

ART. XXVI.—*The Rev. Thomas Wilkinson of Kendal.*
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Read at Penrith, July 8th, 1966.

THE name Thomas Wilkinson is apt to cause the same confusion today as it did during the lifetime of its two most worthy bearers. On 15 December 1848 the older of the two wrote, not without a touch of humour, to his friend Robert Tate at Ushaw College, Durham:

You have very kindly forwarded me Dimissorials, showing that I was ordained Subdeacon at Oscott in December 1847, when I was ordained Priest at Douay April 11th, 1789. N' import: the inclosed I return you as it regards the Revd. Subdeacon Thos Wilkinson of Oscott, the very valuable convert, who I fancy will be ordained Deacon next week, and probably in our most beautifull Church of St Cuthbert [at Ushaw], be that as it may, I return the deed to you, from whom I received it, as you or some one among you, will best know how to dispose of it.¹

The Oscott Subdeacon was indeed to be a valuable convert to Roman Catholicism. Within six years of the date of this letter he had built the present fine churches at Wolsingham and Crook in Co. Durham. Within two more he would be a canon of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. In 1870 he would retire for reasons of health to his farm at Thistleflat to specialize in the rearing of Durham short-horns, but be called upon twelve years later to be first auxiliary-bishop and then diocesan bishop; and before he died in 1909 he would also be president of the very college to which the writer of the letter refers.

Bishop Thomas Wilkinson's remarkable career has overshadowed that of his namesake, the missionary at

¹ Ushaw College Archives, *Ushaw College History Collection* [hereafter UCH], 75.

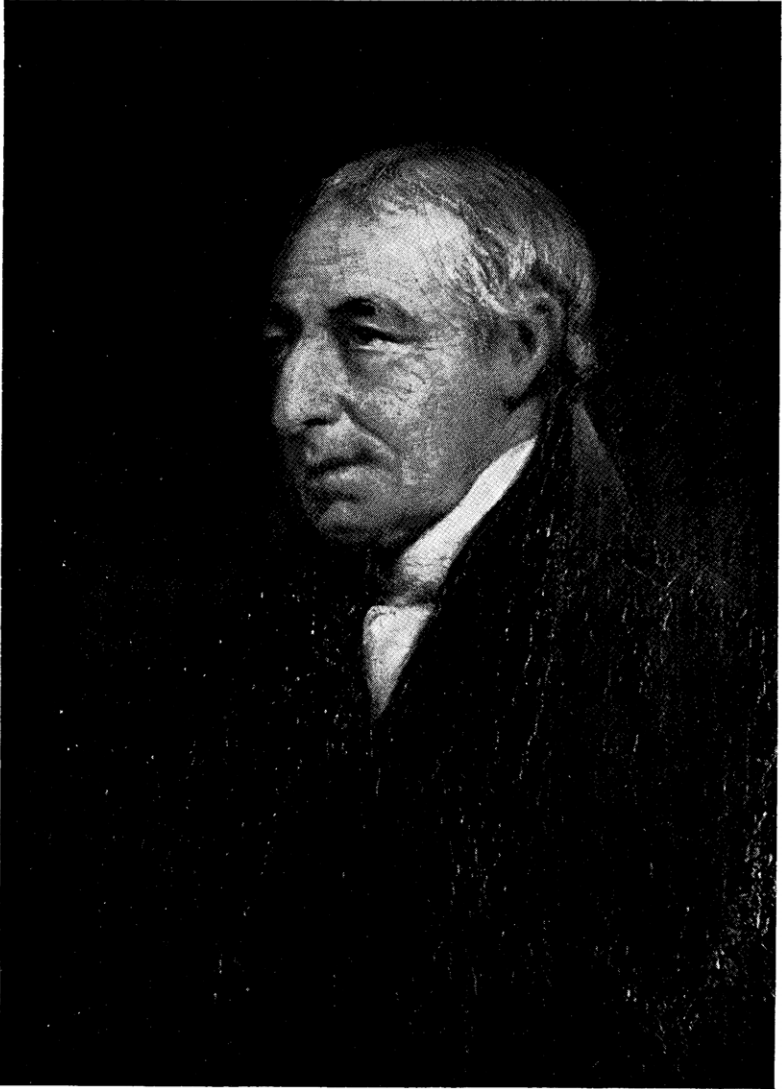


Photo J. Rossi

THE REV. THOMAS WILKINSON
from the painting by James Ward.

Kendal, who never achieved distinction in the ranks of ecclesiastical preferment. Yet I hope to show that his deeds also deserve to be recorded in the annals of English Catholic history of the 19th century.

