

A SCHOOL IN THE SAVOY 1687–1688

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SUMMARY

In the reign of James II a Jesuit school was established in the Savoy. It flourished for about a year and a half only to disappear at the Revolution of 1688.

‘The king [James II] gave leave to the Jesuits to build [a chapel] in the Savoy and Settled a Colledge there ...’ (Clarke, 1816, 2, 79).

The Palace (later the Hospital) of the Savoy occupied the north bank of the river from west of Somerset House to what is now Savoy Hill. This area was granted by Henry III c. 1245 to Peter of Savoy, the uncle of his queen, Eleanor of Provence. The grant was of ‘all those houses upon the Thames ... without the walls of the city of London in the way or street called the Strand ...’ (Stow 1912, 393). Some years later Queen Eleanor bought it and gave it to her second son, Edmund, Earl of Lancaster. Henry, Duke of Lancaster, built a palace here which was considered to have been ‘one of the most magnificent buildings in the Nation’ (Smith 1810), but it was destroyed in 1381 by the rebels of Kent and Essex because of their opposition to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and remained a ruin until it was rebuilt by Henry VII, not as a house for the nobility but as a hospital, endowed and dedicated to St John the Baptist, for 100 sick, poor, lame and travellers.

In the reign of Edward VI the hospital and its chapel of St John was surrendered to the king in June 1553, and the property was given to the Bridewell workhouse for the poor and to the Hospital of St Thomas in Southwark, which had itself been recently suppressed. The Hospital at the Savoy was restored by Mary Tudor and again endowed and ‘so remaineth’, recorded Stow forty years later. In the 17th century parts

of the Savoy became a barracks, a hospital for wounded seamen and soldiers, and a military prison, the rest being occupied by the Master and Chaplains of the Hospital, and by private tenants. The Hospital was finally suppressed in 1702.

The Chapel of St John the Baptist (sometimes known as the Chapel of St Mary le Savoy) built in the early years of the 16th century, became some 50 years ago the Chapel of the Royal Victorian Order; of the old Savoy it alone remains today though much repaired and rebuilt. (Somerville, 1988, 5–9; Knowles & Hancock, 1971, 373.)

With the accession of the Catholic King James II, in 1685 there was inevitably speculation about his future aims and policy. The penal laws against Catholicism were still in force. Only six years earlier there had been the nationwide anti-Catholic hysteria aroused by the Oates plot, and this had been followed by the attempt in Parliament to exclude the Catholic heir, James, Duke of York, from the throne. What James’s aims were when he became king must surely still be debatable. Briefly, did he really mean to try to make England Catholic by force, or did he merely intend to make it possible for Catholics and other non-Anglicans or Dissenters to practise their religion in peace and live their lives like their fellow-countrymen? If he was to achieve the latter he would have to secure a favourable parliament which would consent to changes in the laws; in the meantime he proposed to use his prerogative to dispense individuals from observing the anti-Catholic laws and the laws against the Dissenters, or suspend these laws and so introduce religious toleration, as was done when the Declaration of Indulgence was issued in April 1687 and again in 1688. Greater freedom to

