup>1</sup> died. Shortly before he had told Don Bosco there was something he wanted to tell the Pope. When pressed the boy told Don Bosco about the «distraction» he had had about England. In the biography of Dominic Savio he later wrote, Don Bosco says that in 1858 when he was in Rome he told the Pope<sup>2</sup> about the «distraction» – «he listened with interest and pleasure». «What you have told me», replied the Pope «confirms me in my resolution to work for England, which has already all my care. In this story one can see – if nothing more, at least the advice of a good soul»<sup>3</sup>.

Earlier in his short biography of Dominic Don Bosco wrote: I have often heard him exclaim: «How many souls in England implore our aid. If I had only the health and grace, I would go there immediately, and by preaching and example win them all for Our Lord!»<sup>4</sup>.

It may also be of interest to recall an incident in the life of the English Catholic nobleman, the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, Henry Fitzalan-Howard (1847-1915) who with his family was later to visit Don Bosco in Turin: several times in May 1885, again in May 1887 and finally in January 1888 when Don Bosco was on his death bed.

As well as visiting Rome on official business, the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke frequently led pilgrimages of his countrymen to the Holy City. One such pilgrimage was in May 1877 when a group of English Catholics went to Rome for the Epis-

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<sup>1</sup> St Dominic Savio 1842-1857 canonised 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) Pope 1846-1878; beatified 2000.

<sup>3</sup> «*A Boy with a will*». *Original life of St Dominic Savio by St John Bosco*. Madras 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1962, p.77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

copal jubilee of Pope Pius IX. The Duke read an address to which the Pope replied extempore... «Inghilterra! Inghilterra! Io prego sempre per Inghilterra!» [England! England! I always pray for England!].

This note is an attempt to provide the conclusions of an extensive statistical survey covering the last 120 years of Salesian vocations nurtured and cultivated in the «English Province» under its various guises, by the various communities, and with particular reference to the Novitiates during this period.

Although the first three Salesians sent by Don Bosco himself (1815-1888) arrived in England in 1887 and formed a community in Battersea<sup>5</sup>, from a juridical point of view the Province came into existence only in 1902 (with quite a number of other Provinces around the Salesian world). It underwent not only great expansion but also subdivision with the resulting creation of other independent autonomous juridical circumscriptions. Houses were opened in South Africa, Malta, Ireland and Scotland. Later, as part of the Salesian Congregation's «Project Africa», for twenty-five years there were also two houses in Liberia, West Africa attached to the Province. In 1969 the Vice Province of Ireland and South Africa was established; in 1980 Malta became a Delegation of the Irish Province; and in 2004 Liberia became part of the West Africa English-speaking Vice Province (AFW).

The statistical data in the second part of this note is taken mainly from the official records of the Congregation found in the annual *Elencos* or year books, archive files and computer records in the Generalate in Rome, and in the Provincial archives of the GBR Province in Stockport, England. Since December 2006 these have been in the new location of the Provincial Office in Bolton. The central records in Rome are not, however, totally reliable in recording the historical reality. Among other things they depend on the accuracy of the information provided to the centre by the local and provincial communities. These sources can sometimes not fulfil this responsibility for a variety of reasons. It may be recalled, for example, that during the twentieth century there were two World Wars that at times made such communication difficult if not impossible. Naturally, simple mistakes in transcription and other human error can also play their part.

As Fr W.J. Dickson SDB mentions in his book: «One of the most striking features of the early years at Battersea was the startling growth in the number of Salesians, from 3 to 37 by 1898. This dramatic growth in numbers

<sup>5</sup> 1888 London, 26 Trott Street; 1889 London, 124 High Street; 1890-London 64 Orbel Street.

was due in large part to the intake of English vocations. There were a number of boys who came to stay with the Salesian community at Battersea... The very first of these to be accepted as a student for the priesthood was John Pash in August 1888»<sup>6</sup>. Sadly John Pash died in hospital the following year on March 24th 1889.

On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1890 the small community welcomed two new aspirants, Charles Buss<sup>7</sup> and Ernest Goddard. In September that year Charles Buss was sent to Italy to begin his novitiate at Foglizzo. There he became a Salesian, making his profession at Valdocco on 11.12.1891. Later as a priest he worked in England and the United States where he died in 1938... Ernest Goddard soon left Battersea and died in an accident some months later.

However their places and others were soon filled in a pattern that was to be repeated in subsequent years.