His early life eludes us. It is assumed that he was born in the neighbourhood of Hornby about 1762.² We cannot be far out if we think of his being born within a short time of George III's accession to the throne. We may also presume that one or both of his parents were Catholic, for had it been otherwise it is most unlikely that he would have been accepted as a student for the priesthood. The one certain thing, strangely enough, is that Wilkinson was not his real name — it was an alias which he adopted when he went abroad to study. His real name was Berrington.³

We cannot say where Wilkinson received his earliest education. He might have attended one of the small Catholic schools which, like that run by Dame Alice at Fernyhalgh, existed clandestinely, or he may have been taken as a pupil by one of the Catholic missionaries in the neighbourhood. Only towards the end of 1777, when he was perhaps fourteen or fifteen, did he go abroad to the seminary at Douai in northern France.⁴

Douai College, properly called the English College at Douai, had been founded in 1568 by the Lancashire priest, William Allen, later cardinal, as part of the new University of Douai. Despite poverty it had quickly earned a high place in the contemporary movement of Catholic reform, providing the bulk of priests who con-

² Cf. R. Laing (Ed), *Ushaw College: a Centenary Memorial*, Ushaw College, 1895, 165-166.

³ Aliases had been commonly assumed by Catholic students seeking education abroad in defiance of the law. It would, however, be rather surprising if Berrington had thought an alias necessary so late in the 18th century. Perhaps he was just following tradition by force of habit.

⁴ The Prefect of Studies' Register (cf. n. 7) puts him among the *reliqui* of 1777, that is all those who arrived too late to be entered into the official list prepared for the opening of the scholastic year in October. J. R. Baterden in *Publications of the Catholic Record Society*, xxxii (1932), *Miscellanea*, p. 59, says that Wilkinson entered Douai 2 August 1776.

tinued to administer to the needs of Catholics in England. But by the middle of the 18th century the glory of Douai had somewhat faded. The fine buildings of Presidents Robert Witham (1715-1738) and William Green (1750-1770) did not hide the decline of the college. Sainly Bishop Challoner, intensely worried about the poor state of all the English colleges abroad, hoped that with the blessing of God, Henry Tichborne Blount, whom he was appointing to succeed Dr Green, would remove abuses which had crept in contrary not only to the discipline of the college, but also the ecclesiastical and even Christian spirit.⁵ Many, especially layfolk, wondered whether the time had not come to establish a college on English soil. Charles Butler reminds us in his reminiscences that the boys at Douai were excellently instructed in their religion, classics were well taught, but the main object being to form members for the Church, they were not calculated to qualify scholars either for business, the learned professions, or what he liked to call the higher scenes of life.⁶

It was into this atmosphere that Thomas Wilkinson entered when he passed through the main door of the college in the rue de grands anglais in 1777. He was to remain there first as a student then as teacher, until, as the Prefect of Studies' register puts it: "abiit in vineam Domini, Julii 20, 1792." This same source allows us to chart his academic progress.⁷ He was first in his class in 1778, a position he maintained until Grammar.⁸ There-

⁵ Cf. E. H. Burton, *The Life and Times of Bishop Challoner, 1691-1781*, London, 1909, 119.

⁶ Cf. B. Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, 1781-1803*, London, 1909, 59.

⁷ A number of the official College Diaries are extant and have all been printed, mainly by the Catholic Record Society. They provide a great deal of information about the administrative side of college life. Unfortunately, the seventh, 1715-1778, becomes very sketchy towards its end, and there is no diary at all for the period 1778-1793, when the college was seized by the French Government. The Prefect of Studies' Register gives us a list of professors and students for the years 1750-1795. The original is at St Edmund's College, Ware, Herts.

⁸ Douai employed the Renaissance terms Rudiments or Figures (3rd, 2nd and 1st Class), Grammar, Syntax, Poetry, and Rhetoric for the seven-year course of humanities.

after he dropped to seventh, but recovered his former lead by the end of the humanities. This proficiency in the classics led to his appointment as a master of these subjects after he had completed his two years' philosophy and three of theology. He commenced with First-Class Rudiments (October to December 1789), moved to the class of Poetry (Christmas 1789 to the summer of 1790), then to Rhetoric. He must have been a fairly accomplished classicist.