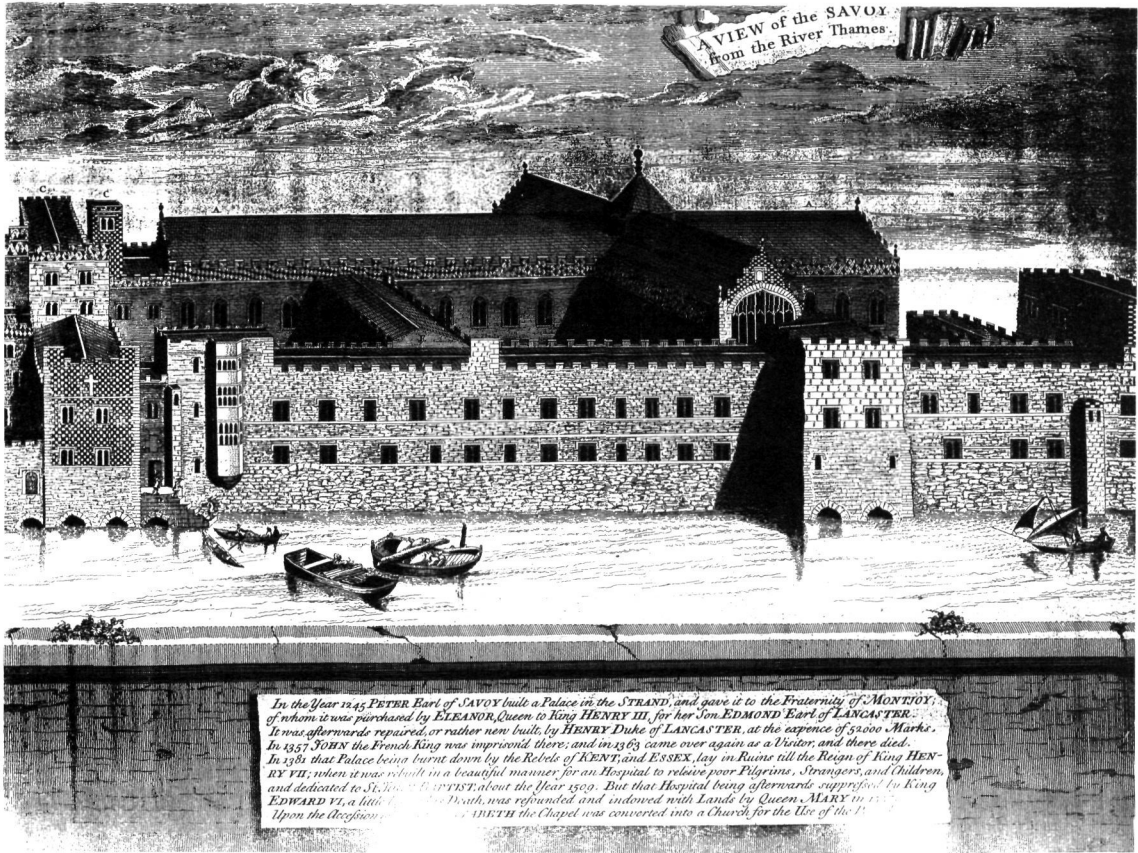


Fig 1. A view of the Savoy by G. V. Vetusta Monumenta Vol II, pl 5, 1750 (courtesy of The Society of Antiquaries of London).

practise their religion openly thus became available to Catholics (and also to Dissenters) and one of the results was the opening of Catholic chapels and schools in various places around the country.

The English Jesuits were very ready to take advantage of this new freedom after working, like other priests, among Catholics secretly and in fairly constant danger for more than a century. Hitherto the Jesuit priests in London had lived quietly and separately in lodgings and it was now felt that the time had come to live together in one house and open a chapel and school. It was in these circumstances that the college in the Savoy was founded. The place, then in the suburbs, seemed very suitable. Part of the building was used as a barracks for soldiers and that would be an advantage in case of any mob disturbance. The site was agreeable as it commanded a view up and down and across the river. It was near Somerset House where the

dowager Queen Catherine lived. A portion of the buildings was accordingly purchased by the Jesuits for about 18,000 florins, according to a contemporary account in the *Annual Letters*—regular reports on the activities of the Jesuits in England (and elsewhere in the world) sent by them to their headquarters in Rome—though some authorities suggest or imply that the king paid for the property. This was in January or February 1687 (*Annual Letters*).

