



## A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF STONYHURST

Stonyhurst College has a distinguished history as one of Britain's leading Catholic boarding schools. The College was originally founded in St Omer in the Spanish Netherlands in 1593 by Fr Robert Persons SJ under the patronage of Philip II of Spain. The purpose of the College was to provide a Catholic education for English boys at a time when such an education was prohibited in England. However, in 1762 the Jesuits were forced to move from St Omer, when the King of France expelled them from France, and re-established their school at Bruges. A further move was necessitated in 1773, this time to Liège, following the worldwide suppression of the Jesuits by the Pope. Finally the school was forced to move from Liège when it was besieged by the French Revolutionary Army.

By this time the head of the Weld family was Thomas Weld, of Lulworth in Dorset, a former pupil of the school at St Omer, and his sons were being educated at the school in Liège. He offered the old mansion of Stonyhurst Hall in Lancashire as a temporary refuge until such time as it was safe to return to the continent. Thus, it was that on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1794, by which time the treatment of Catholics in England had become far less extreme, the school, henceforward known as Stonyhurst College, became established on English soil, where it has remained to this day, continuing to expand, evolve and thrive.

The earliest documentary evidence of a family living on the site now occupied by Stonyhurst College is in a deed dating from around 1200. At this time, and for long afterwards, almost all buildings were made either exclusively or substantially of timber and so nothing remains of them. By the late fourteenth century the family living here were named de Bayley. In 1377, Richard de Bayley married the daughter of Richard Shireburn and, although the reason is unclear, within a generation the de Bayley family had adopted the name Shireburn and forsaken their own.

The oldest parts of the existing building date from the sixteenth century. In the 1590s the ageing Catholic owner Sir Richard Shireburn (who, as a young man, had been knighted by Queen Elizabeth for fighting against the Scots) decided to rebuild and extend the old mansion. The work began with the construction of the Gatehouse in the centre of the West Front. But in 1606 building work ceased because of the persecution of the Catholic family in the conditions prevailing with only the Gatehouse and just over half of the Front Court completed. And so it remained until after the building had become a school.

By the 1690s the position of Catholics had sufficiently improved to encourage Sir Nicholas Shireburn, great-great grandson of Sir Richard, to resume work on the mansion, the most conspicuous new feature being the addition of the twin cupulas or 'towers' on top of the Gatehouse. He also carried out extensive work on the gardens and surrounding land, including the Avenue and the two canals or ponds. Sadly, his ambitions were never fully realised as his only son-and-heir died aged nine in 1702. The property was inherited by Sir Nicholas' only daughter Mary, who married Thomas, the eighth Duke of Norfolk. She remained childless and after her death in 1754 the property, including the extensive estates, passed to the heirs of her aunt Elizabeth, Sir Nicholas' sister, who had married into the Weld family of Wiltshire.

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David Knight, Archivist, May 2014