During the four years that Wilkinson sat at the high table as one of the senior professors his colleagues included William Gibson, of whom more will be said shortly; Edward Kitchin, who succeeded Gibson as president for a few months in 1791; John Daniel, the vice-president who took Kitchin's place; John Gillow, later to be a president of Ushaw College; and two future bishops in England, Thomas Smith and William Poynter. Some of his pupils also rose to ecclesiastical eminence: Richard Thompson, for a time Grand Vicar in Lancashire; Bishop Thomas Penswick, and George Leo Haydock, of Haydock Bible fame, who ended his days at Penrith in 1849. Others earned a more immediate reputation for courage when the college was attacked during the French Revolution.

Wilkinson's association with Douai College coincided largely with the presidency of William Gibson, 1781-1790, to whom was due a degree of modernization, the purpose of which was to meet the demands of those Catholic gentlemen who agitated for a college more in keeping with the end of the 18th century than its beginning.⁹ His chief work was the erection of a new study-place and alterations in the great dormitory as well as a new infirmary. Most of these improvements had been carried out by 1787. In addition the new president turned his attention to the course of studies. By 1784 he

⁹ I have considered William Gibson's work as sixteenth president of Douai in my *History of Ushaw College*, Ushaw, 1964, 12-18.

had introduced English literature and arithmetic, and given more prominence to French, a subject which had been studied first in Dr Green's time. He also tried to tighten discipline which he alleged to be in poor shape owing to the worldliness brought into the college by boys from other schools, too much pocket money, and an ineffective prefect of discipline. But here he does not seem to have had much success.

The president's main worry was financial. Virtual rebuilding of the college in the 18th century had drained it of its resources; funds were quite insufficient to support students in the way intended when they were first established; the cost of living soared month by month.¹⁰ His own policy led to the verge of bankruptcy and a fierce quarrel with some of his colleagues which only came to an end when he left Douai to take the place of his brother Matthew as bishop in northern England.

It is to be supposed that as a student Thomas Wilkinson shared the benefits of Gibson's reforms. That he knew anything about the administrative difficulties of the college is scarcely likely. Later, when he became a member of the staff, much of what had been going on must have reached his ears. Gibson still had another year of his presidency to run, and for three years more Wilkinson was rubbing shoulders with those closely associated with Gibson's policy. Yet nowhere does he discuss it, not even in the course of the bitter controversy which later flared up in the north of England between the clergy and their bishop over the latter's alleged maladministration at Douai.

Nor does he feature in the exciting, if highly dangerous, days at Douai during the Revolution. On several occasions the mob invaded the college. In 1791 drunken soldiers, urged on by the crowd, burst through the main doors. Further violence was prevented only by the

¹⁰ It must be remembered that Gibson's presidency coincided with the decade immediately prior to the Revolution.

spirited action of some of the students who rushed forward with the cry, "Vive la nation", and were carried shoulder high down the street as examples of good citizens.¹¹

Some months after this episode Wilkinson left Douai to take up pastoral work in England. He was then about thirty. At this time English Catholics were subject to the jurisdiction of four vicars apostolic, the exercise of whose episcopal functions depended upon faculties granted directly by the pope. Bishop William Gibson, the former president of Douai College, governed the Northern District, an area comprising the counties of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Cumberland, and Westmorland. In 1790, the year of his appointment, it contained about 35,000 Catholics.¹² Probably the number in Westmorland did not exceed about 500, and most of these would be living within the boundaries of the mission at Kendal.¹³ This Catholic centre had been founded about 1724,¹⁴ most likely by the Robert Stephenson who founded the adjoining mission of Dodding Green ten years earlier.¹⁵ The first priest associated with Kendal seems to have been the Benedictine, Dom James Witham, who was there for some months in 1730-1.¹⁶ Dom William Bede Hutton was

¹¹ Cf. J. Gillow, *The Haydock Papers: a glimpse into English Catholic life under the shade of persecution and in the dawn of freedom*, London, 1888, 94.

¹² A survey made by Bishop Matthew Gibson in 1781 gives a total of 31,645. A Visitation List of the 18th century in the Ushaw library gives 33,685 communicants in the year 1784. So the suggestion of 35,000 for 1790 is probably conservative, especially when we remember that the number of Catholics increased rapidly from this time onwards. Bishop Gibson would state in 1804 that he thought Lancashire alone had about 50,000 Catholics. Cf. my *History of Ushaw College*, 89-92.

¹³ The survey of 1781 gives a total of 400 Catholics living in Westmorland, 300 of them at Kendal. On the other hand, although the number of Catholics increased rapidly it did so only in certain areas. Manchester shot from 600 in 1781 to about 10,000 by 1804. Some areas no doubt witnessed a decline.