What part of the Savoy was acquired for chapel, school and residence? It cannot have been in what was originally the hall of the hospital, nor in the houses or tenements occupied by the Master or Chaplains. Contemporary evidence shows that it extended to the river and it seems probable that it was at the west end, where there were stairs, and that it was south of the Chapel of St John, in other words, between the chapel and the river (*Annual Letters*). If this theory is correct, the building of the Institute of

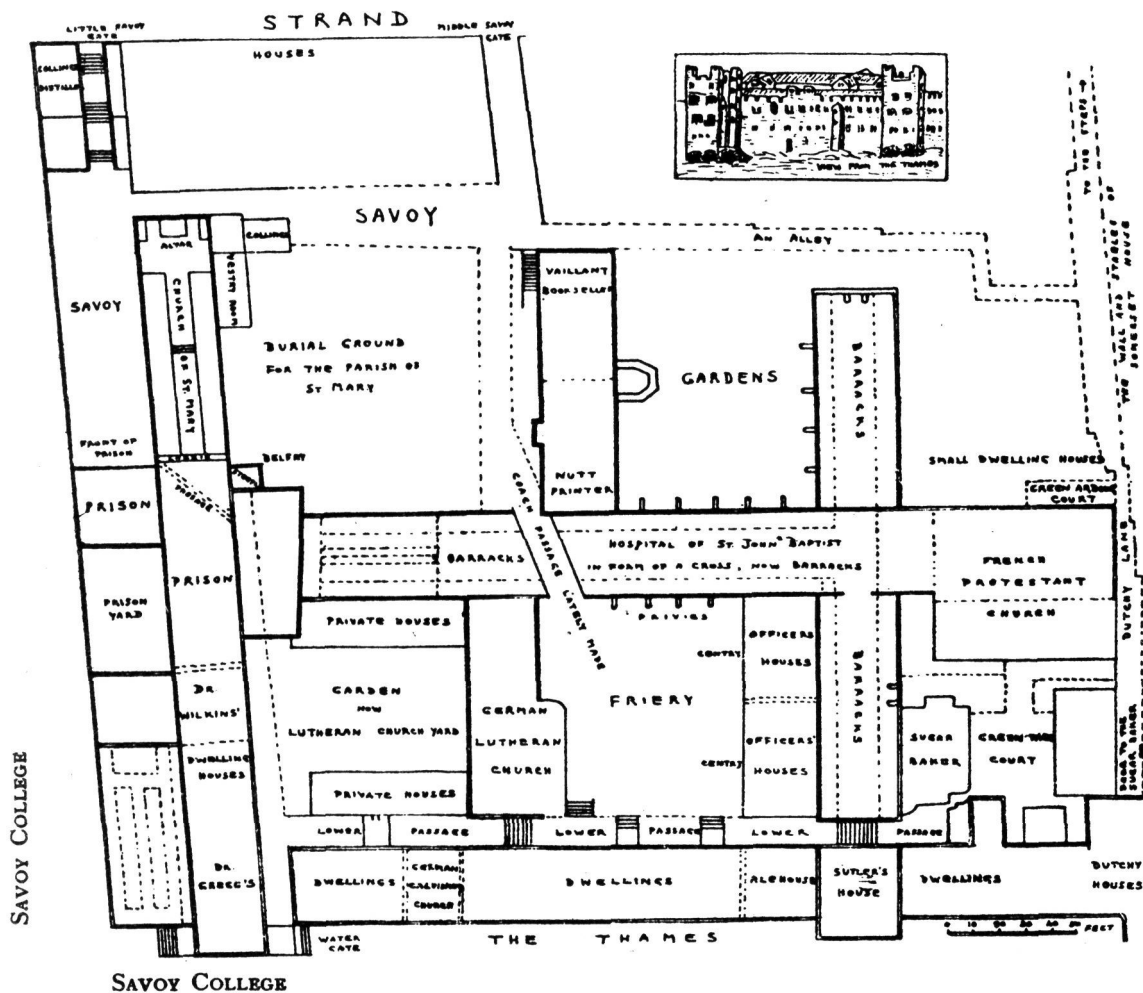


Fig 2. Plan of the Savoy by G. V. Vetusta Monumenta Vol II pl 14, 1736 (courtesy of The Society of Antiquaries of London).

Electrical Engineers, on the east side of Savoy Hill, now occupies the site.