In a letter to Don Rua<sup>8</sup> in July 1890 Fr Macey<sup>9</sup> writes about using three or four aspirants to the priesthood as «pupil teachers» in the elementary school who by taking the necessary examinations could in a few years become qualified teachers. The Trott St Roman Catholic School Log Book records the following as pupil teachers, accepted on the dates indicated. [Their age at the time, discovered from other sources is added in brackets]. William Kelly 16 January 1890 (14); Bernard Hopper 25 April 1891 (15); John McCourt 23 Sept. 1891 (14); Walter Austen October 1893 (23); John Noonan 1895 (15)<sup>10</sup>. In 1896 Bernard Hopper, who in February 1894 had gone to the Teachers' Training College at Hammersmith, London, became the School Master.

<sup>6</sup> William John DICKSON, *The Dynamics of growth. The foundation and development of the Salesians in England*. Roma, LAS 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Buss (1873-1938): born London 04.04.73 nov. Foglizzo 23.08.90 – 11.12.91 prof perpet at the Oratory; ord 12.06.97 in Turin. Then in Valdocco until going to the United States in 1901; Returned to London 1915-22 (Military Chaplain during the War); and then back to the United States. Died in Patterson 18.08.38.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed Michael Rua (1837-1910) the first successor of Don Bosco; beatified 1972.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Bernard Macey dob 28.12.1854. Entered the Oratory in Turin 1880. Novitiate: San Benigno Canavese 02.02.81-07.10.1882 Ordained in Turin 24.09.1887. 16.11.87 –10.10.1919 in Battersea (Rector 1889-1902 and 1909-1919) (Provincial 1902-1909; Pro-Provincial 1916-1919). Chertsey (Rector 1919-1925). Died in Chertsey 09.08.28.

<sup>10</sup> From Salesian official records: After the novitiate 08.12.92-08.12.93, Bernard Hopper; William Kelly, and John McCourt all made their perpetual profession on 08.12.1893, as did Michael McCarthy. Walter Austen is recorded as making his novitiate 17.10.93 – 16.04.96 and then taking his perpetual vows. John Noonan (dob 08.05.79) is listed as a novice 26.11.93-05.07.99 (when he made his temporary profession, and then his perpetual profession on 06.05.02). In fact he was only 14 on 24.11.93. Aloysius Hawarden is recorded as having made his novitiate at Battersea 08.12.92 – 21.10.93 (which obviously is not even twelve months!). From his personal record card it emerges that he entered Battersea on 20.11.1891, was clothed by Fr Macey on 04.05.1892 before beginning his novitiate on 08.12.1892.

As will be seen in the course of this presentation, although of necessity the earliest aspirants and novices were housed, educated, and formed in the house of Battersea with Fr Juvenal Bonavia<sup>11</sup> as Novice Master, it was Burwash in Sussex that became the second Salesian house in England and the official novitiate in 1897. Newly ordained Fr Eneas Tozzi<sup>12</sup> recently arrived from Italy became the Rector and Novice Master in 1898.

A Salesian community had been sent to Cape Town, South Africa, the year before the opening of Burwash, and in 1902 Fr Tozzi was sent out there to take over from Fr Frederick Barni as Rector.

This meant that another novice master was required in Burwash, and although for a short time Fr William Brown was given this responsibility, James (Giacomo) Simonetti<sup>13</sup> (not yet ordained) was sent from Italy to prepare for this office. After his ordination in September 1905, he finally became Novice Master in October 1906 and remained in that position until 1959 – an extraordinary length of time by any reckoning.

After some fallow years during and after the First World War, in 1920 Fr Simonetti and the Novitiate moved from Burwash to Cowley Oxford, and

<sup>11</sup> Fr Giovenale Bonavia: dob 26-10.1865; nov. San Benigno Canavese 01.08.81-07.10.82 perpet. Prof.; ordained 26.05.1888 Turin; Arrived in England 18.09.1888 . Died in London 23.01.04.

<sup>12</sup> Fr Eneas Tozzi (1875-1958). As a boy at Faenza he had an extraordinary meeting with Don Bosco [*The Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco*. New York, Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle 2003, vol. 18. p. 325]. He made his novitiate at Foglizzo, 02.11.91-02.11.93. Ordained in Turin 7 November 1897, he was sent to England, to Burwash as Master of Novices until 1901. He then arrived in Cape Town 12 February 1902 where he was Rector until 1923, and then after being Rector of Lansdowne for three year, in 1926 he was appointed Provincial of England and Ireland 1926-1941. Between 1941 and 1942 and between 1946 and 1950 he was Provincial of the Western United States Province. In between he was the Delegate of the Rector Major for England and Ireland, the Eastern and Western United States, Mexico Cuba and Central America. He was then in the Eastern United States (1950-54) before returning to England where he died in 1958.