¹⁴ A note in Thomas Wilkinson's hand, attached to the Kendal Register at Somerset House. Cf. *The Catholic Registers of Kendal (Westmorland) 1762-1840, with notes on the Mission of Dodding Green from 1706*, edited and annotated with historical introduction by J. R. Baterden, in *Publications of the Catholic Record Society*, xxxii (1932) 62.

¹⁵ Baterden, *op. cit.*, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

there in 1735,¹⁷ but the Rev. James Gandy *alias* Leyburne is stated to have been the first resident priest, probably about 1740. He is buried in the parish churchyard.¹⁸

It was to the Kendal mission that Thomas Wilkinson came immediately he left Douai, presumably to aid the Rev. Thomas Johnson *vere* Middlehurst, Mr Gandy's successor about 1761. Mr Johnson did not die until 1817, but his health was poor from the 1790s.¹⁹ Thus we can claim for Wilkinson the practical administration of the mission at Kendal for over sixty years, that is from 1792 until his retirement in 1853. It is probable that his first work was the building of the chapel which was erected in 1793, and which after 1837 was used as museum and lecture-room until it was turned into the Catholic school. Under his direction, too, the present Catholic church of the Holy Trinity and St George was built at a cost of about £4,000. Its foundation stone was laid in October 1835, and the church was opened and dedicated on 15 September 1837, facing on to the New Road and near the old building of 1793, on the east side of Stramongate.²⁰ It is a fair assumption that this enterprise was made necessary by a rising Catholic population.²¹

Mr Wilkinson's pastoral duties, the multiple and often fatiguing tasks common to all Catholic missionaries of the day, were made considerably more onerous by a long dispute which kept the neighbouring mission at Dodding Green vacant for many years. This needs to be explained. The founder of the Dodding Green mission, Mr Robert Stephenson, preferred the incumbent, as far as was possible, to be one of his own relatives.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59. Having left Douai 20 July, Wilkinson was apparently signing the Kendal Register from 19 August onwards.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57 and 59.

²¹ An analysis of the number of baptisms at Kendal 1792 to 1838 shows an increase of approximately 25% during each five-year period.

Thomas Roydon [the first missionary] shall enjoy all the above mentioned premises [amounting to 250 acres] during his natural life, if he continues in these parts, and after his decease or voluntary cession, any person of the family of John Leyburne of Naitby, or of William Thornburgh of Selside,²² shall be preferred if qualified.²³

Thomas Roydon died on 30 October 1741 and was buried in Kendal churchyard on 1 November.²⁴ His successor, a nephew of the same name, died 16 October 1764 and was buried in Kendal churchyard the next day.²⁵ The next two incumbents were relatives of Thornburgh; the Rev. Robert Johnson, a grandson, was buried at Kendal 6 June 1799; his cousin, the Rev. John Lonsdale, on 12 October 1802.²⁶

In 1803 the Rev. Robert Banister, one of the most distinguished and respected of the northern clergy, retired to Dodding Green from Mowbreck Hall, near Kirkham, where he had been resident since 1774. Dodding Green was then reckoned to be the best living in the Northern District.²⁷ He ended his days there on 17 May 1812 and was also buried in Kendal churchyard.²⁸ Then occurred a vacancy of no less than twenty-three years owing to a dispute as to the right of presentation between the ecclesiastical authorities and the temporal trustees. Eventually, in January 1834, the Rev. Henry Rutter *vere* Banister, a nephew of the previous incumbent, came from Yealand to serve the mission, but as soon as he died in September 1838, Mr Edward Riddell of Cheeseburn Grange, Northumberland, took forcible possession as trustee,²⁹ and placed there the Rev. Charles

²² It is interesting to note that his relative, Dr William Thornburgh, was president of Douai College, 1739-1750.

²³ Baterden, *op. cit.*, 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ John Lingard wrote in the autumn of ?1840 to Dr Husenbeth, another Catholic historian, "The best living in the north is Dodding Green, £300 per annum in land". Ushaw College Archives, *Lingard Correspondence*.

²⁸ An inscription was added to the plain stone slab in 1895. Baterden, *op. cit.*, 52.

²⁹ *Lingard Correspondence*, Lingard to Geo. Silvertop at Minsteracres, 24 June 1839.