Alterations and adaptations were made. A chapel and schoolrooms were fitted up as well as accommodation for perhaps 15 Jesuits. There was also a printing press. 'They are hard at work that a school may be opened before Easter' wrote an anonymous letter writer early in March 1687 (Walford 3, 98; Annual Letters). Among those who moved in on 24 May 1687 were the rector or superior, Charles Poulton (sometimes known as Palmer), Andrew Poulton who was to be in charge of the school—both were members of a Northamptonshire family—and Edmund Hall (or Humberston) whose home was in Norfolk. Others in residence may have included

the chaplains and preachers to the king, the queen and the queen dowager.

The chapel was opened the next day and the school on 2 June (Annual Letters). A prospectus had been issued announcing that Greek and Latin would be taught, that the education would be free, that scholars would be admitted irrespective of religious denomination and that they would not be required to change their religion. According to the contemporary account mentioned above, about 250 boys presented themselves on the first day and they were divided into two classes, partly Catholic and partly Protestant. As there were only two masters it will be appreciated that they 'found it a laborious and difficult task to reduce such a

motley crowd into any sort of order' (Annual Letters).

As the number of boys increased, a third master, Thomas Parker (he sometimes used the name Culcheth), a Lancashire man, was brought in and the three 'with great toil but not without satisfactory results' were well occupied until the summer vacation (Annual Letters). By September a fourth master, Richard Plowden (from Shropshire) had arrived so there were now four classes. More classrooms had been made ready by then and the chapel, which was found to be too small for the numbers wishing to attend it, had been enlarged by adapting and adding to it some tenements purchased for the purpose. The king gave money, the queen two fine silver lamps, and other presents—altarplate, pictures, vestments—were received (Annual Letters).

An account of the opening of the chapel and school was sent, together with other news, to the Jesuit superior in Rome—the general—who expressed his great satisfaction. Only a few years before such an undertaking would have been quite unthinkable. He welcomed the information that because of the number attending the school more masters would be needed, and urged that the very best should be appointed to so important a work (Epist. Gen. 2, 474–6).

On 31 October the king visited the school. Coming by water, he was met at the stairs and conducted to the chapel and classrooms. 'He was so pleased with the Greek, Latin and English speeches [by three boys] that he gave [the boys] gowns and [said] that they should be called his scholars' (Downshire, 1, 272–3). An entry in Luttrell's Diary for January 1688 reads 'The scholars bred up by Poulton the Jesuit at the Savoy are to be elected king's scholars and sent to Maudlin College in Oxford' (Luttrell, 1857, 1, 426). The school was prospering and the number of boys is said to have reached about 400—half Protestant and half Catholic. Macaulay was to write of the school in his *History of England*:

In the Savoy a spacious house, including a church and a school, was built for the Jesuits. The skill and care with which those fathers had, during several generations, conducted the education of youth, had drawn forth reluctant praises from the wisest Protestants. Bacon had pronounced the mode of instruction followed in the Jesuit colleges to be the best yet known in the world, and had warmly expressed his regret that so admirable a system of intellectual

and moral discipline should be employed on the side of error. It was not improbable that the new Academy in the Savoy might, under royal patronage, prove a formidable rival to the great foundations of Eton, Westminster and Winchester. Indeed soon after the school was opened, the classes consisted of four hundred boys, about one half of whom were Protestants. The Protestant pupils were not required to attend mass; but there could be no doubt that the influence of able preceptors, devoted to the Roman Catholic Church, and versed in all the arts which win the confidence and affection of youth, would make many converts' (Macaulay 1931, 2, 85).

J. S. Clarke in *The Life of James II* accepted the figure of 400 boys, about half of them Protestants, and added that the latter 'were in no ways constrained in their Religion or were required to assist at Mass or any other publick devotions' (Clarke 1816, 2, 79–80).