<sup>13</sup> James (Giacomo) Simonetti (1880-1961) dob 03.04.1880 (Polignano); nov. (Foglizzo) 05.10.97-03.10.98 perpet; ords: Lector + Acolyte London 24.09.04; Diac. London 17.06.05; priest London 23.09.05; Burwash 24.10.06 > 01.09.19 -Novice Master Oxford 01.10.20 > 15.08.36 -Novice Master; Beckford 01.09.36 > 25.08.51 – Novice Master; Burwash 25.08.51 > 06.08.58 – Novice Master. Died 23.05.61 at Melchet Court. (The Elencos place him at Burwash among perpet professed): in 1903 (with Frs Brown and Campana); 1904 (with Fr Brown); 1905 (with Frs de Bary and Brown) – Then in 1906 and 1907 as a priest with Fr M de Bary; 1908 (with Frs de Bary and A Sutherland); 1909 (with Fr Sutherland); 1910 (with Frs Willams and Brown); 1911 and 1912 Rector with Fr Ramspott; 1913 Rector with E. Goy; 1914 Rector with J. Connor; 1915 and 1916 and then 1917, 18, 19 (no novices) Rector with E. Goy and J. Connor; 1920: Fr A. Franco, J. Simonetti, E. Goy. Then in 1921 to Cowley, Oxford as Novice Master until 1936 and Rector 1922-1936. Then Novice Master in Beckford 1936-1951 and again in Burwash 1951-1959. He then moved to Melchet Court where he died 23.05.1961.

then in 1937 to Beckford in Gloucestershire. In 1951 Fr Simonetti and the novitiate returned to Burwash. Subsequently, the novitiate had a number of homes as will be explained later.

However to return to the beginnings, and a description provided by a French visitor: «The Salesian House at Battersea (London) counts only six years of existence and already it looks like an over-crowded bee-hive. The hive it is true, is but a small one: six priests, fourteen young religious or novices, all dressed in the religious habit – it is a charming community! Add to these some eighteen classical students, and you will have the whole internal family»<sup>14</sup>.

Considering these resident prospective vocations it is possible, in theory at least, to divide them into three groups. On arrival they were considered (and, as will be seen later, were officially described) as aspirants. If they persevered and showed further promise they became, in the Italian word used at the time (and for many years subsequently), «ascritti»<sup>15</sup>. Whether this is to be identified as novices is not immediately clear. Certainly the word is applied, on occasion, to officially recognised novices. But it is also used of those who were clearly not. It is possible that at some time it referred to those who had been clothed with the religious clerical habit: a custom that, at the time and even later, was also followed in diocesan seminaries including minor seminaries and was not necessarily related to the students being formally tonsured clerics or novices<sup>16</sup>.

On the successful completion of their canonical period of novitiate they made their religious profession (often in these early days when it was still possible, their perpetual profession) and thereby became members of the Salesian Congregation. On October 20<sup>th</sup> 1893, just days after the solemn opening of the new Sacred Heart Church in Battersea which took place on October 15<sup>th</sup>, «in the old chapel in the presence of the Rector Major, of Don Barberis and of the other confreres, the novices Ernest Blackborow, Festini Fortunato, Aloysius Hawarden and Michael McCarthy made their solemn vows, It was the first profession in England». On October 22<sup>nd</sup> «In the new Church the Rector Major gave the clerical habit to six other novices»<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Published in the English Language *Salesian Bulletin*, Nos 25-26 Nov and Dec. 1894.

<sup>15</sup> cf Don Bosco in MB XVIII 144. The Fourth General Chapter (the last held under the guidance of DB) held at Valsalice beginning on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1886. On September 2 «The Saint further recommended that the present terminology used, such as *Ascritti* [enrolled] and *Anno di Prova* [year of trial] be maintained instead of novice and novitiate. The latter terms are neither necessary nor convenient», he said.

<sup>16</sup> Cf J. DICKSON, *The Dynamics of growth...*, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Quotations from the *Salesian Bulletin*...

In the «Elencos» (from 1872 annually published lists of the communities throughout the Congregation) there are separate lists of aspirants and *ascritti* at Battersea between the years 1891 and 1895. From 1896 aspirants are no longer mentioned under that title and the lists of *ascritti* continue. Indeed *ascritti* are later to be found in the lists of other communities when these begin to be opened - beginning with Burwash in 1898 (when this had been opened specifically as the novitiate - with 6 *ascritti*), but also in Cape Town in 1899, and again 1902-1908; Farnborough in 1903, 1905 and 1908; London/St Georges in 1904, London/St. Joseph and St. Casimir in 1906 and 1908, and London/Wandsworth in 1907.