Brigham against the wishes of the bishop, Dr Briggs. The dispute continued for some further time, and involved the bishop and others, including Dr John Lingard of Hornby, the historian, in legal proceedings. Mr Brigham remained at Dodding Green until 1858.³⁰

The long vacancy at Dodding Green doubled Wilkinson's work. It has been estimated that he had charge of an area of about 400 square miles, twenty miles from east to west, and about the same distance north to south.³¹ But it was even more of a trial to have an intruder not a stone's throw away. On one occasion at least he confided his views to a close friend:

The glad tidings you have sent me, has done away, in great measure, with many unpleasant feelings, I may say mortifications, which I have experienced from my intruding and by no means agreeable neighbour, whom I have not yet seen, which you will think strange as others do. He came to Kendal and twice went down this street within 6 or 7 yards from my house, and once more two days after, but vouchsafed not to call upon me, I hear he stands on ceremony, and expects me to call upon him first, I have not done so yet, nor am I disposed to gratify him under present circumstances some of which I will name 'tho you will probably have a general knowledge of them. On the day after he arrived Dr Briggs informed me that Mr Brigham, I thought it was the Jesuit, was come against his will, and that he thought it his duty not to grant him missionary faculties, desiring me to see that he did not exercise any, and to inform him if he did. Previous to this and before Mr Brigham's nomination by Mr Riddell, I received a letter from Mr Riddell the substance of which is follows: "Dr. Sir, As I find it quite impossible to get anything settled with Dr Briggs in regard to Dodding Green I take the liberty of troubling you to know whether you will accept the living entirely [*here the page is torn*] me, as I cannot allow Dr Briggs a joint presentation, and whether having been presented to that living by me, you are prepared to hold it in opposition to the legal and spiritual means Dr Briggs may think himself justified in using to regain it." To this I answered civilly, No. Now I presume that Mr Brigham has accepted the living on the same terms on which it was offered to me, but

³⁰ Baterden, *op. cit.*, 52.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 57. This is the area covered by the Kendal Register.

whether the same or not, what sort of priest and clergyman must he be who could even deign to read such terms without a bluch [*sic*] and indignation, and accept them? Could I be expected to call first upon him and congratulate with him on his being appointed to a living by a lay gentleman, with a dubious title, or even any title, against his Bishop's will and without any missionary faculties? I really think not, and I am so far convinced that this is the opinion of sensible laymen and the clergy that I can easily reconcile myself to any trifling inconvenience that may follow from the awkward situation in which he has chosen to place himself and me.³²

In general, however, we must picture Thomas Wilkinson as a gentle man, given to quiet reflection, averse to gossip, preferring to "search the scriptures rather than the newspapers".³³ His first years at Kendal coincided with the search by Bishop Gibson and his advisers for a college to replace that at Douai confiscated in 1793 by the French Government. It took them a number of years to fix on a site. In consequence, students were housed momentarily at Tudhoe Academy, for a few weeks at Pontop Hall, Co. Durham, and for no less than fourteen years in the temporary college at Crook Hall near modern Consett. The long delay brought many of the northern clergy, especially in the west, to complain of the bishop's lack of initiative, but Thomas Wilkinson was not of them. His rôle was constructive. As the library at Douai had not survived the Revolution he did what he could to collect books for the destitute masters at Crook Hall.

Lonsdale can offer for use of your house: Boranga's *Institutiones Theologicae* etc. 3 vols. 4°; also Raine's *Abrégé de l'histoire Ecclésiastique*, 13 vols. 12°; to these I would add, if worth your acceptance, Carrière's *Commentaire literale de la Bible*, 6 vols, which are at Linton.³⁴

³² To Dr Charles Newsham, president of Ushaw College, 3 March 1840. Ushaw College Archives, *President's Archives* [hereafter PA], O.92.

³³ Wilkinson to Newsham, 14 December 1841, PA, O.93.

³⁴ Wilkinson to the Rev. Thomas Eyre, president of Crook Hall, 1 January 1803. Ushaw College Archives, *Eyre Correspondence*, 265. Wilkinson writes as though Lonsdale were still alive, but he was buried at Kendal 12 October 1802, as we have seen. The same letter refers to Lonsdale's successor, the Rev. Robert Banister, being expected at Dodding Green in about a week.