Well-attended sermons and lectures were given in the chapel, books and pamphlets were published and disputations were held with clergy of the Church of England. The headmaster, Andrew Poulton, became involved in the latter. As was almost inevitable the masters were accused of tampering with the religion of the boys who were not Catholics. The son of a brazier in Long Acre, whose name appears to have been Uppington, had become a Catholic. This led to a conference in September 1687 in Long Acre 'next door to Mr Johnson's the king's cabinet maker' between Andrew Poulton and Dr Thomas Tenison, at that time rector of St Martins-in-the-Fields and of St James's Westminster, later to become archbishop of Canterbury. Andrew Poulton expressed himself ready to give the doctor a full answer 'as far as his religious duties of near five and school employment of six hours a day will allow'. After the conference which was 'managed with much heat' a testimonial in Poulton's favour was offered by the six boys at the top of his class—J. Whitaker (Protestant), John Brady (Catholic), Edward Bray (Catholic), Charles Tripp (Protestant), Rog[er] Thornton (Protestant), Edward Lacy (Catholic). Apart from Uppington, these appear to be the only names of boys in the school that have survived (Downshire 1,269; Poulton, 1687).

It is not surprising to find that a lengthy war

of pamphlets followed the conference. They included:

1. *A True Account of a Conference held about religion at London Sept. 29, 1687 between A. Pulton, Jesuit, and Tho. Tenison D. D. as also as that which led to it and followed after it.* By Tho. Tenison D. D. (1687)

2. *A True and Full Account of a conference held about religion between Dr Thomas Tenison and Andrew Pulton, one of the masters in the Savoy.*

3. *Remarks of Andrew Pulton, Master in the Savoy, upon Dr Tenison's late narrative ...* by A.P. (1687)

4. *Mr Pulton considered in his sincerity, reasonings, and authorities; or a just answer to what he hath hitherto published in his true account ... His Remarks; and in them his pretended confutation of what he calls Dr Tenison's Rule of Faith.* By the said Tho. Tenison (1687)

(Jones, 1859, 136 ff).

The only mention of there having been any other converts among the boys at the school occurs in a letter dated 21 July 1688 to John Ellis, Secretary to the Commissioners for the Revenue in Ireland, in which he was told of the confirmation, by Bishop Philip Ellis 'assisted by Father Poulton the Jesuit, of some hundreds of youths (some of them new converts) at the new chapel in the Savoy' (Ellis, 1827, 117).

One other reference to a boy, or rather a more mature student, at the school—though he is not named—is to be found in *Crosby Records; A Cavalier's Note Book*:

I [William Blundell of Crosby, Lancashire] was in London constantly for some years last past where in the years 1687 and 1688 I chanced to have some conference in Latin with a natural Chinese whom I did sundry times meet with by reason that he went to the Latin school at the Savoy. He told me that he was a native of Pekin ... He appeared to be aged more than thirty years though he pretended and perhaps very truly to be but five or six and twenty ... He spoke imperfectly in Latin as having learnt the same without any rules ... (Gibson, 1880, 140).

That the school was doing well is suggested by the fact that the Jesuits opened another—this time in the City, in Lime Street—on 25 March 1688 (Holt 1981).

It would be reasonable to ask how the Savoy school was financed as there were no fees. It is possible that the king gave money (he did for the school in the City) in addition to his contribution

for the extension of the chapel. There is a record of one benefaction of £50 (H.A. Dist Accs, 19).

In 1691 reference was made in a letter to the extraordinary expenses incurred in setting up the two schools in the Savoy and the City which must have been heavy as must the running expenses. The letter stated that the money had had to be borrowed from private sources. There is a record of £200 being given to the Jesuit mission but it is unlikely that this was for the school (*Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1689–90, 383; Stonyhurst College Mss).

'The sheer educational quality of the schools' wrote A. C. F. Beales, 'attracted a flock of Protestant parents and thereby gave anxiety to the Establishment' (Beales, 1963, 253). And not to be outdone, four bishops of the Church of England, it was reported in a letter from London in June 1687, were making preparations to open a free school in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Luttrell noted on 23 April 1688:

The two Protestant free schools in St Martin's parish and St James's Westminster, were open'd; they are at the charge of Dr Patrick [prebendary of Westminster, later Bishop of Ely] and Dr Tenison for youth to instruct them in the Christian religion, as also to fit them for trades; those that are likely to prove schollars to fit for the university ...

Another school was opened at St Margaret's Westminster in 1688 (Downshire, 1, 246; Beales 1963, 253–4; Luttrell, 1857, 1, 437).