These almost certainly refer to aspirants prior to their becoming novices, or perhaps, to use terms from a later period, postulants or pre-novices (even though some were perhaps already clothed in the clerical habit).

From 1920 (in Burwash) and 1921 onwards (in Cowley, Oxford) *ascritti* are found only in the officially erected novitiate house and the task of counting the number of novices is therefore made that much easier!

In 1937 Beckford becomes the novitiate house (NB *again the dates refer to the elenco – the actual date will be the autumn of the previous year when the academic/novitiate year began.*)

It should be noted that at the beginning of the 1900s in some years there were two novitiates and two novice masters, one in England and one in South Africa. During the Second World War (1939-1945) there were two novitiates and two novice masters, one in England and one in Ireland (1942-5). In the 1960s, in some years there were two novitiates and two novice masters (in England and South Africa – 1960-1962; in South Africa and Ireland 1967; and briefly for some years even three: in England, Ireland and South Africa – 1963-1966); in one year there was only one, that in Ireland (1968). In some years there were no novices at all in England: 1917-1919; 1969-1970; 1994; 2001-2004; 2006-2007).

In the early years especially, but even later, it is no easy matter determining just how many novices entered the novitiate.

In later years, when the names of some individuals are found in the lists of novices in successive years, it is possible that these are examples (at least some of them) of the extension of the novitiate («but not beyond six months»)<sup>18</sup>.

Notwithstanding all these reservations, in the view of the present author, the figures given in the accompanying lists for the number of novices in

<sup>18</sup> Salesian General Regulations 93; CIC 653.

the period covered by this study can be considered as accurate as they possibly can be.

Because of the nature of the other records available, even more accurate is the number of those professed during this period, of those who died and those who left the Congregation while members of the Province in its various forms over the years.

Decade	90-99	00-09	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99	2000+
Novices	45	129	45	210	356	253	255	235	56	39	18	3
Professed	19	67	35	142	253	142	165	159	41	17	8	2

Thus there have been 1644 Novices during this period of whom 1050 made their first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation.

When considering and comparing these numbers it should be remembered that from 1969, when the Vice Province of Ireland and South Africa was established as a separate circumscription with responsibility for its own houses and novices, the numbers refer only to the GBR Province (which still included Malta). However, in 1980 Malta became a Delegation of the Irish Province; and in 2004 after 25 years as part of the GBR Province, Liberia became part of the West Africa English-speaking Vice Province (AFW) leaving the houses of England and Scotland alone to constitute the GBR Province in its latest form. At 31 December 2007 this meant 8 houses and 85 Salesian confreres.

In the years under consideration a number of professed Salesians left the Congregation: most of them at the expiry of their temporary vows, others by dispensation. Some priests joined the secular clergy while others left the priesthood altogether.

	Pre 1919	1920 1939	1940 1949	1950 1959	1960 1964	1965 1969	1970 1974	1975 1979	1980 1989	1990 1999	2000 2007	Tot.
Clerics	31	54	40	48	28	34	18	17	10	6	1	287
LBrS	3	23	15	16	12	20	5	3	3	3	0	103
Priests	10	5	1	4	2	10	5	8	4	2	1	52
Deacon	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Total	45	82	56	68	42	64	29	28	18	11	2	445

During this same period 347 Salesians died while members of the GBR Province and its communities. A considerable number of other Salesians who had made their novitiate in the Province died as members of other Provinces, especially Ireland, South Africa and Malta as these became detached from the GBR Province, but also in other parts of the world where they had spent their Salesian lives as missionaries «ad gentes» or attached to other Salesian Provinces.

The first to die was Fr Edward McKiernan<sup>19</sup> who had been sent by Don Bosco in 1887 as the leader of the first small group of three in Battersea. He died on 30 December 1888 at 27 years of age.

As can be seen from the table below, the highest number of deaths was in the decade 1981-90 when 73 died, while there had been 61 the previous decade, reflecting no doubt the earlier period when large numbers had entered the Congregation.

PRE 1900	1900- 1910	1911- 1920	1921- 1930	1931- 1940	1941- 1950	1951- 1960	1961- 1970	1971- 1980	1981- 1990	1991- 2000	2001- 2007	Tot.
1	10	3	9	24	24	31	43	61	73	37	31	347

<sup>19</sup> McKiernan Edward (d.o.b. 10.11.1861) entered Oratory 14.06.1876; ord. 29.03.84.