There was to be no turning back from this self-imposed task. As he saw the new Douai rising on the hilltop at Ushaw, he knew his life's work would be to equip it with a library worthy of its claim to be *Alma Mater Rediviva*. He chose carefully from catalogues or through agents. A recommendation from Ushaw was always welcome.³⁵ He was particularly pleased to boast of a unique purchase, like the rare edition of Livy's Roman History by Elzevir.³⁶ His unceasing activity quickly brought results. Not only was he continually presenting individual volumes to the college, but also collecting a specialized library at Kendal, which he presented to Ushaw in 1832. It amounted to 6,000 volumes.³⁷

Wilkinson transacted most of his business by post.³⁸ Occasionally, however, he visited Ushaw, presumably riding over the Durham moors in his earlier days but later taking the train. He recalls with evident pleasure the first time he used this form of transport, amazed to be back home at 3 p.m. the same day, having covered the distance from Carlisle to a station two miles beyond Kendal in an hour and twenty minutes.³⁹ Sometimes he journeyed further afield, always with his beloved books in mind, as we can see from a letter he wrote to Dr Newsham at the end of 1841:

In order to make these lines speak common sense I must ask your permission to recall your recollection to a little circumstance that took place betwixt two and three years ago, I believe, that is to a long letter which I forwarded to you about that time, enclosing a list of Muratori's works, and some others; this you sent to Dr Wiseman,⁴⁰ he made little progress in the business,

³⁵ Wilkinson to Newsham, 24 February 1843, PA, O.95.

³⁶ Wilkinson to Newsham, 15 September 1842, PA, O.94.

³⁷ Cf. B. Payne, *The Ushaw Library*, in *The Ushaw Magazine*, xlv (1934), 204.

³⁸ At one time the post *via* Preston was brought to Kendal by the milkman. Books were apparently conveyed to Ushaw by Mr Taylor of Sedbergh until the end of 1841 when he gave up his business. Wilkinson said that he would find it hard to get someone as reliable. Wilkinson to Newsham, 14 December 1841, PA, O.93.

³⁹ UCH 75, to Newsham, 15 December 1848.

⁴⁰ The future Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, at this time president of the Catholic seminary at Oscott and coadjutor to the bishop of the Central District.

but, I think, put the letter into the hands of your good neighbour Mr Thompson,⁴¹ who I believe will shew very kind attention to its contents. At Ushaw we concluded, at a guess, that a hundred pound would cover all costs, and I engaged to furnish that sum. When we parted at Oscott, Dr Errington⁴² told me that he expected to be enabled to purchase to the amount of about fifty pounds, about Christmas. Now as I desired him to forward the books direct to Ushaw, it appears to me that he may send the bill of cost there also, what I have therefore to request of you, is, that if convenient, you will have the goodness to discharge the bill as he may direct, or forward the bill to me with directions how I may pay it to his satisfaction, either way it will be quite right, at all events you will let me know what the amount is, and it shall be presently forthcoming. Have you received the rest of Maii Collectiones Naturae, I take it to be a very interesting work, his holiness has presented it to Oscott in return for something, I know not what, which they had sent to him.⁴³ I am rather curious to know if there be, in the collectiones patrum, some lately discovered works of St Chrisostom, say 60 or 70 years ago, and not in the Benedictin or any other edition of his works, I very well recollect that two very thin folio volumes came to the college library at Douay, three or four years before I left dear Old Alma Mater, and before the existence of my new one. I felt no slight mortification at the necessity I was under, by reason of the short indulgence,⁴⁴ of leaving Yealand only a few hours before you and your young angel guardian were expected at Leighton, such crosses will meet us in this nether world, where there are not many true enjoyments and they uncertain. I presume you got home well, pray tell me was it so, and how is it with you now, and not only with you and all your ample family. I feel for you all here, as if I were one among you there. Within the late two months I have lost two of my particular Douay friends Mr Roby and Mr Josh. Hunt R: in pace, they remind me that the time is short, but, thank God, I am yet much the same as when we last met chaunting Psalms and hymns in great mirth and innocence to a rather late hour. What I saw at Oscott has not in any degree

⁴¹ A schoolfellow of Wiseman at Ushaw, at this time in charge of the mission at Esh, a mile or so from Ushaw College.

⁴² Another early student at Ushaw and associate of Wiseman. He would later be coadjutor to the cardinal at Westminster.

⁴³ Pope Gregory XVI.

⁴⁴ A reference to the times of the year when a special indulgence was granted to those who approached the sacraments; periods when priests were likely to be kept very busy.

estranged my affections from St Cuthbert's,⁴⁵ the reverse if anything, such observations as I made in the short time I was there I stated to Mr Tate, and are not worth repeating, to them I have nothing to add.⁴⁶

The value of this letter is obvious, for it not only tells us how far back Wilkinson's interest in books goes, but also indicates the unbreakable spiritual attachment which the ageing missionary had formed with the northern college. Ushaw, under the dynamic direction of Charles Newsham (1837-1863), became his great joy. How thrilled he was to hear of its successful application for affiliation with London University:

I cannot delay one moment acknowledging the honour you [Newsham] do me by your favour of this morning. I was overjoyed in reading over and over again the article in your Durham Chronicle, but what think you were my feelings when I read the details and the circumstances in your hand writing? I was fully convinced that you deemed me a friend to Ushaw, and truly if I may glory, I will ever glory in being or wishing to be one. I recollect your mentioning that you had made application for such a grant to ministers, but you seemed to shew some apprehensions that you might not succeed, or that the boon might fall to the lot of one of our other establishments: a good providence has kindly watched over you, and crowned your zeal and perseverance with its blessings. This is not a feather in your cap, it is a diamond of true water in your crown, may you long wear it and your successors enhance its splendour, if that can be. Your course of studies,⁴⁷ I fancy, must have been very influential in procuring this ever important warrant, for I presume that her most gracious Majesty and her Ministers are, in a special manner, attentive to all our proceedings, and I trust they do and ever will find us devoutly true faithful and loyal subjects.

You will now think me very bold, but your past goodness makes me so, I certainly should be greatly gratified if at some leisure houer you would please to forward me a copy of the warrant, I would treasure it as a lasting specimen not only of the liberality but the Christianity of our days, and a counterpart

⁴⁵ The Ushaw authorities began to refer to the college as St Cuthbert's from about the beginning of 1840.

⁴⁶ 14 December 1841, PA, O.93.

⁴⁷ Reorganized in 1839. The course was published in the July as *A Course of Studies with the Theses and Examination Papers*.

to the outrageous bigotry of thousands, who have yet to learn before they teach the first and best Christian maxims. You have almost overpowered me with glad intelligence, after the above, I scarcely could name anything more agreeable to me than to hear of any considerable addition to your library, and particularly in a branch in which I believe it was very feeble,⁴⁸ I never applied my mind much to that object tho important, and especially under your present circumstances, when young Catholic gentlemen may after their earlier studies, avail themselves of the opportunity of graduating in the metropolitan University.⁴⁹

The knowledge that young Catholic students could from now on, without hurt to their consciences, proceed to university degrees spurred Thomas Wilkinson to greater efforts on behalf of the Ushaw library. Failing health strengthened his determination. He says that in the early days of February 1843, when he was at least seventy-nine years old, he was seized with a very serious nervous complaint which almost prostrated him. The doctors diagnosed a stomach disorder and prescribed accordingly. But he continued sufficiently unwell to feel the need of calling in his spiritual adviser, Mr Maini,⁵⁰ and Mr William Hogarth for his temporal affairs.⁵¹ Apprehensive for the future, he applied to the bishop for assistance. The Rev. Ralph Platt, until recently prefect of studies at Ushaw, was sent immediately. At long last the old missionary was able to consider seriously the pressing invitation of the college authorities that he should spend his last days in their company. Such an honourable retirement after more than fifty years in the mission-field and his open-handed generosity to Ushaw was no more than he merited, nevertheless he

⁴⁸ A reference to the law library of upwards of 1,000 volumes presented to Ushaw in 1839 by Mr Robert Leadbitter, of Ryton, Co. Durham.

⁴⁹ Wilkinson to Newsham, 3 March 1840, PA, O.92. The first Ushaw candidates were declared equal to, and in many ways superior to, the other contestants. Cf. D. Milburn, *A History of Ushaw College*, 168.

⁵⁰ The missionary at Yealand.

⁵¹ Born at Dodding Green 1786; missionary at Darlington 1824-66; one of the vicars of the Northern District 1838-1848; vicar apostolic of the Northern District 1848-50; first bishop of Hexham (in restored hierarchy) 1850-1866.

decided against moving from Kendal for the time being. In his place he dispatched a collection of 3,000 books, mainly scientific, artistic, and literary.⁵²

He did not retire to Ushaw for another ten years. During this decade, 1843-1853, Dr Newsham completed the first part of a gigantic building programme at the college. He began by engaging A. W. Pugin to build a new chapel.⁵³ Wilkinson saw it in 1846, a few months before it was completed. Although not given to a love of "novelty, frivolity and a mixture of enthusiasm",⁵⁴ he thought the neo-gothic style beautiful⁵⁵ and arranged to send two £50 notes to help with the finishing of the high altar, choir stalls or organ case "or any other object you think best, with the exception of any either of the censured or improved vestments of Mr Pugin's modern cut, which without engaging in argument, I greatly dislike, as being neither of the first, middle, or modern days of Catholicity".⁵⁶ He also contributed to the cost of three of the stained-glass windows.⁵⁷

When eventually, after well over sixty years at Kendal, Thomas Wilkinson made Ushaw his home,⁵⁸ he was able to browse contentedly among his books in the fine new library wing which had been built partly at his expense by the brothers Hansom between 1849 and 1851. All spoke of him as old "Father" Wilkinson at a time when such a title was most uncommon. He died in 1857, just six months before the golden jubilee of the college which he had adopted, the last of the priests

⁵² Cf. B. Payne, *art. cit.*, 204.