In the summer and autumn of 1688 with the trial and acquittal of the seven bishops, the birth of the prince of Wales (with the prospect of a Catholic succession) and the landing by invitation of William of Orange (in November) it was clear that James's policy of religious toleration was doomed. As early as 9 October, according to a newsletter of 11 October, 'The Jesuits' school at the Savoy is shut up, one of the masters having taken with him twenty scholars for Dover in order to goe beyond sea'. He was probably taking them to the English Jesuit school at Saint-Omer (Le Fleming, 213). Mob violence had already broken out in London against Catholic chapels and the Jesuit school in the City. As Macaulay put it 'Thousands of rude and ignorant men ... [had seen] with dismay and indignation a Jesuit College rising on the banks of the Thames' (Macaulay, 1931, 2, 85) but the school was not in fact attacked, saved perhaps by the proximity of the barracks. The Jesuit Savoy

chapel was closed on or soon after 9 November as on that day the king ordered the closure of all Catholic chapels; on 15 November Luttrell noted 'all the Romish chapels in the town are shutt up except their majesties', queen dowager's and foreign ambassadors' (Luttrell 1857, I, 475; Beales 1963, 259). The Jesuits had once more to take flight or go into hiding, as a contemporary account shows (Suppl. Hist. Prov. Angl.).

After the landing of the Prince of Orange early in the month there was a meeting between the king and those bishops of the Church of England who were in London. The bishops proposed that James 'should suppress the Jesuit schools opened in this city or elsewhere, and grant no more licences for such schools as are apparently against the laws of this nation and his majesty's true interest' (Dalrymple, 1790, 35).

In December after the king had left London, Charles Poulton, the superior of the Jesuits at the Savoy, was making his way to the south coast and France but was arrested at Faversham. He was brought back to London and imprisoned in Newgate where he died in February 1690. Andrew Poulton (who is confused with Charles in *Athenae Oxonienses* by Anthony A. Wood) (Wood 1820, 4, 440) and the other masters at the Savoy school and the school in the City, also on their way to the Continent, were arrested at Canterbury. Harshly treated at first and threatened by a mob, they were eventually released (Suppl. Hist. Prov. Angl.).

In the words of a modern historian 'The main Jesuit school in London, which was at the Savoy, was a considerable success. It was explicitly non-denominational and taught nothing controversial, although it had a Catholic chapel attached (Miller 1973, 249). It came to an end with the failure of the king's policy of religious toleration. William Loftie in his *Memorials of the Savoy* states that it was dissolved immediately on the abdication of James—scurrilous ballads of the day refer to the sale of the furniture and make fun of the massing stuff and relics. The clock, according to Strype, was said to have been afterwards set up at 'a gentleman's house at Low Leyton in Essex' (Loftie, 1878, 153; Broad-sides, 595). A few years later it was reported in a letter from London '... There hath been some discovery made lately by an astrologer of some treasure hid by the Jesuits in the Savoy, and many have been yesterday and this day set to work to digg and a guard attending them; but its thought will

signify nothing' (Pine Coffin, 386). By the end of the 17th century, according to Loftie, the Savoy had become the residence of bad characters and rogues. Strype described it in about 1720 as a very great and at this present very ruinous building ... a cooper hath part of it ... other parts serve for the Marshalseas for keeping prisoners or deserters, men prest for military service, Dutch recruits, etc. ... In the Savoy, however ruinous soever it is, are divers good houses. First the king's Printing Press ... next a Prison, and thirdly a Parish Church and three or four of the churches and places for religious assemblies, viz for the French, for Dutch, for High Germans and Lutherans and lastly for Protestant Dissenters. Here be also harbours for many refugees and poor people (Walford, n.d. 3, 98).

It would seem likely that the prison occupied some part of the buildings that had been acquired for the Jesuit school.

By the end of the 18th century, although some of the walls were still standing, much of the hospital had become a ruin and it was demolished early in the next. All that remains of Henry VII's rebuilding, after many repairs and alterations, is the Chapel of St John the Baptist, now known as the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy (Walford, n.d. 3, 99; Somerville, 1988, 7–8).

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