⁵³ This "gem" no longer exists. It soon became too small for the needs of a growing community and was replaced by the present Dunn and Hansom building, 1882-5.

⁵⁴ Wilkinson to Newsham, 21 November 1846, PA, O.96.

⁵⁵ UCH 75, Wilkinson to Newsham, 15 December 1848.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ It is generally thought that he came to Ushaw in 1853, e.g. Baterden, *op. cit.*, 62. But B. Payne, *art. cit.*, 207, quotes letters written by Wilkinson to Newsham dated 6 and 30 December 1853; and there is no reference to his approaching retirement. The College Diary unfortunately does not record his arrival.

ordained at Douai, perhaps the first in rank of Ushaw's benefactors. Robert Tate, one of his friends, several times mentioned in these pages, who could not be with him at the end, anxiously looked for news:

You would no doubt wend your way to Ushaw yesterday to follow to the grave the remains of dear good old Father Wilkinson. It would have been a very great satisfaction to me to come and pay my tribute of respect to the memory of the good old man, but the day of the week, and more still the indulgence⁵⁹ was in the way — though I have often thought that I would, if possible, attend his funeral, when the good old patriarch should go to his rest. He is one of those on whose course of life it is pleasing to dwell, for his memory is associated with almost everything which makes the priest loved and respected. How completely old Father W. was the gentleman and the priest united! Quite naturally the gentleman, from the gentle tone and fatherly bearing which he always carried with him. He seems to have gone out at last like a candle in the socket, and his bones will rest on the spot where all his earthly desires were centred. He was heard, I am told, to pray a few days before his death for all the priests at Ushaw, who had attended him with so much care, and to thank God for having called him to the priesthood. This was the prayer of a patriarch, and his life, if written by some one who knew him well, would read like that of some of our simple-hearted Saxon Saints, who lived in the simple exercise of their unobtrusive daily duties, and when the term of their noiseless course drew near lay down to die in peace.⁶⁰

A few years afterwards, Tate, who had succeeded Dr Newsham as president of Ushaw, composed the following inscription for Wilkinson's grave in the cemetery:

⁵⁹ Cf. n. 44.

⁶⁰ Ushaw College Archives, *Tate-Slater Correspondence*. Printed in *The Ushaw Magazine*, xlix (1939), 122-123.

R. D. THOMAS WILKINSON
 MISSIONAR. APOSTOL. KENDALEN.
 1793-1853
 MILES IAM EMERITUS
 SUPREMOS SENECTUTIS SUAE ANNOS
 EGIT IN COLL. S. CUTHB.
 EIUSDEM INTEREA BENEFACTO
 ASSIDUUS INDEFESSUS
 OB. 30 DECEMB. 1857
 AET. 94
 VIVAS CUM XTO
 PATER VENERANDE⁶¹

About the same time his friends set up a memorial in the college chapel. It depicts the old man, clad in priestly vestments and supported by his patron saint, Thomas of Canterbury, kneeling before a statue of Our Lady and Child. The inscription reads:

THOMAE · WILKINSON · PRESBYTERO · ET ·
 RECTORI · OLIM · KENDALEN / MITISSIMI ·
 INGENII · VIRO · RELIGIONE · ET · MORIBUS ·
 SPECTATISSIMO / AC · DE · HOC · COLLEGIO
 · OPTIME · MERITO / QVI · PIE · OBIIT · II ·
 KAL · IANVAR · MDCCLVII · AN · NATVS · P.
 M. XCV / EIVSDEM · COLLEGII · ALVMNI ·
 GRATI · ANIMI · MONVMENTVM · POSVERE /
 HAVE · ANIMA · GENEROSSISIMA · VIVAS ·
 APVD · DEVM · QVEM · TVI · PRO · TE ·
 ROGANT

But the most evocative memorial of all is his portrait, painted by James Ward in 1832. From where it hangs just outside the door of the library the shy, scholarly missionary from Kendal seems continually to invite us to make use of the 12,000 volumes he placed there for the purpose of keeping the new Douai close to the scholarly origins of the old.

⁶¹ Tate composed a number of inscriptions for the college cemetery cloister. Inaccuracies are not infrequent.